

The Theology of Accessibility

In recent years, we've done a lot of work to make our church buildings more accessible. Modern building codes require owners of public spaces to think about the needs of everyone who might use them and with this in mind, we've installed:

- Additional handicapped parking
- two ADA compliant bathrooms
- six infant changing stations
- four assisted hearing devices in the Sanctuary
- an electronically accessible doorway
- accessible walkways to the lobby, Parish Hall, and Meeting House

But as believers, for profound theological reasons, we would do these things anyway because everyone should be welcome in a church, and the non-believing world should see us leading the way.

To emphasize this, the climactic part of our Sunday worship is a call to draw near with faith around one table, to eat of one bread, and to drink of one cup, together as one body, though faith and by grace alone. For this reason, we believe that our biggest theological problem is still yet to be addressed: not everyone can do that here.

On my first weekend at Christ Church, I tore a ligament in my knee, and I can still recall how difficult it was for me to come to the front of my own church because of all the steps. A major part of this renovation is designed to include everyone equally at the climactic moment of our worship. That means eliminating some of the different levels in the sanctuary and creating enough space around the rail for people to get to it without falling over each other.

We've already seen the joy that assisted hearing devices have brought to those using them, and we've seen how grateful new parents are that both men and women are able to use the changing tables in their own bathrooms. We've also seen people with wheelchairs, walkers, or strollers, smiling on their first visit here, knowing that to enter the building, all they needed to do was press a button on the wall. In many churches, they are excluded before they even enter by something as simple as a door.

In Romans 12 Paul commands us to "show" or "practice hospitality". In the original Greek, it's just one word "*philoxenia*": literally "love to strangers" as opposed to "*philonexia*" love to selves. In other words, when embarking on a building development like this, our first thought should always be for others and especially those who've not always felt welcome before.