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Congregational Accessibility Network (CAN) Congregational Study Process

This material, along with links to the resources mentioned, can be found on the CAN website at <http://www.canaccess.org/inclusion/study-process/>.

Mission of CAN: To encourage every religious congregation to include persons with disabilities in its community life.

Goals of CAN:

- To help congregations **assess their current level of accessibility** and ascertain how well they include persons with disabilities in their community life.
- To assist congregations in **finding the tools** to increase accessibility and **work toward full inclusion** of all persons in community life regardless of abilities.

The tools of the Congregational Accessibility Network (CAN) are most effectively used as a part of an overall “Congregational Study Process” Each congregation will need to develop such a process in a way that best meets its needs. This document provides an introduction and gives important guidelines for carrying out this study process.

This document is found online at <http://www.canaccess.org/inclusion/study-process/>. It helps congregational leaders understand the proposed study process. You may reproduce the document so that it comes out on the front and back of a single sheet of paper with a copy for each person involved.

Each step listed on the second page (back) of this document is also linked online to additional materials that will be helpful for that step. In this way, you can see the process at a glance and find additional helps online whenever you need them for a particular step.

Important: Congregations are made up of unique people with varying degrees of awareness, interest, and motivation toward inclusion. For maximum impact on the congregation as a whole, there are three things to keep in mind: **communicate, involve, and communicate more!** At each step in the process, it is important to communicate upcoming steps to the congregation as a whole, involve as many persons as possible, and communicate more fully with the key persons involved in your process.

One final note: Early in the process, you may find it helpful to make a quick check of your congregational accessibility without necessarily doing the entire survey. A **Quick Checklist** has been developed for this purpose and can serve as a discussion-starter for your congregation.

Congregational Study Process

I. Preparation

- A. **Gain approval and support** from the key leadership (persons and/or groups) in your congregation. (Use the **Quick Checklist** to help stimulate discussion on accessibility.)
- B. **Rally support** for your efforts as you **announce** your intentions to the congregation.
- C. **Assign** the study process to an existing committee or group **or form** an Accessibility Study Team (“Study Team”) specifically for the process.
- D. **Review** the entire process so that the Study Team becomes **totally familiar** with it and owns it.

II. Assessments

- A. Carry out the **Individual and Family Needs Questionnaire** (“Questionnaire”)
- B. Carry out the **Congregational Assessment Survey** (“Survey”)

III. Analysis

- A. **Compile** the results of the Questionnaire for analysis by the Study Team.
- B. **Analyze** the results of the Survey.
- C. **Compare** how the congregation feels about the level of inclusion (from the Questionnaire) with the objective analysis of accessibility (from the Survey).
- D. **Reflect** on the overall results in light of the congregational mission statement.

IV. Action

- A. In light of the mission of your congregation, **identify both strengths and weakness** in the ministry of including persons with disabilities in your congregational life.
- B. **Explore** how your strengths can be used to remedy the weaknesses.
- C. **Develop a list** of actions needed to increase accessibility and move toward full inclusion.
- D. **Group the actions** needed into the following categories:
 1. **Adjustments:** Can be done soon within current congregational structure and budget.
 2. **Changes:** Can be done within the next year or two if the congregation makes a modest commitment of time and funds.
 3. **Projects:** Require a major commitment of time and/or funding from the congregation to do.
- E. **Develop your priorities** in an action plan supported by congregational leadership:
 1. Decide how to make the **adjustments** as soon as possible.
 2. Present proposals for **changes** to the congregational leadership for action.
 3. Present **project** ideas to the leadership and work together to rally support from the whole congregation.

V. Evaluation

- A. **Decide** about the future of the Accessibility Study Team. If the Study Team does not continue, who will take responsibility for the ongoing implementation of their work?
- B. **Plan and carry out** an evaluation of the progress toward accessibility and inclusion at intervals of 6 months, one year, and each year thereafter.
- C. **Recognize with gratitude** the adjustments and changes that have been made and the people who have needed to make them.
- D. **Celebrate the completion** of projects with a special worship service of recognition and dedication.