

IS YOUR WORSHIP

ACTUALLY ACCESSIBLE?

A 15-Minute Accessibility & Belonging Audit for Churches

THE QUESTION BENEATH THE CHECKLIST

*Would people with disabilities leave knowing not simply that they were accommodated—
but that they were expected to belong?*

NOTICE • ASK • LISTEN • CHANGE

Accessibility is not perfection.

*It is attention, honesty, relationship, a willingness to ask the questions,
and a willingness to change when change is needed.*

Travis Wilson

Pastor • Writer • Accessibility Advocate

traviswilson.us

Before You Begin

Most churches want to be welcoming. We put it on our signs, say it from the front of the worship space, and tell guests, “All are welcome here.” Most of us mean it.

But welcome and accessibility are not quite the same thing.

A congregation can have ramps, accessible bathrooms, large-print materials, assistive listening devices, and a good website—and someone with a disability can still spend an entire Sunday navigating barriers no one else noticed.

Another congregation may worship in an old building with limited money and barriers it cannot remove right now. Yet its people may listen, ask good questions, communicate honestly, adapt, and work alongside people with disabilities rather than deciding for them.

This audit is not a scorecard. There is no passing grade and no perfect congregation. It is an invitation to pay attention.

A QUESTION TO CARRY WITH YOU

What would we have done differently if we expected this person to be here from the beginning?

Ask Rather Than Assume

Do not assume what help someone needs, where someone wants to sit, or how someone can participate. Ask.

Nothing About Us Without Us

There is a phrase with deep roots in the disability community: “Nothing about us without us.” Accessibility cannot simply be something people without disabilities design for people with disabilities. The people most affected by barriers need to be part of the conversations and decisions that follow.

People with disabilities retain agency over their own participation. Their experiences, wisdom, gifts, questions, and leadership should help shape the community itself.

Accessibility is not something we do for people. At its best, it is something we build with one another.

Accessibility is not perfection. It is attention, honesty, relationship, a willingness to ask the questions, and a willingness to change when change is needed.

How to Use This Audit

This audit follows the journey of someone attending worship—from preparing to come through leaving safely. It is intentionally short. Move through it quickly and mark the response that best describes your congregation today.

Complete it with several people if possible, including people who experience your congregation differently and, most importantly, people with disabilities and others with lived experience of access barriers.

RESPONSE	WHAT IT MEANS
YES	This is part of our regular practice.
IN PROGRESS	We are actively working on this.
NOT YET	This is a place for us to grow.
NOT POSSIBLE RIGHT NOW	We know this barrier exists.

When You Choose “Not Possible Right Now”

Ask: Have we communicated the barrier honestly? Have we asked affected people what would help? Is there another meaningful way to participate? Is this truly impossible right now, or simply not prioritized? When will we revisit it?

REMEMBER

Some physical barriers take years to change. A posture of listening can begin today.

1 Before I Arrive

Accessibility begins before someone reaches your building. Good information reduces guesswork.

QUESTION	YES	IN PROG.	NOT YET	NOT POSS.
Our worship times, address, and basic directions are easy to find online.	☐	☐	☐	☐
We clearly explain parking, drop-off options, accessible entrances, and whether stairs, ramps, or elevators may be involved.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Someone can easily find a way to ask accessibility questions before visiting.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Our website uses readable text, strong contrast, meaningful link text, and a layout that is reasonably easy to navigate.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Important information is available as text—not only inside graphics or images.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Our public accessibility information is easy to find and kept accurate.	☐	☐	☐	☐

PAUSE AND NOTICE

If someone needed to plan carefully before entering an unfamiliar building, would our website help them prepare—or would they have to guess?

2 When I Arrive

Arrival communicates—often without words—whether someone was expected.

QUESTION	YES	IN PROG.	NOT YET	NOT POSS.
Accessible parking or drop-off and an accessible entrance are easy to identify and use.	☐	☐	☐	☐
If the accessible entrance is not the main entrance, we communicate that clearly and respectfully.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Signs for the worship space, bathrooms, elevators, and other important spaces are easy to locate and read.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Greeters and ushers speak directly to people with disabilities rather than automatically directing questions to a companion.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Greeters and ushers ask whether assistance would be helpful instead of assuming what someone needs.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Accessible bathrooms are easy to locate and usable by people with a range of mobility needs.	☐	☐	☐	☐

PAUSE AND NOTICE

When someone arrives who moves, sees, hears, communicates, or processes information differently than we do, is our first instinct to ask—or to assume?

3 Finding My Place

People should have meaningful choices about where and how they participate.

QUESTION	YES	IN PROG.	NOT YET	NOT POSS.
People who use wheelchairs have more than one reasonable seating option when the space allows it—not only a designated place in the back.	☐	☐	☐	☐
People using wheelchairs, walkers, or other mobility devices can sit with the people they came with.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Seating choices consider visual, hearing, mobility, and sensory needs without automatically directing someone to a particular seat.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Ushers ask before moving someone’s walker, cane, wheelchair, or other mobility equipment.	☐	☐	☐	☐
If mobility equipment is moved, the person knows where it is and it is returned before they need it.	☐	☐	☐	☐
People can move, shift position, use sensory supports, or step out and return without being treated as a distraction.	☐	☐	☐	☐

PAUSE AND NOTICE

Do our practices give people meaningful choices—or do our attempts to help sometimes make those choices for them?

4 Navigating the Worship Service

Clear communication is an accessibility practice—and it helps almost everyone.

QUESTION	YES	IN PROG.	NOT YET	NOT POSS.
Worship materials use readable type, adequate spacing, and a layout that is easy to follow; large-print or digital options are available when needed.	☐	☐	☐	☐
If someone needs accessible worship materials, we also consider the hymnals, songbooks, Bibles, or other resources they are expected to use.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Projected text is large enough, high-contrast, visually simple, and visible long enough to read and process.	☐	☐	☐	☐
We avoid unnecessary animation or constantly moving backgrounds that may create sensory barriers.	☐	☐	☐	☐
The flow of worship is reasonably predictable or clearly communicated.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Worship leaders explain unfamiliar practices or transitions rather than assuming guests—or longtime members—already know what is happening.	☐	☐	☐	☐

Helpful tool: [WebAIM Contrast Checker](#)

Passing a contrast test does not automatically mean a projected slide will be easy to read. Viewing distance, room lighting, font choice, projector brightness, and background images matter too.

It is okay not to sing. Singing is one way to participate in worship. It is not the only way.

PAUSE AND NOTICE

Could someone participate if they could not comfortably read the bulletin, see the screen, use the hymnal, or process instructions as quickly as people around them?

5 Hearing & Understanding Worship

Having equipment is not the same thing as providing hearing access.

QUESTION	YES	IN PROG.	NOT YET	NOT POSS.
Speech is clear and understandable through our sound system in most areas of the worship space.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Readers, assisting ministers, or other worship leaders—and people speaking from the congregation—use microphones when needed.	☐	☐	☐	☐
We remember that microphones may be essential not only in the room, but also for hearing-assistance technology and online worship.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Microphone levels, sound balance, and speech clarity receive regular attention.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Assistive listening equipment is maintained, tested, easy to find, and someone knows how to explain it.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Captions or written/visual alternatives are used when they can meaningfully improve access.	☐	☐	☐	☐

PAUSE AND NOTICE

If someone told us, “I can hear sound, but I cannot understand the words,” would we know what to try next?

6 Participating in Worship

Worship practices should not become unspoken tests of who is participating “correctly.”

QUESTION	YES	IN PROG.	NOT YET	NOT POSS.
Posture invitations make room for different bodies rather than assuming everyone can stand, kneel, walk, or hold materials.	☐	☐	☐	☐
People who remain seated or participate differently are not called unnecessary attention to.	☐	☐	☐	☐
We treat singing, speaking, silence, movement, stillness, and listening as legitimate ways of participating.	☐	☐	☐	☐
People can share the peace without being expected to shake hands, hug, or engage in physical touch.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Communion distribution is clearly explained and includes a meaningful option for people who cannot or do not wish to walk forward.	☐	☐	☐	☐
We ask people how they prefer to participate rather than deciding on their behalf.	☐	☐	☐	☐

One possible posture invitation: “Either in body or spirit, please rise.”

PAUSE AND NOTICE

When our worship says, “Everyone is invited,” do our actual practices provide more than one way to accept that invitation?

7 Online & Hybrid Worship

The need for meaningful online participation did not end when congregations returned after COVID-19.

QUESTION	YES	IN PROG.	NOT YET	NOT POSS.
Everyone who speaks during worship can be heard clearly online—not only in the worship space.	☐	☐	☐	☐
We periodically listen to the online feed instead of assuming that good sound in the room means good sound online.	☐	☐	☐	☐
When online worshipers need to read something, we make it large enough on their screen rather than shrinking it into a tiny picture-in-picture view.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Captions are available whenever reasonably possible, including imperfect automatic captions when they add meaningful access.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Worship leaders regularly acknowledge people worshipping online as part of the gathered community.	☐	☐	☐	☐
If we invite chat, prayer requests, or other online participation, someone actually monitors and responds.	☐	☐	☐	☐

PAUSE AND NOTICE

If someone worshiped with us online for six months, would they know that we consider them part of the congregation—or feel like they were watching someone else's church service?

8 Children, Neurodivergence & Cognitive Access

Different ways of moving, processing, communicating, and regulating are not interruptions to worship.

QUESTION	YES	IN PROG.	NOT YET	NOT POSS.
The flow of worship and unusual changes are communicated clearly enough that people can anticipate what is coming next.	☐	☐	☐	☐
People who need to move, fidget, stand, sit, rock, pace, or change position are not automatically treated as disruptive.	☐	☐	☐	☐
People can use sensory supports—such as noise-reducing headphones—without others making assumptions about why they are using them.	☐	☐	☐	☐
People can step away from worship and return without being made to feel that they have done something wrong.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Quiet spaces, sensory supports, fidgets, pray grounds, or similar resources are available when appropriate, including for adults when helpful.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Children who move, make noise, use sensory supports, or communicate differently are treated as members of the worshiping community—not problems to manage.	☐	☐	☐	☐

A person wearing headphones may be reducing sound so they can remain present and participate. Ask rather than assume.

PAUSE AND NOTICE

Would a family whose child needs movement, vocalizes, communicates differently, or uses sensory supports leave knowing their child was expected to be there?

9 Leadership & Belonging

Belonging asks who gets to contribute, lead, and shape the community.

QUESTION	YES	IN PROG.	NOT YET	NOT POSS.
People with disabilities are encouraged to serve in worship leadership and other congregational roles.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Leadership spaces can be accessed or adapted, and leadership materials can be provided in formats that work for the person using them.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Roles do not include unnecessary physical, sensory, communication, or cognitive requirements simply because “that is how we have always done it.”	☐	☐	☐	☐
People with disabilities are included in conversations and decisions about accessibility.	☐	☐	☐	☐
When someone identifies a barrier, our first response is curiosity and listening rather than defensiveness.	☐	☐	☐	☐
When a barrier cannot currently be removed, we work with the person to explore meaningful alternatives and revisit the barrier later.	☐	☐	☐	☐

NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US

Do not simply ask, “What can we do for people with disabilities?” Also ask, “Who with lived experience should be helping us answer this question?”

PAUSE AND NOTICE

Are people with disabilities primarily receiving ministry here—or are they also helping shape the ministry we share?

10 Leaving & Emergencies

Accessibility includes the whole experience, including departure and the unexpected.

QUESTION	YES	IN PROG.	NOT YET	NOT POSS.
People can reasonably find exits, parking areas, pickup locations, or transportation after worship.	☐	☐	☐	☐
People who need to wait for transportation have a place to sit, including indoors when necessary.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Assistance is available when requested without assuming that someone needs—or wants—another person to take control.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Emergency plans consider people with mobility, visual, hearing, cognitive, communication, and sensory disabilities.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Emergency information does not depend entirely on one sense, such as only hearing an alarm or only seeing a visual signal.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Guests unfamiliar with the building would have a reasonable way to understand where to go during evacuation, severe weather, or another emergency.	☐	☐	☐	☐

PAUSE AND NOTICE

A longtime member may know exactly where to go in an emergency. A guest may not. Would everyone have a meaningful way to know what was happening and what to do next?

Reflection & Action

Do not add up your answers. There is no accessibility score. There is no passing grade.

Use what you noticed to decide what conversations and changes need to come next.

Three things we're already doing well:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Three barriers we didn't notice before:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Three changes we can make now:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

One barrier we cannot currently remove—but need to communicate honestly:

Who with lived experience needs to be part of this conversation?

From Reflection to Action

NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US

Before making decisions about accessibility, ask whether the people most affected by those decisions are actually part of the conversation. Do not only ask, "What should we do for them?" Ask, "Who should we be listening to and working with?"

When will we revisit this audit?

Date: _____

One Action in the Next 30 Days

Choose one action. It does not have to be dramatic.

- ☐ Update our accessibility information online
- ☐ Test our hearing-assistance equipment
- ☐ Improve a seating option
- ☐ Train greeters/ushers to ask rather than assume
- ☐ Check projection contrast
- ☐ Improve online captions or sound
- ☐ Talk with someone who has lived experience
- ☐ Communicate a known barrier honestly

Small changes do not solve everything. They do tell people that you are paying attention.

Accessibility Is Not Perfection

A church can have ramps, accessible bathrooms, large-print bulletins, assistive listening equipment, modern technology, and a carefully written accessibility statement—and still leave someone feeling as though they were never expected to be there.

Technical access matters enormously. But technical access alone does not create belonging.

Belonging is also found in the greeter who speaks directly to the person with a disability instead of to their companion; the usher who asks before moving someone's walker; the worship leader who explains what is happening without assuming everybody already knows; the child who can wear noise-reducing headphones without being judged; and the online worshiper who is addressed as part of the community.

It is found when someone identifies a barrier and the congregation becomes curious rather than defensive. And it is found when people with disabilities are not simply welcomed into ministries designed by everyone else, but are invited to help shape the ministry itself.

Another congregation may worship in an old building with limited finances and barriers it cannot solve this year. Those barriers are still real. But that congregation can tell the truth about them, listen, ask rather than assume, offer choices, communicate clearly, invite people with lived experience into the conversation, and be willing to change when change is possible.

ACCESSIBILITY IS NOT PERFECTION

It is attention, honesty, relationship, a willingness to ask the questions, and a willingness to change when change is needed.

Perhaps the most important question in this entire audit is not: "Are we accessible?"

If a person with a disability worshiped with us this Sunday, would they leave knowing not simply that we accommodated them—but that we expected them to belong?

Keep Going

Fifteen minutes cannot answer every accessibility question your congregation will encounter. It can help you begin noticing better questions.

NOTICE

Pay attention to the experience of worship from before someone arrives until after they leave.

LEARN

Explore more Accessibility & Belonging resources at traviswilson.us, including disability theology, disability-inclusive worship, accessible language, and helping people who are blind or have low vision.

IMPLEMENT

Use what you are learning to make concrete changes. The Every Body & Mind liturgy and the future Inclusive Worship Language Toolkit are designed to help congregations put this theology into practice.

GET HELP

If this audit raised questions about accessibility, worship, disability, or belonging in your congregation, I would be glad to help you think them through through conversations, workshops, speaking, and accessibility-focused consulting.

About Travis Wilson

Travis Wilson is a Lutheran pastor, writer, and accessibility advocate whose work explores faith, disability, belonging, and the future of the church.

As a person with a visual disability and a pastor who regularly thinks about how people encounter worship, Travis approaches accessibility not simply as a technical question, but as a theological one:

Who did we expect to be here—and who gets to help shape what happens once they arrive?

Learn more or get in touch: traviswilson.us