

Resources for outreach with members with intellectual and developmental disabilities



Reach out to your members and the community

This is your chance to engage members of the community who do not typically participate in faith-based programming or worship, often because an individual in the family has difficulty sitting quietly during church functions, or because work schedules conflict.

Challenge your participants and their families to invite friends to sign up for your updates and to watch services online. Contact your local Arc or other organizations and providers to let them know what you have to offer. Post information in the neighborhood grocery store. Make the information easy to find on your church website.

Facilitate in-home faith-based activities

Follow the lead of the disability ministry coordinators and mail, e-mail, or deliver activity packets to your members and others in the community. Share ideas such as:

- Create an altar or worship space. Place a cloth or large towel over a small table and arrange a cross (make one if you don't have one), Bible, and possibly flowers and a battery-operated candle on the table. Add photos of people you pray for, treasures that remind you of the God's wonderful creation. Personalize it with faith objects that are meaningful to you. Ideally this will be set up in the room where the person or family watches online worship services.
- Set a daily family prayer time, involving all family members.
- Learn short Bible verses and discuss how they apply to life. The Easy-to-Read translation available at [Bible Gateway](https://www.biblegateway.com/easy-to-read/) can be helpful.

Try to include gross and fine-motor activities, and noisy as well as quiet activities along with the typical pen and paper tasks. Find additional ideas at the following sources:

“Messy Church at Home Ideas:” <https://www.messychurch.org.uk/resources/messy-church-home-ideas>

“Adaptable Easter Egg Hunt for Families During COVID-19,” by Kevin Johnson, Discipleship Ministries. Designed for families with children but the activities are suitable for all of us: <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/articles/adaptable-easter-egg-hunt-for-families-during-covid-19>

Please see also the Resource sheet for “Praying Without Words.”

Offer virtual worship and devotional messages

Help your families prepare for online worship by sending materials such as age-appropriate Bible coloring pages ahead of time. Suggest that people who struggle to follow the whole message listen for one or two key words.

Offer a brief take-home phrase or thought for the day that summarizes the message, possibly in the form of a coloring sheet.

Encourage active participation with flags to wave or homemade maracas or bells to shake during music and when the person hears the key word he or she is listening for.

The CRC Network offers many suggestions applicable for families with members of all ages in the article COVID-19 and Including Kids in Online Worship (Part 1) by Karen Deboer, 3/30/20:

<https://network.crcna.org/pastors/covid-19-and-including-kids-online-worship-part-1>

If your disability ministry group is meeting online, consider writing a skit to illustrate the scripture message and having members perform it, and offering the skit to be included in worship.

If you do not offer video messages, consider sending links to churches that post theirs:

- Church of the Resurrection – Matthew’s Ministry/ Mornings with Mikala:
<https://cor.org/matthews>
- Highland Park UMC – Belong disABILITY Ministry:
https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCxktBshgkF_vchOWwpBBOSQ/playlists
- University UMC – Believer’s Garden:
<https://www.universitysatx.org/media/messages/believers-garden-service-archives/>

Please see also the Resource sheet “Inclusive online worship and group participation.”

Facilitate mutual communication and connection

- Involve your members and volunteers in contacting other participants. See the suggestions for “Talk-o Tuesdays:” <https://www.facebook.com/belovedeverybody>.
- Contact parents and caregivers to listen and offer prayer.
- Go a step further and offer to run errands or drop off a take-out meal, respecting family food sensitivities and needs.
- Consider arranging an online caregiver support meeting.
- For families overwhelmed by trying to teach school-aged children with disabilities offer to research ideas and develop and provide learning materials appropriate to the child’s needs and goals.

Plan and prepare for resumption of your ministry

- Use the gift of the time at home to dream of ways to make your entire congregation’s ministry more inclusive and to enhance your specific ministry.
- Schedule a Zoom planning retreat with your ministry volunteers.
- Add to your online and physical library.
- Find training resources and arrange online training events with your volunteers.
- If you are creative (or know of someone in your congregation who is), make a felt board and figures to tell Bible stories in a visually appealing format.
- Fabricate weighted lap pads with tactile faith symbols, e.g. a rainbow, on washable pad covers. Make rhythm instruments.