

Disability Awareness Mission Moment – March, 2011
(Carol Robison – Evangel Heights UMC, South Bend, IN)

Just imagine - a new family has moved to town settling across the street from *Best UMC in Town*. Mr. and Mrs. Justin Time are the first church members to greet John and Elsie Newcomer and their large, active family. The Times come bearing fresh brownies and lemonade hoping that the Newcomers will be able to take a few moments from their unpacking to get acquainted.

“We’re members of *Best UMC in Town*,” begins Mr. Time. “I’m Justin, and this is my wife, Sadie. Welcome to the neighborhood.”

“We’re so pleased to meet you,” adds Sadie. “We would be so happy for you to attend services and Sunday School this Sunday. Here is a schedule of times and classes and up-coming events. We’ll be looking for you on Sunday.”

Isn’t this a lovely way to greet new neighbors? But let’s hold on just a minute and meet the Newcomer family.

The Newcomers are a family of six: John, Elsie, Jimmy, age 12, Maisie, age 10, and Ernie, age 6. Grandma Letty who recently had a stroke has become a permanent member of the household.

Grandma needs 24 hour care and, although therapy is helping, she is unable to move about freely and uses a wheelchair when away from home. Her vision and hearing aren’t what they used to be either, and she finds the whole situation very frustrating.

Jimmy has a developmental disability and will attend a special class in the public school. He is extremely friendly and likes playing with his Legos. He builds amazing structures.

Maisie is looking forward to school. She had meningitis when she was six months old and lost her hearing as a result. She will have an interpreter with her in class so that she can stay on track with her classmates. Her favorite class is art.

Ernie is concerned about going to school all day now that he’s going into first grade. He likes running games and wants to learn how to jump higher than anyone else in the family.

John is starting a new job in town and will be really busy establishing himself in the workplace. Elsie will have to be a stay at home Mom and caregiver – a 24-7 job, indeed.

Back to Sadie and Justin Time – As they meet the Newcomers they realize that there are some special needs for this family. The Newcomers seem to be pleased to be invited to church. But is *Best UMC in Town* accessible and welcoming to the whole family? The Newcomers have just a few of the disabilities that might appear at any of our church doors: such as mobility problems, vision and/or hearing issues, and learning disabilities.

Are we accessible to all? Are our churches’ facilities, methods of communication and attitudes welcoming to all who would enter? How does ministry with those who have disabilities work in your congregation?