

# Disability Etiquette for Ushers and Greeters

Greeters and ushers are often the first people to welcome folks on Sunday morning. But meeting a person with a disability can be awkward. You may wonder: “Do I give a worship folder to someone who doesn’t read?” or “Do I shake the hand of a person who can’t use his hands?”

These are common concerns, but with a little education you can genuinely welcome people and families with disabilities to Grace Church by following Christ’s example.

It’s important that the disabled be integrated into the life of our congregation. God has given them special gifts that will enrich us and our corporate worship experience.

Here are some tips that can help you feel confident when interacting with a person with a disability.

## **General Information**

- Welcome a person with a disability in the same manner as you would anyone else. Don't ignore them, but acknowledge their presence.
- Offer a worship folder even if you don't know whether they can read.
- Touch is a very effective communicator of love and understanding. Most people with disabilities appreciate a genuine handshake. If someone does not want to shake your hand, don't take offense. Just smile and warmly say hello.
- Always speak directly to the person who has a disability. Don't consider a companion or attendant to be a conversational go-between.
- If you think a person needs assistance, don't hesitate to ask her how you can help. Your willingness and availability is an early demonstration of Christ's love.

## **Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities**

- Greet a person with an intellectual disability with a “hello”, a genuine smile and a handshake. You might ask his name, and remember to use his name the next time you see him.

- Sometimes a person may want to give you a hug. If you are comfortable with this, go ahead. If not, you might say “let's shake hands today.” Know that your voice and expressions can communicate warmth.
- Offer a worship folder even if you don't know whether they can read. It's one way of communicating that you want them to belong.
- Sometimes a person with an intellectual/developmental disability will behave in ways which make others uncomfortable. These can include talking out loud at inappropriate times or fidgeting and moving in the seat. Usually the people that are with them—staff, volunteers, family members—will know best how to calm them. People with intellectual disabilities can usually learn appropriate behavior when given enough time and some reminders.
- If a person becomes agitated, allow him and his companions to change their location. It may simply be a matter of getting comfortable in a new setting. They may need to be left alone, and may not want to talk or be touched.

***IMPORTANT:*** *A member of the Barnabas Disability Ministry can always be contacted by radio on Channel 10 to come and be of assistance.*

### **Visual Impairments**

- When greeting a person who has a visual impairment, be sure to identify yourself. Remember that your warm smile can be heard in your voice!
- Offer a worship folder even if you don't know whether they can read.
- If a blind person has a guide dog, ask how much room is needed.
- Ask if they need assistance to their seat. It is usually easiest for them to take your elbow.
- Ask if they need help during the service, for example during communion.

### **Hearing Impairments**

- When greeting a person who is deaf or has a hearing impairment, a wave and a big smile will communicate welcome.
- You may gently tap a deaf person on the elbow to get his attention and then speak face to face looking him in the eyes. Speak slowly and clearly, but don't exaggerate or shout.
- Look directly at the person and speak expressively; remember your facial expressions, gestures, and body movements help in understanding. Don't look at the interpreter.
- If there is a “signer” at the service, offer to seat the hearing impaired person in the area near the signer. If not, seat her so she can easily see the pastor.

### **Mobility Impairments**

- Lean down to greet the person in the wheelchair face to face.
- Whenever possible, allow the person to be seated with family or friends.
- Be respectful of the wheelchair. It is considered part of the user's space and should not be leaned on or pushed without permission.
- A person who uses a wheelchair may be able to walk, but still need the wheelchair. Try not to move the wheelchair or crutches out of their reach.

- Always ask the wheelchair user if she would like assistance before you help. It may be necessary for the person to give you some instructions as an unexpected push may throw her off balance.
- If lifting a wheelchair, be sure to follow the person's instructions implicitly. They may have been up and down the steps before, and know from past experience what works best. If you doubt your ability to lift, ask for help from others.

Karen Anderson, Director

Barnabas Disability Ministry of Grace Church

612-869-8803 [kanderson2@atgrace.com](mailto:kanderson2@atgrace.com)