

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

We're visiting the *Best UMC in Town* during the monthly Church Council meeting. Justin Time and his wife, Sadie, are reporting on their visit to the Newcomer family who has moved in across the street.

"They seem to be very nice and are anxious to become involved in our church," remarked Sadie. "The children really gobbled up my special fudge brownies."

"I noticed," added her husband, "that the family has some special needs. Are we prepared to meet those needs? For example, they have a Grandmother living with them who needs to use a wheelchair when she's away from the house. She'll have access to our sanctuary, but what if she wants to attend Sunday School downstairs?"

"We talked about an elevator a few years back, but decided that we didn't have anyone in our congregation who would need to use it," replied Tom Goodenough. "Maybe we need to check into that again – and do it quickly."

Pastor Holiman then asked, "What is the Mission of the Church?"

The Council replied in unison, "To make disciples for Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world."

"And where do we start?" Pastor continued.

"By opening our hearts, minds and doors to everyone, including persons who have disabilities," said Sadie. After meeting the Newcomers, I know that they want to be involved in all aspects of our church life. They want to serve with us. I think a committee should be formed to make our building more accessible. We could start with the Accessibility Audit that each church is to complete for Charge Conference each year."

"An excellent idea," responded George Topman, the Chair of the Council. "Tom, you're the Chair of the Trustees, will you please look into that for us?"

Tom Goodenough nodded agreeably and added, "I'm thinking that there may be other issues rather than just the building ramps, elevators, restrooms, etc. that might make it difficult for persons with disabilities to become fully involved in the church. What about communication? We could have assistive listening devices or interpreters available during services or classes. And maybe large print bulletins or Bibles and Hymnals as well."

“And how about our attitudes?” asked Justin. “We need to get to know folks who have disabilities. The Newcomers’ oldest son, Jimmy, has a developmental disability, his sister is deaf and the grandmother’s had a stroke and has many challenges. I didn’t understand much

about people who were disabled until I met the Newcomers. Elsie Newcomer is a full time mother and caregiver. John is getting started in a new job and is really busy. There seems to be a lot going on in that family. But they all want to be a part of *Best UMC in Town* and be involved in the ministry. I’ll repeat what my wife said a few minutes ago. They don’t want to be ministered to they want to be in ministry with us.”

“Hooray,” said Mary Booker. “I’ve been wanting to offer Bible Study in a different way. Our youth can help make the Newcomer children feel comfortable and get them involved. We’ve talked in the past about having a support group for caregivers. Maybe this is just the push we need.”

“Our Indiana Conference Disability Concerns Committee may have some resources to help us get started. We’ll look into that right away,” said George. Then turning to Pastor Holiman he asked, “Pastor will you please close our meeting with prayer?”