Disability, Accessibility, and Inclusion Resources
for Clergy and Congregations:
An Annotated Bibliography of Resources

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## Accessibility Resources for Children and Youth, Sunday School Teachers, and Youth Group Leaders

1) *Teaching by Design: Using Your Computer to Create Materials for Students with Learning Differences* by Kimberly S. Voss. Bethesda, MD: Woodbine House Publishing, 2005.

2) *Accessible Gospel, Inclusive Worship* by Barbara J. Newman. Zeeland, MI: With Ministries, 2023.

3) *Welcoming Differences: Including Children Who Experience Challenges* by Kathy Nantais. Toronto, ON: United Church of Canada, 2008.

4) *Learning Disabilities and the Church: Including All God’s Kids in Your Education and Worship* by Cynthia Holder Rich and Martha Ross-Mockaitis. Grand Rapids, MI: Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2006.

5) *Beyond Saints and Superheroes: Supporting Parents Raising Children with Disabilities—A Practical Guide for Faith Communities* by Laura MacGregor and Allen G. Jorgenson. Toronto, ON: Mad & Crip Theology Press, 2023.

6) *Like Me: A Story About Disability and Discovering God’s Image in Every Person* by Laura Wifler. Eugene, OR: Harvest House Kids, 2022. (Picture book, ages 3-10+ yrs)

7) *I Can, Too!* by Karen Autio, illustrated by Laura Watson. Toronto, ON: Scholastic Canada, 2022. (Picture book, ages 3–10+).

The illustrated adaptive equipment list at the back of the book is not to be missed! This is not a faith-based book, but the message of integration and inclusion echoes the Christian concept of hospitality and welcoming one another across differences.

8) *The Big Wide Welcome* by Trillia Newbell, illustrated by Catalina Echeverri. Charlotte, NC: The Good Book Company, 2022. Part of the “Tales that Tell the Truth” Series. (Picture book, ages 5–10+).

Based on James 2:1–26, this book uses the parable of the wealthy and poor worshippers to illustrate our contemporary need to address racism, ableism, social bullying, and exclusiveness. The message is that “Our churches should be big-wide-welcome places—places where there are no favourites, and everyone is loved.”

9) *Included: A Book for ALL Children About Inclusion, Diversity, Disability, Equality, and Empathy* by Jayneen Sanders, illustrated by Camila Carrossine. Victoria, Australia: Educate2Empower Publishing, 2022. (Picture book, ages 5–10+).

This book would work well in a Sunday School classroom setting or in the church lending library; it is likely too long for a Children’s Story Time. This book is not explicitly faith-based, but it does include Christian concepts of kindness, hospitality, and inclusion across difference. The book narrates the experiences of a child who is Deaf, along with five other children who were born with Cerebral Palsy, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Down Syndrome, ADHD, and limb differences, giving examples of things each child is good at, not only what they are “working on,” and offering constructive ways that non-disabled children can interact meaningfully and respectfully with their disabled peers.

10) *Just Ask! Be Different, Be Brave, Be You* by Sonia Sotomayor, illustrated by Rafael López. New York, NY: Philomel Books (Penguin Random House), 2019. (Picture Book, ages 4–10+).

This beautifully illustrated book shows a diverse series of children with diabetes, asthma, blindness, deafness, using a wheelchair for mobility, dyslexia, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Tourette’s Syndrome, ADHD, Down syndrome, and peanut allergy. This is not a faith-based book, but it offers practical information and uplifts the value of diversity in a gentle, inclusive way. The message to children is that it’s okay to be curious about differences, to adapt to the needs of others, to be welcoming and respectful, ultimately building a healthier and more diverse community together. This book would work well in a Sunday School classroom setting, perhaps paired with Psalm 139:13–14, that all bodies are “fearfully and wonderfully made” by God, even if they work differently or have different strengths/weaknesses. 1 Corinthians 12 would also work as an addition to the text of the book. This title would also be appropriate for the church library or sanctuary resource bins for children (for example, if there are times of the calendar year when the Sunday School takes a break, and the children are asked to remain in the worship service).

## Accessibility Resources for Parents and Caregivers

1) *The Spiritual Art of Raising Children with Disabilities* by Kathleen Deyer Bolduc. King of Prussia, PA: Judson Press, 2014.

This author is a spiritual director and a parent who has raised a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder and a moderate intellectual disability. Her book offers a series of reflections that use Christian “spiritual disciplines” as a framework for daily family life, helping parents to more faithfully navigate their difficult, rewarding journeys of disability and restoration with their children, their community, and their churches. Each short chapter shares a story, a cultural insight, or a poem on a particular theme, then scripture, followed by a brief theological/spiritual reflection by the author. The chapters conclude with a series of reflective questions or exercises for the reader to help parents build practical skills, and to offer spiritual succour and meaning-making. Bolduc addresses notable topics such as “Doing the Grief Work,” “Becoming a Wounded Healer,” “The Spiritual Litany of Routine,” “The Importance of Self-Care,” “Putting Together a Team” and many more.

The first time I read this book, I paced myself by reading one chapter each week; the second time through it, I wanted to “go deeper” and spend more time on the application pieces, so I spent a minimum of two weeks (and sometimes, up to four weeks) on each topic. At that pace, the book can easily last for a year. Clergy might consider offering this book as an informal “book study” for a small group ministry with parents and caregivers of children/youth with disabilities, as well as non-disabled persons who are interested in becoming better-equipped as allies and advocates.

2) *Refresh—Spiritual Nourishment for Parents of Children with Special Needs* by Kimberly M. Drew and Jocelyn Green. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2016.

Kimberly and Jocelyn have raised children with disabilities and write from the perspective of wise friends and well-equipped advocates. They share stories from parents of kids who are living with diagnoses of Angelman’s syndrome, Autism Spectrum Disorder, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, genetic disorders, chronic illnesses, and more. Divided into eight sections, with ten chapters each, the book uses agricultural imagery as an organizational principle for Christian parenting of children with disabilities, with headings such as “Uprooted: When Life’s Landscape Changes, “Sowing Seeds: Cultivating Truth and Faith,” “Pulling Weeds: Digging Out That Which Entangles,” “Parched: When Hope Withers,” “Drenched: Nourishing the Soul,” “Sunlit: Turning Toward the Son,” “Pruned: When Pain Produces Fruit,” and “Branching Out: Touching Others’ Lives Through the Journey.”

Each chapter includes a brief scripture reference, a contemporary parenting story involving the challenges of disabilities, the ableism and prejudices of congregants, and comfort/correction directly from the Bible, a biblical character, or wisdom from a historical Christian figure, followed by a short prayer and a series of reflection questions for the reader to consider. The authors seem to be writing in the evangelical tradition, as God is referred to in solely masculine terms, or addressed as “Lord,” and there are some theological interpretations around disability that I disagreed with. However, the helpful content of this practical, accessible book of devotions outweighed my theological concerns. This title will offer help and hope to parents who are raising kids with disabilities. The stories and reflective questions could also be used as sermon illustrations or as spiritual discipline “prompts” in the church newsletter or website (after securing the publishers’ permission).

3) *The Other Side of Special: Navigating the Messy, Emotional, Joy-Filled Life of a Special Needs Mom* by Amy J. Brown, Sara Clime, and Carrie M. Holt. Grand Rapids, MI: Revell Press, 2023.

It is unfortunate that these authors imagined *mothers* of disabled children as their only readers; it would have been more inclusive to have simply addressed *parents* as their target audience. Despite this, the content of the book is solid, describing how to navigate the emotional complexities of special needs parenting with “grit and grace.” Amy, Sara, and Carrie have collectively parented children with physical, medical, mental, and emotional disabilities; they provide authentic advice, acknowledging the messy realities of parenting kids with disabilities, and their support for parents is consistently hopeful and helpful, without denying the need for lament and grief. The bonus chapter alone (about how to navigate an unexpected health/mental health crisis) is well-worth the cost of the whole book, but other chapters are also filled with practical suggestions, theological reflections, and application questions. The authors host a podcast together called “Take Heart Special Moms” that parents and caregivers may find interesting.

4) *Sacred Pauses: Spiritual Practices for Spiritual Renewal* by April Yamasaki. Kitchener, ON: Herald Press, 2013.

This isn’t a book specifically designed for parents/caregivers of children with disabilities, so I considered putting it in the clergy section of this resource list. However, this title was so valuable to me personally while I was processing simultaneous health and church-related traumas during the first year of the pandemic, and it was so helpful to my spiritual well being as I parented three teens with disabilities, that I felt compelled to recommend it for other parents/caregivers and families. The spiritual practices that Yamasaki advocates introduced our family to a meaningful blend of ancient and contemporary spiritual support.

Rev. Yamasaki’s gentle, personable writing style emphasizes the value of both traditional Christian spiritual practices, like developing the rhythms of prayer, reading scripture, and fasting, alongside contemporary suggestions like “having fun,” “living simply,” and “getting outside.” This combination of scriptural insights, historical references, personal stories, and practical suggestions for deepening our lives as Christ-followers (individually *and* collectively) was spiritually sensitive, pastorally powerful, and theologically truthful.

The author’s list of suggested resources, coupled with her academic references throughout the volume make this a particularly valuable resource for families, *despite the complete lack of any direct references to disability, accessibility, or inclusion issues!* I regularly recommend this book to other parents and caregivers who are living through stressful circumstances with the children in their care; I still put it on my required reading lists at the undergraduate and graduate level (and it is relevant whether I’m teaching about worship, pastoral care, disability ministries, or Christian theology); I recommend this title more than any other “self-help” or “spirituality” book among my friends and ministry colleagues from many different denominations. In my opinion, Yamasaki’s book belongs in every church library, and in every section of this resource list.

5) *Choosing to See—A Journey of Struggle and Hope* by Mary Beth Chapman. Grand Rapids, MI: Revell Books, 2010.

This is a heartbreaking story of loss (the traumatic, untimely death of a child, unintentionally caused by one of her siblings) and hope, told by Mary Beth Chapman (who is married to the popular Christian singer-songwriter Steven Curtis Chapman). The book narrates the traumatic death of the Chapmans’ youngest daughter, Maria, who died at the tender age of five after being run over in their driveway. Maria’s older brother, 17-year-old Will, was the driver.

Mary Beth gives a transparent account of the devastating loss that Maria’s death caused for the whole Chapman family, their profound sense of grief and lament, the theological disruption they experienced, the challenges of changed family relationships and identities, and the hope and healing that ultimately sustained them through their faith in Christ. The content of this book is not easy to read, even though the tone is very accessible. The author asks transparent questions like “why does God allow terrible things to happen” that may upset your readers’ theological categories around the sovereignty of God, human suffering, and the brokenness of creation.

## Accessibility Resources for Congregants and Church Libraries(Introductory Materials, Intended for Lay Readers)

1) *Everything Happens for a Reason: And Other Lies I’ve Loved* by Kate Bowler. New York, NY: Random House, 2018.

This book was a New York Times bestseller and an international sensation. Canadian writer (and professor at Duke Divinity School) Kate Bowler was diagnosed with stage IV colon cancer when she was thirty-five years old. In the book, Bowler narrates her sudden journey from health and independence to life-threatening illness (her colon cancer was deemed terminal in 2017, yet she is still thriving and continues to be in remission in 2024). Bowler writes clearly and compellingly about the “health and wealth” assumptions embedded in our North American cultural (it’s also a common belief in far too many of our churches), the limitations of the medical model, the indignities of daily life in the hospital, and how to face our mortality as frail human beings. Bowler writes from a Christian perspective, but her particular version of the faith is an interesting study in contrasts: she is deeply inclusive, but also acerbic, insightful, innocent, brilliant, naïve, earnestly serious in one instant and wickedly sarcastic, the next—this historian offers ageless wisdom and humour with her own characteristic blend of intelligence, insight, and irreverence. In this book, Kate shares several compelling observations about dying, our human need for hope and community, and how her journey of serious illness has taught her to live more faithfully. Kate also launched a podcast called “Everything Happens,” where she and her guests explore life, death, and everything that can happen to human beings in-between.

2) *No Cure for Being Human (And Other Truths I Need to Hear)* by Kate Bowler. New York, NY: Random House, 2021.

Published three years after *Everything Happens for a Reason*, this book points out the absurdity and impossibility of trying to have a “limitless life.” The author exposes the fraudulent and deceptive claims of the “live your best life now” prosperity gospel proselytists. As she so clearly illustrates, using her characteristic blend of razor-sharp wit and tender compassion, life on Earth is a challenging blend of beauty and terror, hope and despair. “There is,” Bowler writes, “no cure for being human!” Bowler’s podcast, “Everything Happens”, has excellent episodes about living faithfully with chronic illnesses and a variety of disabilities.

3) *My Body is Not a Prayer Request: Disability Justice in the Church* by Amy Kenny. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2022.

Amy Kenny offers an excellent, highly accessible primer on disability issues, exposing ableism in the church by sharing her own story with wit, intelligence, and grace. Readers of Anne Lamott and Sarah Bessey will appreciate Kenny’s voice.

4) *When God Doesn’t Fix It: Lessons You Never Wanted to Learn, Truths You Can’t Live Without* by Laura Story. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2015.

Laura Story is an American, and a contemporary Christian recording artist/worship leader who writes about her journey as a caregiver to her husband, Martin, who was diagnosed unexpectedly with a brain tumour while they were newlyweds. The book details the changes to Laura’s theology as she came to terms with the impacts of Martin’s diagnosis, surgery, and the ongoing post-surgical impacts to his health and daily ability to function. She describes her caregiving role, the changes to her disabled spouse’s life and routine, and both the challenges and blessings that his condition prompted for her, theologically and practically, using a highly readable and relatable writing style.

5) *Radical Hospitality: Benedict’s Way of Love (2e)*. by Lonni Collins Pratt and Fr. Daniel Homan. Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2011.

This is a book that will disrupt your concept of being a “good” Christian who is “nice” to others; it aims to transform hearts, minds, and communities, conforming us to the image of Christ and, in Christ, boldly claiming justice for every person. Using plain language and applying biblical concepts convincingly, Pratt uses St. Benedict’s Rule to extend a challenging, powerful, and gracious message to us all: if we the church will loosen our tight-fisted grasp on our programs and buildings, our budgets and schedules, and instead respond with open-hearted hospitality that is radically available to others, Pratt promises that amazing, gospel-fuelled and Spirit-filled things will happen. Although this book does not focus specifically on disability, the “way” that Pratt opens up is relevant for people living with disabilities, for our loved ones and caregivers, and for the able-bodied, healthy people around us. These attitudes and actions, when applied in the context of United Church congregations, will help the denomination become more faithful to the gospel (and more effective witnesses for Christ) through the principles of radical hospitality and generosity of spirit that provides “strangers” with an intentional, intercultural welcome.

## Accessibility Resources for Clergy(Academic Focus, Disability/Accessibility Theology)

1) *Autism and Worship: A Liturgical Theology* by Armand Léon van Ommen. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2023.

This profound, deeply valuable book doesn’t only introduce readers to an autistic perspective of what worship is and how it ought to function; it also illuminates our common commitment, as an interconnected web of worshipping communities, to center the church *in Christ*, rather than in our own personal ideas about what does, or does not, constitute “normalcy.” Our universal, creaturely desire to embrace vulnerability and mutual kenosis, as followers of Jesus, is faithfully modeled throughout van Ommen’s brilliant text. His thoughtful argument for not only broader, but also more authentic inclusiveness is developed through a discussion of theological ethics, liturgical thought and praxis, and availability and presence. Since the 2019 Canadian Health Survey indicates that Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is being diagnosed in about 2% of the population, or 1 out of every 50 Canadians, this is a book that is highly applicable for United Church clergy. Even smaller congregations (50–100 people) are likely to have one or two worshippers with ASD; some may have many more. This is a brilliant book that I wish had been written fifteen years ago, when our firstborn son had just been diagnosed with ASD.

2) *Discovering Trinity in Disability: A Theology for Embracing Difference* by Myroslaw Tataryn and Maria Truchan-Tataryn. Toronto, ON: Novalis Publishing, 2013.

This spousal team (Myroslaw is a Ukrainian Catholic priest, and Maria works in disability studies) raised three daughters together; two of their children have disabilities. Their book overflows with theological insights, dismantles social constructs of “difference,” and explores a Christian response to disability by embracing a Trinitarian view of disability, where God models an interdependent community of dynamic love encompassing all manner of differences. The authors invite the church to become a sanctuary where all congregants find care, respect, and love without forcing artificial constructs of conformity or requiring a superficial “sameness.”

3) *Disability and Spirituality: Recovering Wholeness* by William C. Gaventa. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2018.

This comprehensive book integrates two important topics that have traditionally been viewed as separated entities (disability is a physical affliction, requiring attention and research from health care professionals, while spirituality belongs to clergy and theologians). The author makes a compelling argument for a cohesive, unified approach to both subjects, and gives readers and excellent overview of both historical and contemporary developments in both fields of study. Many compelling anecdotes are shared in the book, and I appreciated that these narratives came from a variety of sources—they were shared by people living with disabilities, their loved ones, caregivers, clergy, and professionals, and they were honest about not only the blessings of integrating disabled people more fully into the life and work of the church, but also the burdens, miscommunications, hurt feelings, and awkward moments of failure. This is a wonderful scholarly resource, filled with accurate, relevant information about disability and spirituality, but it is also a very practical book that readers will find refreshing and highly relatable.

4) *Loving Our Own Bones: Disability Wisdom and the Spiritual Subversiveness of Knowing Ourselves Whole* by Julia Watts Belser. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2023.

Watts Belser is a Rabbi and a researcher in Christian and Jewish disability studies. Her book brings a wonderfully embodied “disability perspective” to many familiar biblical stories, disrupting traditional interpretations, and also discomforting us in the process. The author’s lived experience of “life with wheels” enables her to identify, illuminate, and then resist the types of embedded ableism that are unfortunately still very common in North American churches. The insights she shares from other disabled, queer, feminist, and Black thinkers make this book particularly compelling.

5) *Vulnerable Communion: A Theology of Disability and Hospitality* by Thomas E. Reynolds. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2008.

Reynolds writes for theologians, ethicists, clergy, and students alike, placing people with disabilities at the center of his theological conversation. The author refutes the popular “cult of normalcy” and instead offers a theology of mutual vulnerability, hospitality, and reciprocity.

6) *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability* by Nancy L. Eiesland. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994.

This book was one of the first titles about people with disabilities that explored the topic as a justice issue for both the church and society, instead of putting the burden of “adapting” or “fitting in” on disabled persons. Eiesland’s seminal work is connected to the disability rights movement, but she also appeals to theological, ethical, and social science sources as she casts a compelling, and deeply Christocentric vision of liberatory disability.

7) *Becoming the Baptized Body: Disability and the Practice of Christian Community* by Sarah Jean Barton. Studies in Religion, Theology, and Disability. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2022.

Barton’s insightful text is rooted in her belief that the exclusion of persons with intellectual disabilities from the baptismal font (and many other core Christian practices) was a problem in such need of urgent repair that it needed to be immediately addressed. The author’s pressing need for a more deeply participatory and practical approach to our collective theologies and practices around baptism does not mean that the resulting ethnographic research is slap-dash or insufficient; there is plenty of evidence of careful scholarship and deep theological thinking on display throughout the chapters of this powerful, necessary book. Barton’s vision of the *imago Dei* is well worth your time, but she also offers compelling, challenging, and potentially transformative words about core Christian practices (and how we’ve distorted identity within them), frameworks of friendship, inclusion paradigms, analyses from historical theology, denominational reflections about the sacraments and disabilities, and conceptions of the body in disability theology.

8) *A Constructive Theology of Intellectual Disability: Human Being as Mutuality and Response* by Molly C. Haslam. New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2012.

Haslam addresses the common belief that to be human requires rationality, the capacity for self-reflection, and the powers of reason—and that this concept of humanity marginalizes people with intellectual disabilities. The author gives an alternative approach, drawing from diverse philosophical and theological sources, going far beyond a model of “inclusion” to the wholesale reinterpretation of what it means to be a human created in the image of God. This is a slim volume (116 pages), but it is packed with profound theological insights that will disrupt and improve your thinking; it may also provoke you into offering a “wider welcome” to marginalized people in your churches and communities.

9) *At the Gates: Disability, Justice, and the Churches* by Naomi Lawson Jacobs and Emily Richardson. London, U.K: Darton, Longman, and Todd Publishers, 2022.

The authors spent a decade researching this book, and one welcome result of their thorough approach are the substantive contributions of disabled people to the text. The stories of Christians with disabilities being able to claim their prophetic voice within their church communities, and for their messages to be heard, add immeasurably to the text. These authors share their own lived experiences of disability in the UK, and then discuss physical access to church buildings, how to create cultures of access to increase participation, and how churches can be transformed into interdependent communities, places where disabled people can offer their leadership gifts. This practical text also touches on disability theology as described by disabled people themselves, the complex relationship that people with disabilities have with the healing narratives in scripture, the participation of disabled people in the life of the church as a justice issue, and exploring the ways that the COVID-19 pandemic changed how we worship together, and the impacts (positive and negative) that these changes have had on disabled congregants and their caregivers.

10) *The Bible, Disability, and the Church: A New Vision of the People of God* by Amos Yong. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmanns, 2011.

This is another classic book in disability studies. The author grew up alongside a sibling with Down syndrome, and his early experiences of exclusion and being shamed by the church led him to question the doctrines of creation, providence, Christology and atonement, theological anthropology, ecclesiology, soteriology, and eschatology that he had been taught. Yong clearly demonstrates how our collective theological “understandings” (mostly negative) of disability have developed over several centuries, and how we might collectively revise our views with the goal of creating a most hospitable and inclusive world for people with disabilities to inhabit.

## Accessibility Resources for Clergy(Applied Focus, Practical Disability Books)

1) *Disability and the Church: A Vision for Diversity and Inclusion* by Lamar Hardwick. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Press, 2021.

2) *Demystifying Disability: What to Know, What to Say, and How to Be an Ally* by Emily Ladau. New York, NY: Ten Speed Press, 2021.

This is not a Christian book, but it is the best practical primer about what disability is and isn’t, how to relate to people in the disability community, and how to become an ally that I have ever encountered. Ladau includes relevant stats about the prevalence of disability in North America, and her first-person experiences (both horrific and lovely) of living and working as a disabled person in our profoundly ableist world will highlight the importance of her book, and our collective need to become better advocates and allies. Ministry personnel will discover some key facts to learn and plenty of important principles to apply to their own lives and in their congregational contexts.

3) *Disability and the Way of Jesus: Holistic Healing in the Gospels and the Church* by Bethany McKinney Fox. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019.

McKinney Fox considers how the healing narratives contained in the gospels can guide able-bodied and disabled people alike toward a faith that embraces a more nuanced, respectful, and theologically faithful view of healing. The author explores the intersectionality of biblical studies, disability studies, and ethics. Her approach is deeply practical, full of narrative accounts from individuals, clergy, and congregations attempting to faithfully navigate this issue. If you’ve ever heard a “horror story” from a disabled person who had “healing prayer” forced upon them by an able-bodied stranger, in the name of Jesus; if you worry that the underlying theology of disability in your church is limited and likely also ableist; or if you’ve ever wanted to know to pray more authentically and faithfully for disabled congregants (but you weren’t sure how to go about it without causing offense) then this is the book for you!

4) *Disability: Living Into the Diversity of Christ’s Body* by Brian Brock. Jason Byassee, series editor of “Pastoring for Life: Theological Wisdom for Ministering Well.” Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021.

This author combines scriptural insights and first person accounts from within disability and church communities. He also explores the practical and theological issues surrounding disability/accessibility conversations, all woven together by a theologian who cares deeply about the concerns of pastors, and how clergy can create a more vibrant, more radically welcoming environment for all worshippers. This is a challenging book, one that I hope will disrupt and convict you, but also inspire and provoke you to make some practical changes in your community of faith. Another reason to commend this book to you: the series editor happens to be our brilliant colleague, the Rev. Dr. Jason Byassee, formerly a homiletics professor at the Vancouver School of Theology, and currently the Senior Minister of Timothy Eaton Memorial United Church in Toronto.

5) *Amazing Gifts: Stories of Faith, Disability, and Inclusion* by Mark I. Pinsky. Herdon, VA: Alban Books, 2012.

This book is filled with stories written by people with disabilities, their family members, congregations, and clergy. There are sixty-four stories here, and several of them would work well to illustrate sermon topics and to enhance understanding within your church, illuminating the uniqueness and value of every human being, the pain that isolation and exclusion from the church community causes, and the healing power offered through simple actions that promote welcome and belonging for all. Some of these stories are about people motivated by a personal challenge, others reflect community concern, and still others voice a cry for justice.

## Resources for Clergy and Lay Worship Leaders(Disability/Accessibility Liturgical Resources, Blessings, and Devotional Readings)

1) *A Liturgy for All Bodies: New Words for a New World* by Kimmothy Cole, editor. Glendale, CA: Cyclical Press, 2022.

This substantive, challenging book offers a large collection of new liturgies and hymns written by ministers, mystics, poets, and musicians who live all across North America, and who also live with a wide variety of disabilities. It was written for churches who are interested in becoming anti-ableist communities of faith and who asked for an anti-ableist worship resource that would help to reshape their liturgical language. This resource may also reform your ideas about God, humans, and what new possibilities arise when we adopt a humble, hospitable posture that welcomes everyone. We imagine the kingdom of God as a flourishing community where every kind of body truly belongs. United Church of Canada ministers Rev. Evan Swance-Smith and Rev. Dr. Lisa Waites both contributed to this collection of liturgical resources.

2) *Liturgies from Below: Praying with People at the Ends of the World* by Cláudio Carvalhaes. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2020.

This is not a book of liturgies designed specifically to be inclusive, and disabled people are not often specifically named in the four hundred and sixty-two acts of worship contained in these pages. However, the experiences of people with disabilities are present everywhere, as the prayers often express the language of pain. There is deep intersectionality between experiences of poverty, racism, sexism, homophobia, disability, poverty, and ageism; people living “at the margins” often express similar experiences of suffering and exclusion, even when their respective “labels” are quite different.

3) *Black Liturgies: Prayers, Poems, and Meditations for Staying Human* by Cole Arthur Riley. New York, NY: Convergent, 2024.

Again, this book was not written with disability/accessibility issues specifically in mind, yet the liturgical resources on topics such as “Belonging,” “Body,” “Dignity,” “Justice,” “Lament,” “Mortality,” and “Rest” are relevant and meaningful as resources that name suffering and boldly demand a remedy from God, and from our communities of faith. There are prayers, poems, reflections, and theological questions in each chapter, and these resources are suitable for individual, devotional use and also for enriching Sunday worship experiences. The intersectionality of Arthur Riley’s text makes it an accessible, relatable book for people experiencing ableism; it will also be beneficial for the ministers and lay leaders who would like to offer more inclusive, more hospitable kind of liturgical language during Sunday morning worship services.

4) *A Rhythm of Prayer: A Collection of Meditations for Renewal* edited by Sarah Bessey. New York, NY: Convergent, 2021.

This book of prayers functions as an exemplar and an invitation, sharing ideas that will prompt delight and desolation, prayers that confront and comfort, protect and provoke. The whole volume is suitable for a variety of worship contexts, but if you are looking for disability/accessible themes in particular, see “A Prayer Against Efficiency,” “A Liturgy for Disability” and “A Benediction.”

5) *Have a Beautiful, Terrible Day! Daily Meditations for the Ups, Downs, and In-Betweens* by Kate Bowler. New York, NY: Convergent, 2024.

Each of these lovely entries by New York Times bestselling author and Canadian theologian Kate Bowler offers a short scripture reading followed by Kate’s reflection on the assigned topic and several reflection questions for readers. Semi-liturgical in scope (she offers a series of Advent and Lenten reflections), Bowler isn’t writing specifically about disability issues, yet her own experience of pain, chronic illness, and acute illness informs her writing to the extent that her reflections can’t help but be inclusive.

6) *The Lives We Actually Have: 100 Blessings for Imperfect Days* by Kate Bowler and Jessica Richie. New York, NY: Convergent, 2023.

This is another excellent volume of liturgical blessings that acknowledge the messiness and vulnerability of human existence. These blessings can function devotionally—many of the blessings are accompanied by a verse or two of scripture, or a thoughtful quote from another writer or theologian. They are also appropriate as sermon illustrations and words of commissioning and benediction for Sunday worship services, special services, small group settings (such as nursing homes), Bible studies, youth group gatherings, “Blue Christmas” services, etc. Bowler and Richie have provided reading guides for Advent and Lent that are also quite lovely; although this volume is not written specifically about disabilities, Bowler’s lived experience of cancer has profoundly shaped her writing. Congregants will find compassionate, wise, and deeply truthful words of hope, and a delightful absence of the syrupy, pseudo-religious, “just have more faith” shellac that too often accompanies the topic of suffering/healing.

7) *Creative Ideas for Worship with All Abilities* by Hazel Bradley and Jim Cargin. London, U.K.: Canterbury Press, 2019.

Bradley has spent more than four decades as a liturgist for L’Arche International. Her experiences at L’Arche facilitated these multi-sensory, highly engaging strategies for fully integrating persons with intellectual and learning disabilities into the worshipping community. Bradley shares many worship principles and sample liturgies for engaging worship that includes people of all ages and ability levels. She also explains the theological, ethical, and practical reasons why integrated, inclusive worship is essential for the Body of Christ, and how facilitating the inclusion of disabled people as active worship participants and leaders is not an extra burden for clergy, but rather a faithful action that allows the whole church to realize identity in Christ more fully, and to more effectively carry out Christ’s mission in the community.

8) *Enabling Church: A Bible-based Resource Towards the Full Inclusion of Disabled People* by Gordon Temple and Lin Ball. London, U.K.: SPCK Publishing, 2012.

Dr. Gordon Temple is the CEO of “Torch Trust,” an international Christian organization serving people with vision loss. His book explores the concept of interdependence through scriptural examples, discussion, prayer, worship, activities, and a collection of short stories narrated by disabled authors. This thoughtful collection of resources could be quoted in sermons, used in small group settings, and incorporated into many different outreach programs. One caveat—the author includes vignettes from those who have found meaning in the theological idea that God has “given” them their disease/disability as some sort of character test. People hold many different points of view regarding theologies of disability. Sensitivity and pastoral care needs to be used by clergy when exploring these themes so that the conversation doesn’t veer into “blame the victim” territory.

Temple and Ball have included a helpful guide to congregational accessibility audits that would be a good resource for M&P Committees, worship teams, and Stewards/Trustees to consider. For anti-ableist worship materials that are highly congruent with the new UCC call to “Deep Spirituality, Bold Discipleship, and Daring Justice,” see the chapters/worship resources under the titles “Fearfully and Wonderfully Made,” “Living with Diversity,” and “Standing Up for Justice.”

9) *Wild Goose Big Book of Liturgies* by the Iona Community. Glasgow, U.K.: Wild Goose Publications, 2017.

Although this collection of liturgies wasn’t specifically written from an anti-ableist perspective, the language used is highly accessible and inclusive (e.g., “journeying with Jesus,” instead of “walking with Jesus”), and the themes of developing community despite difference, human vulnerability, and grief are handled with both sensitivity and skill. “Waiting in Darkness” by David McNeish and Sarah Anderson incorporates Isaiah 42:1–4 into an Advent service longing for justice and peace. “That All May Dance” by Chris Polhill incorporates Acts 2:1–13 and 2 Corinthians 13:11–14 into a Pentecost to Trinity Sunday service (a deeply Trinitarian worship service with accessible prayers for justice, peace, and love). “God of the Tipping Point: A Service of Sorrowing, Defiance, and Commitment” by Alison Swinfen uses Lamentations 1:16–22 and Luke 18:1–8 (the parable of the persistent widow) to illuminate the global struggle for justice and that God invites us to participate in together.

10) *The Cure for Sorrow: A Book of Blessings for Times of Grief* by Jan Richardson. Orlando, FL: Wanton Gospeller Press, 2016.

Author and liturgist Jan Richardson has written several volumes of liturgical poetry that are sometimes accompanied by paintings and mixed-media artworks, illuminating the theological themes she addresses in her writings. I commend all of her insightful work to you, but *The Cure for Sorrow* is of particular value for clergy and lay leaders who are crafting liturgies in a time of suffering, loss, and grief. Richardson offers a graceful, wise, and deeply personal (yet also universally applicable) account of her own journey through the shadowlands; her husband died unexpectedly in their fourth year of marriage. “Blessing for the Brokenhearted” and “The Blessing You Should Not Tell Me” refute several common (and highly problematic) theologies of loss that are often lobbed like grenades at people with disabilities; the author’s insistence that these toxic theologies must be rejected is like a balm in Gilead for those of us who have suffered, and who have had that suffering reinforced in less than helpful ways by the church.

“The Cure for Sorrow” and “The Hardest Blessing” are deeply truthful renderings of grief and woundedness that do not sink into despair, but preserve resilient, truthful accounts of human struggle, hope, and the grace and strength of God. Richardson’s words are appropriate as sermon illustrations, as words of commissioning and benediction as the worship service concludes, and in small group and “special service” settings.

## Accessibility Podcasts to Explore

1)The Mad and Crip Theology Podcast

Hosted by Amy Panton and Rev. Miriam Spies, Canadian disability advocates and theologians (Miriam is a United Church minister, and both she and Amy are pursuing doctoral degrees; in addition to hosting this podcast, Panton and Spies are co-editors of the *Canadian Journal of Theology, Mental Health, and Disability*).

2) Disability with Possibility

Hosted by Amanda Lockitch and Michelle Hewitt, this podcast (launched in September 2024) is designed to amplify the voices of disabled Canadians, highlighting “strength, creativity, and determination … to build a community of support and inclusivity.”

3) Everything Happens

Hosted by Dr. Kate Bowler, this podcast is listed under “Society & Culture,” but Bowler often interviews theologians, clergy of many different denominations, and authors who are writing about theology, spirituality, disability, and suffering/grief. If you appreciate Bowler’s books, you are likely to also enjoy the podcast, although recent seasons of the podcast have seen a sharp increase in the volume of sales pitches and sponsoring advertisers.

4) Access All: Disability News and Mental Health

Hosted by the BBC; this is a weekly podcast that offers a series of life stories and solutions around mental health, well being, and disability. International focus and audience.

5) Disability and the Canadian Church

Hosted by Keith Dow and Jasmine Duckworth, this podcast show discusses the intersections of disability and Christianity in Canada and beyond. The episode “Let’s Talk about Ableism” is a particular *must-listen* topic, but all of their episodes are worth your time and energy.

6) Autism and Theology

Launched by the Centre for Autism and Theology at the University of Aberdeen in 2023, this podcast is published on a biweekly basis, and it engages with recent resources and research in the fields of autism studies and Christian theology. The tone is conversational and informal.

7) The Mighty

This podcast is affiliated with “The Mighty” online platform ([TheMighty.com](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5Clisaw%5COneDrive%5CDocuments%5CDisability%20Ministries%5Cwww.TheMighty.com)), a global forum filled with free health information, patient and family support groups, and recent medical/functional/holistic approaches to a wide variety of physical and mental health conditions, how to adapt to life with disabilities, thriving while managing chronic illnesses, and more. Their podcast “infuses the health space with positivity, humour, and vulnerability.”

8) How We Live Now

Hosted by Katherine May, author of “Wintering” and “Enchantment”. May’s podcast is not advertised as being faith-based or Christian, but there are episodes that are highly relevant for clergy and lay leaders, include “Mortality, Acceptance, and Imperfectionism,” “Real Autistic Lives,” “Life as a Nun,” and “Awe, Humility, and Purpose.”

9) Brewed Differently

Hosted by Hailea Carter, this podcast offers a parental perspective on raising children with disabilities. The host addresses topics like barriers to inclusion, disability and the church, dysregulation, all things Autism, and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder. “Disability and the Church: Barriers, Inclusion, and Ways to Support” (Season 1, Episode 14) gives some practical suggestions that clergy, Sunday School teachers, and Youth Group leaders can benefit from.

10) The Distillery

Hosted by the Princeton Theological Seminary, this podcast isn’t specifically about disability, but previous guests have included authors Sarah Barton, John Swinton, and Erin Raffety, who are all working in the areas of disability theology, mental health, accessibility, and ministry.

11) Sanctuary Mental Health

Hosted by Sarah Kift, this podcast interviews theologians, writers, leaders, and people living with mental health challenges. Recent guests include practical theologian Dr. John Swinton, psychologist Dr. Hillary McBride, author Amy-Louisa Robinson, the Rev. Dr. Malcolm Guite, Dr. Christopher Cook (director of the Centre for Spirituality, Theology and Health at Durham University), and Nigel Pollock (President of InterVarsity Canada).

12) Faith in a Fresh Vibe – On Decolonizing Christianity

Hosted by Rohadi Nagassar, a Canadian author and pastor who lives in Calgary, Alberta. Season 10, Episode 77 features a not-to-be-missed interview with author Lamar Hardwick, who discusses his latest book, *How Ableism Fuels Racism*. Hardwick’s 2021 book, *Disability in the Church* is also listed above, in the recommended reading for clergy part of this resource list.