

Team Ministry Proposal: Accessibility and Inclusion

Last year our first diversity topic area was devoted to accessibility. Over the course of six weeks we explored several aspects of accessibility including both physical and mental abilities and the inclusive/exclusive attitudes that shape our perceptions of our humanity. As a congregation, we learned how personal disabilities and barriers of all forms can be hidden or in plain view. Our goal is to continue on our path to become an openly accessible and inclusive community.

We, the Accessibility and Inclusion Ministry Team, propose that MUUC commit to making the life of our congregation more accessible for all members, friends, and guests, regardless of visible or invisible disability.

To guide us in this process, the UUA has developed a credentialing program called *Accessibility and Inclusion in Ministry (AIM)*. AIM is “focused on welcoming, embracing, integrating, and supporting people with disabilities and their families in our congregations” (<https://www.uua.org/accessibility>). The program provides resources to congregations in removing barriers to full participation in church life for people with disabilities. The obvious barriers include architectural and communication barriers for people with mobility and vision or hearing impairments; but attitudinal barriers that limit participation in church activities must also be addressed. The following are examples of accessible worship that are provided by the UUA AIM website:

- Wheelchair-accessible entrances are clearly marked.
- Children’s story used in worship service include characters with disabilities as a natural part of the tale.
- The congregation uses clear, appropriate signage in media and language accessible to all who would use it.
- We encourage people in our congregation to focus on people and relationships and not be overly concerned with labeling a person as having a particular disability.
- Assume the participation of people with disabilities in such congregational activities as worship, choir, retreats and social events.

There are three phases to achieve AIM certification.

1. **Getting started on the AIM program.** Submitting basic information to UUA AIM, e.g., team membership, leadership approval.
2. **Conducting assessments and creating your AIM plan.** Assessing programs and facilities, determining priorities, and creating a plan.
3. **Implementing your AIM plan.** Implementing the plan and documenting our progress.

The Accessibility Team anticipates that we could complete the first phase and begin planning the second phase in this church year. Throughout the process, the UUA provides an AIM advisory team to mentor and guide the congregation’s accessibility team with the expectation that the certification process will take up to three years. Our resource needs will be determined as we evaluate our facilities to better understand the physical limitations of our spaces and develop an implementation program.

We began last year’s “understanding diversity” topics by opening our hearts and minds to those who are “differently abled”. Let us take the next steps to become AIM certified and, thus, a fully welcoming and inclusive congregation for our members, friends, and visitors who have disabilities.

Thank you. The Accessibility Team: Dave Bliss, Doug Dick, Nancy Free, and Mary Hildebrand