

## **Handout: The Journey of Disability Attitudes**

Attitudes present the most important barrier to engagement of people with disabilities in congregational life. It's easy to look at a checklist and determine whether or not one has built a ramp, but how do you measure attitudes toward people with disabilities? A continuum called, "The Journey of Disability Attitudes" is one way to do this.

Below is a brief summary of the five stages along this journey, and examples of statements that would be expressed by someone with this attitude:

### **Ignorance**

Most people who claim to have disabilities are looking for a government handout. The ones who live in group homes should not be allowed in public; their appearance is troubling. They have disabilities because they are unlucky and/or lazy.

### **Pity**

People who have disabilities are needy people, and it is good to feel sorry for them. But, thank goodness, no one I know has a disability. Someone should help them and give their lives meaning.

### **Care**

People with disabilities have inherent worth and dignity; for that reason their lives have value. It's great that our congregation helps the local group home with yard work and building maintenance sometimes. Sometimes the youth group goes there to sing for the residents too!

### **Friendship**

There is no "us" and "them," people without disabilities and people with disabilities. We all are "us." We all benefit as we grow in friendship with each other.

### **Partners**

Congregations encourage people who live with disabilities to use their gifts in ministry, recognizing that some gifts arise from their disability. Together, we who live with and without disabilities support and equip each other to fulfill the mission of our congregation and live our shared values.

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Source: This handout is adapted from a Blog entry on Mark Stephenson's Blog **Disability Concerns** <http://network.crcna.org/content/disability-concerns/tool-disability-attitudes-youth-or-adult-sunday-school>. It is based on work done by Dan Vander Plaats and others at Elim Christian Services.