

The Church and People with Disabilities

*People with disabilities do not feel welcome
in church settings. Why is that?*



CURATED BY AMANDA FINO

The project consists of research and feedback.

Amanda Fino

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Curated By Amanda Forry/Fino

July 2022

www.cpgal.com

***I would love to thank anyone who took part in this
booklet. May this open door to a better world.***

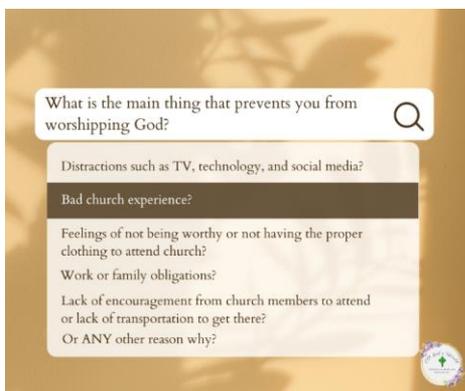
The Mission



Research and feedback are the two components of the project. A few weeks ago, I wrote in a couple of Facebook groups about why some disabled adults cannot attend church. Many of the comments I have received have been horrifying.

Consequently, we need to bring about a change if we want disabled adults to be welcomed into our churches. I have gotten several good suggestions regarding how to make churches more inclusive of disabled people.

In the post, I have written the following. What is the main thing that prevents you from worshipping God?



A.) Distractions such as TV,

technology, and social media?

B.) Bad church experience?

C.) Feelings of not being worthy or not having the proper clothing to attend church? D. Work or family obligations?

E.) Lack of encouragement from church members to attend or lack of transportation to get there?

F.) Or ANY other reason why?



What comes next will
upset and disturb you.



“So, teach us to
number our days that
we may get a heart of
wisdom.” -Psalm 90:12

What They Say...

† I don't know ANY disabled people who go to a Christian church... it sucks

† The church I am at now has been very welcoming to me. All of the churches I have been to have treated me well. I think churches should be prepared to possibly have volunteers ready to be buddies to people with disabilities. I don't know if there is any training out there to look for, but if there is, I am interested in seeing if it is something I can check out.

† The money and lack of encouragement.

† Nothing should prevent you from worshiping the Lord, but if you have an issue with your church, you should go to your pastor for help. I know that people don't know exactly what my daughter needs to participate in and be included for us and might not feel comfortable even asking.

Communication is vital, Amanda Forry Fino. I hope it helps shorten the gap between the two! I think what you are doing is incredible, and if people only knew what a HUGE blessing a church family can be in our lives, everyone would be running for it!

† I don't know if this helps. For two years, I held a workshop called Divinely Disabled with young adults at a national gathering, and we'd talk about biblical teachings on disability. Still, eventually, it'd turn into a significant talking circle to air religious trauma. We're sick of being told we need to be "healed" to be seen as valid. Many of us have been told our disability relates to sin or the devil, which the bible says is not the case, so we don't go to church. Many churches are also not accessible or only partly accessible. God accepts fully. A church should work as well.

† Who says you need to be in a church to worship a deity?

† Being "religious" has zero to do with being a Christian and having a personal

relationship with Jesus Christ. A relationship with Jesus is 24/7. Going to church is a religious practice.

† I'm an atheist, so you might not want my response on here.

† So, I grew up in a Christian family and was even baptized at one point. I left the church because of a few reasons. 1. I couldn't take any more of the prayer away. 2. The clique aspect and hypocritical rhetoric - There's more infidelity and backbiting than anywhere in the secular world. 3. The institutional and explicit racism within the infrastructure and the lack of speaking out regarding poverty, classism, homelessness, etc.

† I can't drive to and from a church that I like to go to.

† I'm an atheist but grew up in churches. My disability isn't the main reason I left religion, but I did have some experiences that made me feel unwelcome. When I was 7, I was told I had cerebral palsy because I

didn't pray enough. At 11, I joined Bible drill, where you learn to get to verse quickly. I couldn't do it well because of my hands, and when we had an "exam," I was the only one who couldn't keep up. Everyone else got ice cream; I got lectured for not trying hard enough to overcome my disability. I was told that my refusal to play basketball and fear of running was why I didn't have any friends. Youth ministers talked to me like I was five until I was 18 and routinely left me out of things. Not necessarily the church directly, but also: At 16, I had a fellow Sunday school student ask me to sleep with him, and when I said no, he said I should because no one else would want a disabled girl. This was really messed up, and considering the fact that churches tell women that our virginity is our virtue, it made me feel even worse. Also, when I went to youth classes, a teenager from a wealthy family, with a lot of church power beat up a kid who was autistic with cognitive disabilities. Another kid started fighting with the teenager to stand up for the kid who got

beat up. The kid who stood up for him got in trouble, and the one who actually beat up the kid did not. I know my experiences are from a kid's experiences, but they're a big reason I'm hesitant now. I'd say avoiding dehumanization, into porn and whatnot is a big way to make us feel more welcome.

† I know some people with sensory issues can't attend. I've seen churches with "nursing rooms" for nursing mothers. Maybe include a "sensory room" with stem activities/gadgets and a speaker connected to the sanctuary so they can still hear if they want or turn it off if it gets to be too much.

† This is a huge issue when I visit my sister's church. They have flashing lights and blasting music and a loud band, and it hurts my head and exacerbates my migraines that discourage me from attending. They do not have a "cry room" for babies that I could sit in and still hear the service. My family does not understand and thinks that I am shunning their church, when in fact their church is shunning my disabilities.

† Definitely make it more accessible for people who are unable to walk. I've seen churches where people in chairs can only go so far. They can't get on stage or to the other side of the church or even to the bathrooms alone.

† Thankfully our church has a covering in front of the front door to pull under so we don't have to walk as far, and we can attend when it rains. My husband can't attend when it rains if there's no cover due to the high likelihood of a fall.

† Hypocrisy is my biggest thing so I stopped going. 1. Not all disabled people want to be healed. I swear I'd be rich if I had a dollar every time someone looked at me like I had two heads when I said I didn't want to be healed. 2. Make sure to include accessibility info on any church-wide events. It says a lot when I don't have to get in contact with someone to make sure I can participate. Even better if someone contacts you before and is like "How can we make it so you can participate?" 3. Try to have small groups at

accessible places. Even if you have people willing to help disabled people get into an inaccessible place (like up the stairs into someone's house, it's still a hassle and makes me not want to go. 4. There are many different ways to connect with God. I grew up Southern Baptist and there was a big push to read the Bible and pray. They called this quiet time or doing devotions. I could never just sit down and read the Bible or pray. I met God through songs and only prayed when I thought of things to say. I was made to feel not Christian enough for not being able to pray a lot and read my Bible. Now that I'm trying to come back to God, I find it hard to approach him in the way that makes sense to me because I grew up being told that it wasn't the right way to connect to God. 5. Accommodations made so I could participate are not an inconvenience.

† When I was younger, there was an incident where the youth group was all going to the youth pastor's house which was

not accessible. At the time everything seemed fine, a group sat outside and hung out with me. Later the senior pastor's wife basically called me an inconvenience with regards to this event.

† Maybe include closed captioning on the screen (for churches that have projectors) so the hard of hearing and deaf community can enjoy it. I've also seen closed captioning gadgets they can bring with them to places like the movies. Maybe invest in a few to have on hand. See if someone in the congregation knows ASL so that if you have someone who's deaf come ASL could be an option. We got in touch with some people who are deaf to teach us ASL. I'd love to get them to teach the congregation.

† My church is very inclusive... amplifiers for HOH and very accessible and welcoming to everyone. I am blessed to be a part of this ministry... My husband who also had CP was a deacon as well and instrumental in many of the changes!!!

† I've seen this go around social media recently! Why is this suddenly an issue? We should be treated like anyone else at church. Are people uncomfortable having others pray for them? The one time I felt really uncomfortable was when the congregation had to say "we pray for people with disabilities" as part of the regular prayers. I can understand how that can be uncomfortable, but, as far as how people treat us, I don't understand what the issue is? What am I missing?

† Churches can bring up a lot of challenges for some people with disabilities. Places of worship are technically exempt from ADA, separation of church and state. Perhaps this post is trying to help one specific church become more inclusive? Most places of faith that I know of are inclusive by nature, but I do know it's been an issue for many persons living with disabilities.

† Treat adults with disabilities as equals, because we are all created in God's image. Always assume they can understand what

you are saying. We ALL should be treated with respect and compassion.



So, you understand...

1. *Disabilities and faith*

A lot of disabled people are angry at God for their disability and also, they feel judged by Christian people when they get the, “If you had faith you'd be healed...” type comments from certain groups and churches. When they hear this, they can feel like they are being told that their faith is also disabled.

Some churches sadly are like that and very ignorant of dealing with disabilities, thinking if you just had faith or prayed harder, you'd be cured or could be able to do things that aren't really possible for you, or even thinking you have an evil spirit that's causing the disability.

2. *Disabilities and marriage*

Supplemental Security Income (a.k.a SSI), which is intended to provide income for people with disabilities, has policies that cause hurdles for disabled men and women to get married. They can lose half of their SSI or all, and as in my case, if I did get married I would lose all of my income. There is no way I can avoid giving up my

support to wed a man. I know only a handful of people with disabilities that have gotten married.

Within the civil law and God's law, people who love each other should have the opportunity to marry. But for many people with disabilities, getting legally married can mean losing access to critical support. Because many people with disabilities rely on SSI or Social Security for access to health care, benefits like home and community-based services can also be cut off.

So, why is this problematic for disabled couples who might consider getting involved in a church? They are afraid of being judged or condemned if they want to be together but have no financial means to become legally married. Churches must rest on God's word about sex and marriage. The world may seem more compassionate toward these couples, but what good does being together do if they have no chance to hear and receive the words of life given in the gospel? I don't have a solution for either them or the church, but I know that God can provide creative, godly ways for churches to welcome and help disabled couples if their

church is willing to earnestly seek and trust Him for an answer.

My heart desires to bring together disability and the Christian community in any way I can. I have created two flyers on "How to welcome a Disabled Adult in Church." and "Email Template for Disabled Adults to email a Church to Join. You can easily download it off of my website cpgal.com.

I hope to bring Christian churches, children with disabilities, and their families together by teaching and helping since having a church family is important and beneficial at any age. I aim to guide several churches into being more disability-friendly, including people with disabilities and including them with the respect we deserve.

I have several good suggestions regarding how to make churches more inclusive of disabled people. I am praying to

pave the way for including people with disabilities in every church in America.

Let me conclude by challenging you, leaders of the Christian faith, to welcome all kinds of people with disabilities, just as Jesus did.

#TheBarriersWeFace

God Bless, Amanda.

For Future Reference

<https://www.seejesus.net/training/bethesda-disability-ministry>

<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/pro-life/when-disabilities-arent-welcome-at-church/>

<https://www.joniandfriends.org/ministries/>

<https://engagingdisability.org/>

<https://advocacymonitor.com/marriage-equality-is-still-not-a-reality-disabled-people-and-the-right-to-marry/>

I can be reached by email if you want to discuss this further at cerebralpasygal@outlook.com

About the Author,

Amanda Fino holds a college certificate in Disability Self Advocate from the State of Virginia Board of People with Disability and is a Va-LEND graduate of 2022. With her autobiography *Amazing Grace in a CP Gal's World*, she is reworking her autobiography as a Christian autobiography with *Extra Tale by Heaven Ramsey* through the eyes of a cerebral palsy beauty queen.

Amanda is a part of the DC Author's Dinner Group that's included some of the most significant bestselling authors of our time. When Amanda isn't writing, she is a disability rights advocate, active Alumni, Leader, and Presenter with the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities, Training Alumni Association (TAA), and Public Speaker. Originally from Las Vegas, NV, Amanda lives in Williamsburg, VA, with her family. She loves books, walking, and being a member of her church.