

LENTEN CHALLENGE

CENTERING THE DISABILITY COMMUNITY



**SOUTHWESTERN
PENNSYLVANIA
SYNOD** EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN
CHURCH IN AMERICA

A PROJECT OF THE SYNOD'S AUTHENTIC
DIVERSITY AND JUSTICE WORKING GROUP

WEEK 5:

Even though the Americans with Disabilities Act was introduced to Congress in 1988, there was still a lot of resistance to passing it. One of the biggest resisters was the wider Christian church, who were concerned about the cost, as well as the separation of church and state. So an exemption was made that is still in place today, meaning that a house of worship or religious school does not have to be accessible. As congress continued to stall the passing of this bill, activists knew they had to make a point regarding accessibility. On March 12th, 1990 protestors with mobility aids put them aside as they climbed and crawled the steps at the Capitol. This sent a clear message to lawmakers about why they needed to pass the ADA now. The ADA was signed into law on July 26th, 1990. The ADA added more adaptations like: wheelchair lifts for buses, anti-discrimination laws at work, and coverage of service animals. This was a big leap forward, but we still have a ways to go. Many restaurants, stores, and venues are not accessible, medical care is not easily available, many states (including PA) have a disability wage where people are paid below minimum wage, disabled people often can't get married and keep their benefits, and we still have room for growth towards social inclusion and acceptance of everyone.

ELIZABETH'S STORY

Hi, I'm Elizabeth and I work as a support for people with mental health conditions and developmental disabilities. Mental health conditions are incredibly common and incredibly treatable. Did you know that one in five people experience challenges with their mental health? It might be your friend, a family member, or even yourself.

What I enjoy most about my job is spending time in community with one another. We participate in social activities at the centers (such as game days, watching TV, or arts and crafts). We go out together for lunch or on special trips. We have plans to work together on a garden in back of our building. We are full participants in the community, despite the challenges that we face.

I am grateful for each person because of who they are and what they bring to our group. I am grateful for the healing that happens in community—relying on the strength and insight of each other. I am grateful for the joys we celebrate together and the support we give and receive.

When we truly accept one another, we can build a sacred space where are all welcome. We become living signs of God's grace. We become mirrors of Christ for one another. This Lenten season, may we remember the strengths and challenges of our brothers and sisters who seek healing and wholeness of mind and spirit.

ACTION ITEMS:

- Learn about the Social Model of Disability. Discuss with a friend one way you can change your mindset to see disability through that model.
- Visit the [ELCA's page on disability](#) to learn more about what resources are available to our church.
- Look at your church website and social media accounts to see if there is anything that could be changed. For instance, live streaming services can be helpful and build community to people with mental health conditions, mobility disabilities, other health conditions, and more that cannot make it to in-person church.

PRAYER:

Dear God, help us to see that we are all part of the body of Christ. That you made us each uniquely to work together for your kin-dom. Help us grow together so that we can include all. We appreciate this time of Lent and the opportunity to learn more about the struggles and joys of members of our community. We ask that you continuously remind us to think of how we can include and advocate, not only in this season, but throughout the years. In Jesus' name. Amen.