

Proposed New Resolution: Overcoming Ableism and Audism

We live for a day in which those who are nondisabled will not oppress those who are disabled, and those who hear with their ears will not oppress those who do not. We hope for the day when all, regardless of disability or deafness, will experience inclusion and belonging in the Body of Christ. Ableism and audism are barriers to the coming of that day; they are an injustice that undermines the witness of the Church in the world.

- Ableism is the negative bias and discrimination towards persons with disabilities that limits full participation through attitudinal barriers (e.g., lack of disability awareness and hospitality), architectural barriers (e.g., stairs, narrow doorways) and programmatic barriers within faith communities. Ableism is prejudice against disabled bodies in preference of normal bodies.
- Audism is the negative bias and discrimination towards persons who are d/Deaf and hard-of-hearing¹ that limits their discipleship and leadership potential due to communication barriers (e.g., not having captions or sign language interpreters) and attitudinal barriers (e.g., lack of Deaf culture awareness) within faith communities.

The Theological Imperative

Our faith presents us with three imperatives in combatting ableism and audism.

Invitation. In Jesus' parable of the Great Banquet, the king commands "Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame" (Luke 14:21) "so my house may be full" (Luke 14:23). This is a proclamation to value disabled and d/Deaf and hard-of-hearing persons and to include them in the life of the Church.

Preparation: When an invitation is issued, preparations must be made. When Isaiah prepared the people to return from exile, he urged them, "Clear a path in the desert! Make a straight road for the Lord our God. Fill in the valleys; flatten every hill and mountain. Level the rough and rugged ground. Then the glory of the Lord will appear for all to see." (Isa 40:3-5) For disabled and d/Deaf and hard of hearing persons, return from exile means freedom from discriminatory attitudes. Making the path smooth is not for the God's benefit, but for those who have difficulty navigating rough ground. The coming of the Messiah includes the divine call to work for full accessibility so that persons of all embodiments may return from exile.

Formation. The resurrected body of Jesus Christ still bears the signs of wounds which are the marks of disability. Therefore, what many commonly understand as disability or differences in embodiment are incorporated into God's very nature in Christ's Ascension (Luke 24:36-53). Our

¹ The term deaf and hard-of-hearing is all-inclusive of persons who identify as d/Deaf, hard-of-hearing, late-deafened, deafblind. An individual's identity can be fluid and change over time or with settings. Using a capital D implies a person who identifies with Deaf culture.

formation as Christ's disciples includes recognizing and lifting up the gifts of all embodiments and working against all forms of prejudice that deny access to human flourishing for all persons.

The Call to Thought, Action, and Service

These imperatives are a call to United Methodists to free ourselves from ableism and audism.

We call upon United Methodist General Agencies, and all who create church publications, policies, and programs, to:

1. Draw on resources for promoting awareness and inclusion developed by the Disability Ministries Committee² and the Committee on Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Ministries along with the caucuses: the Association of Ministers with Disabilities of The United Methodist Church and the United Methodist Congress of the Deaf.
2. Assign a group or individual the responsibility of reviewing church documents to eliminate ableism and audism in teaching, policy, worship resources, and official statements.
3. Integrate ableism and audism awareness into diversity and inclusion resources and training for ordained clergy, candidates for ordination, local licensed pastors, and laity.
4. Faithfully engage in and support anti-ableism and audism advocacy by all United Methodists.

We call on local churches, annual conferences, and episcopal leaders to:

1. Implement an Annual Conference staff or volunteer Accessibility Coordinator position to support local church and annual conference commitment to accessibility and inclusion of persons with disabilities and who are d/Deaf and hard-of-hearing through awareness, accessibility, and inclusion training.
2. Intentionally promote and engage in Disability Awareness Sunday (¶1265) and Deaf Awareness Sunday services and/ or activities to educate congregations about ableism and audism. These events should utilize persons from the disability and d/Deaf communities along with resources from the Disability Ministries Committee, the Committee on Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Ministries along with the caucuses: the Association of Ministers with Disabilities of The United Methodist Church and the United Methodist Congress of the Deaf to tell of contributions of disabled and d/Deaf persons to the Body of Christ.
3. Include anti-ableism and audism concepts in diversity and inclusion training including confirmation, Bible studies, and youth group activities. This may include special bulletins, multimedia promotions, a sign language class, a guest speaker, and observance of national disability or d/Deaf awareness-related commemoration dates.
4. Live into the Social Principles by including persons with disabilities and persons who are d/Deaf and hard-of-hearing in worship, discipleship growth, mission work, leadership roles, pursuit of ordained ministry, and outreach ministries so all may utilize their gifts.

See Social Principles, ¶1621.

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² An example is the Understand Ableism Toolkit <https://umcdmc.org/resources/christian-education/theology/understanding-ableism/> offered by the Disability Ministries Committee.