

How to Choose Disability-Affirming Music and Liturgy for Your Congregation

Worship shapes how we understand God, ourselves, and our neighbors. Choosing music and liturgy that affirms disabled people is one way we proclaim that all of us bear God's likeness. Here's a quick "cheat sheet" that may help you make better choices around choosing liturgy and music. Consider this a starting point for continued exploration.

Be careful with language around physical bodies or invisible illness.

Language like "Too often we are blind the suffering of others" or "help us not be deaf to God's word" might be offensive to people who cannot see or hear because of experiencing actual blindness or deafness. (Yes, for many, "Amazing Grace" falls into this category.) This does not prevent you from using embodiment language, of course, but language should always be as positive as possible. **Also, please remember that, while chronic pain is real for some, not all disabled people want to be "healed."**

Disability is not a "bad thing." Neither is the word "disability."

Any language that either explicitly or implicitly paints disability with a negative brush should be avoided. Also, many in the disabled community are trying to avoid euphemisms--"differently abled", "special needs", and the like. Such euphemisms are often experienced as attempts to distance ourselves from disabled people.

Person-first language or identity-first language?

Usage of person first language ("person with a disability") or identity-first language (autistic person" is highly dependent on the individual. Best practice is to ask each person what they prefer.

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You will mess up. And that's okay.

Apologize and move forward. We don't need to hear how hard it is for you! It's hard for *all* of us to be human in these days. We all make mistakes, and thankfully, God's grace abounds.

What are some “green flags” to seek out in music and liturgy?

Here are some themes that are always “winners”:

- **Interdependence instead of independence** (understanding that we need each other to live and thrive in the world)
- **Breaking down barriers** (making more accessible spaces, changing attitudes, etc.)
- **Civil rights advocacy** (changes to policies and legislation that improve the lived experiences of disabled people)
- **Celebrating all bodies and minds as gifts, without the need to “fix” or change.**
- **Using metaphors of community and belonging rather than cure/healing**

What hymns do we sing in church that are already good choices?

I have some favorites:

- *Called As Partners in Christ's Service*
- *Just As I Am* (even better with Rev. John Gage's new lyrics!)
- *I wrote new lyrics to Amazing Grace* to respond to the harm “spiritual blindness” has done

The UCC Disabilities Ministries has [a longer list](#).

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Want more information or resources about disability theology? I thought you'd never ask!

Books:

Blessed Are the Crazy and Blessed Minds by Rev. Dr. Sarah Griffith Lund

The Disabled God by Nancy L. Eiesland

My Body Is Not a Prayer Request by Amy Kenny

A Healing Homiletic: Preaching and Disability by Kathy Black

Musicians and Artists:

Bekah Maren Anderson and Allison Connelly-Vetter (both of them will have music in the forthcoming book, *Centering Disability in Worship: Liturgy and Prayer for the Whole Church*)

I also have music available! Check out my website.

Denominational Disabilities Ministries Orgs:

UCC Disabilities Ministries and Mental Health Network

UMC Disability Ministries

ELCA Disability Ministry

**Thank you for your attention to
choosing music and liturgy for your
congregation which honors all
bodies and minds! Together, we will
make the world more accessible,
and celebrate the gifts all of us
bring to the wider church!**