

Report of the Saint Mark's Cathedral Accessibility Task Force

Summer 2025

Executive Summary

The Accessibility Task Force was formed the last quarter of 2024. To fulfill its mission to make improvements in accessibility to the Saint Mark's Cathedral community, we **undertook several actions to better understand both strengths and opportunities for improvement**, including:

- The development of a webpage with resources on disabilities
- A presentation to the cathedral community entitled "Enhancing Accessibility at Saint Mark's Cathedral"
- The development and implementation of accessibility audit tools in four categories including attitude and culture, physical environment, worship services, classes and events, and communications with the participation of clergy and staff
- Three listening sessions (as well as informal discussions) with the members of the cathedral community to learn about the needs of parishioners with disabilities
- A table at the ministry fair with information and resources

From the audits, listening sessions, research and review of resources, and numerous conversations with interested individuals, the task force has crafted **three sets of opportunities for improvement to enhance the accessibility for people with disabilities** at the cathedral:

- **Intermediate opportunities for improvement as part of the Living Stones II Capital Campaign**
- **First phase of recommendations for improving accessibility** within the framework of each of the four audit categories
- **Second phase of recommendations for improving accessibility** within the framework of each of the four audit categories

The task force **requests that the Vestry take several actions**, including:

- **The Adoption of the Accessibility Strategic Plan:** Adopting this report and its recommendations will provide the strategic roadmap for improving accessibility for people with disabilities at the cathedral.
- **Create a Structure for Implementing the Accessibility Strategic Plan:** The task force recommends that the Vestry create an Accessibility Committee that serves as an on-going committee (rather than a time-limited task force) to work with existing committees, parishioners with disabilities, clergy, staff, and the congregation at large in implementing this plan as appropriate and in light of budgetary considerations and other resources.
- **Establish Clear Communication with the Cathedral Community:** The task force recommends periodic communication (e.g., forums, announcements, reports, etc.) with the Cathedral community regarding the accessibility initiatives and progress as well as continuing to listen to the needs of parishioners with disabilities.

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Introduction

The Accessibility Task Force approached its charge to learn, listen, and gather knowledge of how the cathedral community will be enriched by improving its accessibility with genuine curiosity. Theologically, the commitment to justice through improvements in accessibility are found in the writings of St. Benedict's Rule. We can find opportunities for radical hospitality in all areas of our cathedral life. In doing the work and through the lens of justice, we can remove the barriers placed upon individuals with apparent and non-apparent disabilities to worship fully.

The 2024 Strategic Plan calls the community of Saint Mark's to Cultivate Diverse Community. The Accessibility Task Force has worked to integrate the goals of the Strategic Plan into our work.

- We affirm that we are all welcome here – whoever and wherever you are on your spiritual journey.
- We reflect on the ways in which we engage with diverse groups of people.
- We actively seek and nurture diverse community through listening, connection and collaboration.

Summary of Strengths

- The cathedral is committed to providing an accessible and inclusive environment for people with disabilities.
- There is representation on the Vestry and staff by people with disabilities.
- The formation of the Accessibility Task Force in and of itself demonstrates the cathedral's focus on accessibility for all.
- Cathedral clergy provide support with people with disabilities by making accommodations in meeting with individuals, making appropriate referrals, and through the clergy discretionary fund.
- St. Mark's demonstrates a long-term ongoing commitment to welcoming people of all abilities.
- St. Mark's has made many physical accessibility improvements in past capital projects, creating accessible routes from the exterior into the nave and into Cathedral House and between the two areas. This was accomplished by adding an elevator serving the nave floor and Cathedral House, a ramp at the front, designated accessible parking spaces, and automatic door openers at the entry and from the narthex into the nave. Handrails and a ramp improve access to the chancel. A variety of seating options, including traditional pews, linked chairs with kneeling cushions, folding chairs and a carpeted area for children and parents offer comfortable seating for parishioners with a range of needs and preferences.
- St. Mark's implements accessibility improvements in worship and events as the need becomes apparent. Examples include serving the elements of the Eucharist from the floor of the nave rather than from the chancel. The order of service is available in a bulletin with a legible, high-contrast design. The choir at the 9AM service sings from the nave floor, offering an opportunity to serve in the choir to those who cannot climb the stairs to the

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choir loft. Thoughtful recent measures include making fidget devices available, as well as supplies for people experiencing low blood sugar episodes during worship.

- St. Mark's responded to the pandemic by instituting a live stream of the 11AM Eucharist and by mastering hybrid meetings and Cathedral Commons events. Live-streaming and hybrid events continue, allowing parishioners to participate from a distance.
- The 7PM Contemplative Eucharist offers a quiet, low-light worship option.
- The Cathedral's Habitat for Humanity committee undertakes small projects around the building, including accessibility improvements such as the addition of a handrail up the steps to the ambo.
- Saint Mark's has instituted a comprehensive assessment of accessibility needs and conditions, broadening the definition of accessibility to include non-apparent needs.
- The Living Stones II Capital Campaign provides the cathedral with the opportunity to incorporate designs and features that will secure improved accessibility and accommodations.

Summary of Opportunities

- Areas that the cathedral is accessible and offers accommodations are not always widely communicated or known, and there are gaps that need to be addressed.
- While some methods and techniques are used by clergy and staff to make things accessible for people with disabilities, they are not systematically deployed.
- People with sensory disabilities (e.g., vision loss, hearing loss, neurodiversity, etc.) have particular challenges in fully participating in the Cathedral.
- Through the implementation of a range of accommodations, the cathedral could gain a reputation of being a place where all people with disabilities can fully participate.

Immediate Term Opportunities

Recommendations for Improving Accessibility in Living Stones II Capital Campaign

- Ensure there are designated places dispersed throughout the sanctuary that are accessible and with clear line of sight when others are standing, especially for people who are wheelchair users or have other mobility issues
- Continue to provide a variety of seating options, and consider additional options. Pews (and their attached kneelers) continue to be preferred by some parishioners for their stability, providing a continuous handrail to assist standing, sitting and kneeling.
- Install a hearing loop system (a form of hearing assistive technology) that consists of a special amplifier and hidden copper wire that transmits sound from a public address microphone via a magnetic field that allows attendees to receive sound directly into hearing aids or cochlear implant processors with a telecoil. Some parishioners go to Thomsen Chapel or outside to listen to the sermon on livestream. We can offer this as a strategy until something better is in place.
- Build out restrooms in the narthex that meet the requirements of the ADA, including sinks, countertops, soap and hand sanitizer dispensers, toilets, toilet paper holders, etc. Until this can be done, increase access to hand sanitizer and wet wipes for the narthex bathrooms.

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- Create accessible signage (e.g., text characters with contrasting background or Braille signage) for information about automatic door openers, elevators, restrooms, and other accessibility accommodations, such as text characters with contrast and/or Braille signage
- Ensure doors have lever style handles in the narthex

First Phase of Recommendations for Improving Accessibility

Physical Environment

- Move some of the accessible parking spaces from the sloped part of the parking lot to the flat part of the parking lot
- Mark the accessible parking spot that is van accessible as such

Attitude and Culture

- Modify the cathedral's Statement of Lament and Commitment to Action to specifically include people with disabilities.
- Create a policy statement that specifically addresses the inclusion of people with disabilities into the full life of the cathedral.
- Initiate learning and development opportunities for clergy, staff, ushers, greeters, and parishioners on inclusivity for people with disabilities
- Develop and implement a systematic process and method for people requesting accommodations.
- Expand the range of equipment, supplies, and other resources that are routinely available for people who need accommodations; and that ushers and greeters know where the resources are and how to make them available.
- Include information in the service leaflets about the ways the cathedral supports all participants, such as bringing service animals, how to request and receive accommodations, where quiet spaces are, fidgets, etc.

Worship Services and Events

- Establish guidelines for all virtual and hybrid events that systematically offer closed captioning, audio recordings, printed transcripts, reading of all questions in the chat before answering, etc.
- Provide, when feasible, large print versions of sermons and readings that will be given the day of the worship service (ongoing).
- Write and distribute a sensory guide with opportunities to provide feedback and suggestions.
- Establish and implement a policy regarding sensory issues and ensure that there are announcements and signs posted at the cathedral regarding the use of incense, loud noises, and low lighting.
- Incorporate information in announcements about worship services and events regarding how someone can request reasonable accommodations.

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- Provide guidelines in advance to presiders, presenters, and others leading a worship service, class, or event on how to make the event more accessible, such as introducing themselves, using microphones, providing specific visual points of reference (rather than saying “over there”), slow pacing, facing the congregation or audience whenever possible, avoid covering the mouth, etc.)
- Establish and maintain a database of drivers who have submitted their DMV check and proof of insurance and those who need rides, their neighborhoods, the services usually attend, etc. to provide access to worship and cathedral events to those who don't drive.

Communications

- Adopt communication guidelines that specifically support inclusive language related to people with disabilities, such as:
 - Inclusive language guidelines
 - Plain language guidelines
 - Social media inclusive guidelines
- Ensure PDF documents are accessible to people with disabilities by meeting technical criteria that allow them to be read and navigated with assistive technologies.
- Obtain professional consultation on how service leaflets (and other documents) can be produced that comply with the Large Print Guidelines for accessibility for people with vision loss and blindness
- Adopt practice to include up-to-date accessibility information (e.g., closed captioning, location of accessible seating, etc.) on the website and service leaflets;
- Initiate efforts to identify strategies and tactics to make the cathedral's website compliant with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAGs), such as a professional audit of the website
- Routinely use closed captioning on webinars and other virtual events, as well as audio and printed transcripts.

Second Phase of Recommendations for Improving Accessibility

Physical Environment

- Explore making the restrooms in Bloedel Hall accessible and compliant with the ADA specifications, including sinks, countertops, soap and hand sanitizer dispensers, toilets, toilet paper holders, etc.
- When moving furniture or familiar items, share this information with people with vision loss so they know that things have moved. In some places, the use of tape on the floor to indicate transitions can be useful.
- Explore making the Saint Nicholas mezzanine more accessible for activities related to Godly Play and the Choir School
- Explore making doors and hallways more accessible in Bloedel Hall, such as levers on all doors, hallways at least 36 inches wide, door openings at least 32 inches clear, automatic door openers, etc.

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- Consider making the following accessible:
 - Control and light switches in all locations
 - The choir loft
 - All drinking fountains
 - All fire alarm pulls
 - All fire extinguishers
- Stream video service into the narthex or Thompsen Chapel with space to sit and watch there; stream or broadcast service into the childcare room.
- Purchase stools and benches that can be moved for individual seating preferences.

Attitude and Culture

- Provide on-going learning and development opportunities for clergy, staff, ushers, greeters, and parishioners on inclusivity for people with disabilities
- Develop and implement a "medical emergency response plan" for each worship service that describes how qualified people (e.g., physicians, nurse practitioners, etc.) are designated tasks (e.g., responsible for being with the person and contacting first responders when necessary); assign point person for emergencies.
- Identify and initiate dialogue and potential affiliations with non-profit organizations who serve people with disabilities.
- Create a process for current and new parishioners to voluntarily self-identify disabilities and the need for reasonable accommodations, such as adding "How can we best support you during this event?" to event registration forms and newcomer forms.
- Incorporate activities and initiatives regarding accessibility in the cathedral's annual report and newsletters.
- Develop a list of social and human services in the area to meet the health-related social needs of people with disabilities.
- Offer alternate worship services for neuro-diverse folks and others in addition to the Contemplative Eucharist.
- Develop and implement a timely and administratively simple process for clergy, staff, and parishioners to request and receive reasonable accommodations.
- Implement policy for communication of accessibility issues between staff/clergy and vestry, ministry leaders and volunteers. Continue providing agendas ahead of time to allow for thoughtful consideration of topics and time to formulate questions and comments.
- Following the first year of accessibility implementations, conduct a survey of people with disabilities regarding their experiences and satisfaction with the most recent reasonable accommodations. Follow up periodically.
- Consider whether the cathedral wants to prioritize suppliers and vendors who include disability owned enterprises (DOBEs) and/or service-disabled veteran-owned small business (SDVOSB)

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Worship Services and Events

- Consider the acquisition of a limited number of large print hymnals and Books of Common Prayer for use by people with vision loss
- Consider the acquisition of a “toolkit of accessible devices” (e.g., screen readers, hearing aids, etc.) that can be checked out when requested.
- Consider additional tools to accommodate neurodiversity – adult and child-oriented fidgets (finger labyrinths), earmuffs, ear plugs, etc.
- Provide American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters to periodic, perhaps monthly, worship services; sign contract with ASL providers and offer it as an accommodation.
- Have a scent-free zone to help people with asthma, emphysema, or others who have chemical sensitivities. Ask people to avoid wearing aftershave, cologne, or perfume to church as a first step.

Communications

- Implement a plan for the website to become fully compliant with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAGS) (Audio Eye, etc.)
- Implement other accessible communications solutions based on feedback from people with disabilities as well as professional consultants.

Decisions and Next Steps

- The vestry, the Dean, and potentially others will decide which of these recommendations to implement based on priorities, budget, impact on staff resources, and other considerations, and select a timeframe.
- Consider assigning a vestry member to represent the cathedral in the current Diocesan-wide effort addressing Disability and the Church.
- Decisions will need to be made regarding how to implement the changes through existing committees or potentially by extending the term of the task force.
- Decisions will need to be made on how to communicate these changes to the cathedral community and potentially to the diocese.
- Determine the frequency of communication with the cathedral community regarding the progress on initiatives to improve accessibility and inclusion of people with disabilities.
- Develop a mechanism to periodically reassess and reprioritize initiatives based on feedback from people with disabilities as well as other considerations such as staffing resources and budget.
- Incorporate learning and development opportunities throughout the year through regular offerings at Wednesday Cathedral Commons or Sunday forum panel discussion. Other offerings could include articles in The Rubric, a parish-wide book study, highlighting books in the Diocesan resource center, or offering a storytelling series featuring parishioners.
- Research grants for the implementation of more costly items.

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References and Resources

Saint Mark's Cathedral Accessibility Task Force website:

<https://saintmarks.org/about/vestry/accessibility-task-force/>

Everybody Belongs, Serving Together (Christian Reformed Church)

<https://www.faithward.org/everybody-belongs-serving-together/#toc>

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Checklist for Existing Facilities; New England ADA Center;
A Project of the Institute for Human Centered Design

<https://www.adachecklist.org/checklist.html>

International Symbol of Accessibility (ISA); U.S. Access Board

<https://www.access-board.gov/ada/guides/guidance-on-the-isa/>

Disability:IN (Disability Index Questions for the U.S.)

<https://disabilityin.org/what-we-do/disability-index/>

Federal Plain Language Guidelines

<https://www.plainlanguage.gov/guidelines/>

Accessible Communications Guidelines (American Alliance of Museums)

https://www.aam-us.org/2021/07/01/accessible-communications-guidelines/?gad_source=1&gclid=CjwKCAiA2cu9BhBhEiwAft6lxHfzW9hQQOjjzh3EEXYik_ac3QApTSBUk-LCuZt8OctGT5BIDOLEAxoCbc4QAvD_BwE

American Medical Association (AMA) Inclusive Language Guidelines

<https://www.ama-assn.org/about/ama-center-health-equity/advancing-health-equity-guide-language-narrative-and-concepts-0>

American Psychological Association (APA) Inclusive Language Guide

<https://www.apa.org/about/apa/equity-diversity-inclusion/language-guidelines>

Community Guide to Accessible Events and Meetings: Meeting the needs of people with disabilities, recommendations from Age Friendly Seattle, an initiative to make Seattle a great place to grow up and grow old

<https://www.seattle.gov/agefriendly>

Guidelines for Writing about People with Disabilities (ADA National Network)

<https://adata.org/factsheet/ADANN-writing>

Stanford University's Disability Language Guide

<https://disability.stanford.edu/news/disability-language-guide>

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Contrast Checker

<https://contrastchecker.com/>

Make your Word documents accessible to people with disabilities (Microsoft)

<https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/make-your-word-documents-accessible-to-people-with-disabilities-d9bf3683-87ac-47ea-b91a-78dcacb3c66d>

Everything you need to know to write effective alt text (Microsoft)

<https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/office/everything-you-need-to-know-to-write-effective-alt-text-df98f884-ca3d-456c-807b-1a1fa82f5dc2>

PDF file format accessibility (Adobe)

<https://www.adobe.com/accessibility/pdf/pdf-accessibility-overview.html>

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines or WCAG (World Wide Web Consortium or WC3)

<https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG21/>

What are the levels of WCAG compliance? (Accessible Metrics)

<https://www.accessiblemetrics.com/blog/what-are-the-levels-of-wcag-compliance/>

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) levels A, AA, and AAA: Navigating web accessibility standards (User Way)

<https://userway.org/blog/what-are-wcag-2-0-a-aa-and-aaa/>

Social Media Accessibility Guidelines (Harvard University)

<https://www.harvard.edu/in-focus/the-accessible-world/social-media-accessibility-best-practices/>

Community Guide to Accessible Events and Meetings: Meeting the needs of people with disabilities, recommendations from Age Friendly Seattle, an initiative to make Seattle a great place to grow up and grow old

<https://www.seattle.gov/agefriendly>

Accessibility Guidelines for In-Person and Virtual Meetings, Seminars, and Workshops; American Alliance of Museum (AAM)

https://www.aam-us.org/2021/07/01/accessibility-guidelines-for-in-person-and-virtual-meetings-seminars-and-workshops/?gad_source=1&gclid=CjwKCAiA8Lu9BhA8EiwAag16bwLHcjQZg6EwBDowj1mISFqfH6JD5ZGIu4iGE5y4elq4iZAMbODgmBoCKwYQAvD_BwE

Create Accessible Portable Document Format (PDF) documents; Accessible Electronic Documents Community of Practice (AED COP); Section 508.gov

<https://www.section508.gov/create/pdfs/>

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Communication Access Real-Time Translation (CART); National Association of the Deaf (NAD)
<https://www.nad.org/resources/technology/captioning-for-access/communication-access-realtime-translation/>

American Foundation® for the Blind (AFB) Accessibility Resources
<https://www.afb.org/digital-inclusion/accessibility-resources>

Virtual Meetings: Accessibility Checklist & Best Practices, American Bar Association (ABA)
<https://www.americanbar.org/groups/diversity/disabilityrights/resources/covid-resources/virtual-meetings-checklist/>