

Accessibility Audit For Communities of Faith in The United Church of Canada

The United Church of Canada has made a commitment to becoming a more open, accessible, and barrier-free church. What might this mean for your community of faith? How might your congregation or ministry become a more accessible one for people with a range of disabilities?

This accessibility audit might help move in the right direction. For more information, visit [Disability and Inclusion](#) on the United Church website.

Accessibility is about designing products, service, and environments so that people of all abilities can have direct access. Enabling direct access goes far beyond physical space alone—it also includes dismantling barriers of attitudes and barriers of communication.

An accessibility audit can assist your community of faith to become a more accessible space for people with disabilities. Even if you do not think there are people with disabilities in your community of faith, an accessibility audit can help to create space where people of all abilities might feel welcome.

Explore the following questions, and consider which ones you can say “yes” to. If you cannot yet say “yes” to all, perhaps choose a few areas that you could work on improving in your community of faith. It might be overwhelming to try to do everything at once. Instead, doing a few things at a time will help to make your space even more open and accessible to all!

Access to the building

- The *main* entrance of the building is barrier-free with ground-level access (including a ramp, elevator, or lift)
- A secondary entrance is barrier-free with ground level access (including a ramp or an elevator or lift)
- There is a power door opener on the entrance that is barrier-free
- If there is more than one floor to the building, all stories are accessible with an elevator or lift
- The coffee hour space is accessible, with refreshments within reach
- Meeting rooms, and the assembly hall, have barrier-free paths
- There is at least one designated accessible parking spot reserved and identified near an accessible entrance
- A boarding area is available for accessible transit
- Navigation is accessible by eliminating trip hazards on the floor (such as scatter mats)
- Contrast marking is available on stairways
- Stairways have proper and secure railing on both sides
- Barrier-free pathways are available to all meeting spaces

Access to the worship space

- The pulpit has a barrier-free pathway
- There is accessible seating space in the sanctuary
- There is also adjacent companion seating in the sanctuary
- Storage space for mobility assisted devices is available, if needed
- The worship space has a sound system
- Hearing assist devices are available
- Large print bulletins are available
- Accessible seating space is available that is suitable for side transfer



- Storage space is present for mobility assistive devices
- Amplification system is in place
- An adaptive worship bulletin, that uses icons and visuals is available, which can aid people on the autism spectrum
- Electronic copies of the bulletin are available for ease of access
- There are rest or quiet spaces that is accessible should someone need to leave the service
- Weighted lap blankets, which can calm and centre people with sensory processing disorders, are made available
- Overhead lighting can be adjusted for sign language interpretation, speech reading, or people with low vision

Access to washrooms

- The washrooms are situated on a barrier-free path of travel
- The washrooms include a wheelchair accessible stall, or an individual washroom that is wheelchair accessible
- The washrooms have power door operators
- The washrooms have accessible sinks, towel dispensers, or hand dryers
- The washrooms include a raised seat, with space next to the toilet for a side transfer
- The door handles throughout the building are lever-style
- The doors to all rooms are at least 36 inches (0.91 metres) in width

Access through attitudes

- Training is regularly offered on the accessibility features of the community of faith
- New members, or visitors, are oriented to the accessibility features of the congregation
- People with disabilities are actively involved in leadership and in decision-making processes of the church
- A committee, or group, focuses on questions of accessibility in the community of faith
- Sign language interpretation is available, if needed
- Accessibility is discussed regularly in the congregation, and in worship services
- Mental illness is discussed openly and regularly in worship and in the congregation
- There is active work towards minimizing the stigma and discrimination associated with mental illness and all forms of disabilities
- People who make audible noises or gestures are not asked to leave the worship service
- Sermons have been preached about theologies of disabilities and healing is not only thought of as a “cure”

This accessibility audit draws from previous work by the United Church’s Toronto Conference of and the [Our Doors Are Open](#) Project. Their work is acknowledged with gratitude, and is used with their permission. There is also a recognition that not all questions can easily fit into a questionnaire! As such, audits such as this one are works in progress.

The United Church of Canada’s full communion partner, The United Church of Christ, also has a [wide range of resources available on the subject of accessibility](#).

Do you have feedback on ways to improve this accessibility audit? Please email cim@united-church.ca with your ideas and suggestions.

