

**MCC Accessibility Guide & Information  
General Conference 2013  
Chicago, Illinois (USA)**

## MCC Commitment to Accessibility

Metropolitan Community Churches (MCC) understands that our human experience of the world impacts our spiritual health and well-being. Therefore MCC is committed to providing universal access in all aspects of our ministry, including gatherings and events hosted by MCC. Those responsible for planning an MCC event will ensure that meeting space is accessible to people with disabilities and meet basic requirements of legislation of the land. It is also the responsibility of organizers to provide accommodations to ensure accessible communication. MCC will not hold any event where the facility has known barriers, which exclude people with disabilities from attending and participating.<sup>1</sup>

## Understanding the Need for Accessibility

Participants of any gathering, meeting, or service desire to experience fully the event and feel welcomed and involved. Most, if not all, will also experience some temporary or permanent challenge to their participation. For the purpose of this document, we name those challenges “disabilities.” In using this word, we intend to communicate that requiring a specific ability to participate in an event/gathering offered for “all people” is less-than optimum. In no way do we use this word to indicate that a person is less-than optimum.

The following statements about access needs are general and should not be taken as an individual account of experience, nor should it be taken as an exhaustive listing of challenges to access.

- **Mobility Access Needs** – Challenges to mobilizing through a space is perhaps the most widely recognized disability because of the visible use of mobility aids such as wheelchairs, scooters, canes, walkers, and crutches. Such loss of mobility also impacts stamina and balance and can impact the ability to reach or grasp. Considerations for the height and presence of steps, width of aisles, removal or covering of trip hazards, availability of elevators and ramps, and time to traverse long distances are all meant to address such challenges.
- **Cognitive Access Needs** – Challenges in cognition impact the ability to understand and communicate. Behavioral challenges may also arise from this difficulty in processing information. Understanding and patience is our best tool for better communication and access to information for those with cognition challenges.
- **Chronic Illness/Condition Access Needs** – Challenges to health are often less obvious, even as they prevent full participation. Conditions such as asthma, heart disease, seizures, hypo/hyperglycemia, diabetes, and food allergies present obstacles that must be addressed. As much as possible, open and non-judgmental dialogue about the needs of individuals regarding such illnesses or conditions aids in providing equal access to all.
- **Speech Access Needs** - People with speech disabilities may use an alternate means of communication such as an assistive device to speak for them. A speech disability often has no impact on a person’s ability to understand. Additional modes of communication may be needed to assist in gaining access to events, conversation, and building relationships.
- **Vision Access Needs** - There are varying degrees of vision loss and a distinction between total blindness and low vision. Some people can distinguish between light and dark, or between contrasting colors, or read large print, but have difficulty with small print or low-light situations. They may use a cane or service animal to help with orientation and movement in an environment. Accommodation of service animals, large print materials, read-aloud materials, verbal descriptions of images used in print and presentations, clear instructions, guidance to a location (if requested), and attentive companions are all modes of assistance toward access.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from the US Department of Education Policy Statement on Meeting Accessibility and from A Guide to Planning Accessible Meetings.

- **Hearing Access Needs** - Hearing loss varies. People who are Deaf or hard of hearing use different ways to enhance communication, including hearing aids, speech reading, or sign language. They may also require the use of a text telephone, called a TTY, and may use other aids such as captioning or assistive listening devices.
- **Environmental Access Needs** - People with environmental disabilities or multiple chemical sensitivities can have a physical or cognitive reaction to a chemical or combination of chemicals such as deodorizers, smoke, perfumes, or pesticides which may affect their ability to breathe or process information. Attention to and honoring designated smoking areas, lessening the use of perfume/cologne, and availability of assistive materials (identified restrooms to wash away allergens, face tissues, etc.) make it possible for these challenges to be addressed.
- **Height/Weight Access Needs** – Because standards for human height and weight impact our world, considerations such as chair size, seating row space, stair steps, and other height/weight related access helps are integral to making spaces and events accessible.

### Situational Accessibility

Accessibility may also be a concern due to some temporary life situation. These needs for accessibility are not focused on disability, but are focused on additional need for space, time and attention. Here are a few examples of accessibility in this area:

- **Parents with Small Children** – Parents with infants and small children are in need of more room to maneuver around various spaces in order to move together. Infants often mean additional luggage (diaper bag, backpacks, etc.), a high chair, stroller, baby carrier, all of which must be placed somewhere and inhibits access to tight spaces. Small children tend to move in variant pathways and easily separate from parents. This requires that spaces not only be child-safe, but also that parents have an easy line of sight around them.
- **Pregnant Women** – Pregnant women in advanced months of their pregnancy need a little extra space to navigate spaces. Also, quick and ready access to restrooms and rest areas are necessary to make travel and participation as easy as possible.

### Tips for Interacting with People with Various Disabilities/Access Needs

- Always treat anyone with a disability with the same respect that you would extend to everyone else. Remember, a disability is not a defining factor for who we are, but is a condition of our experience of the world.
- Use words that put the person first, referring to them as a “person with a disability” or “person with hearing loss.” Do not use words like “handicapped,” “retarded,” “crippled,” or “wheelchair bound.”
- Don’t be afraid to offer assistance to a person with a disability, but ***wait until the offer is accepted before you help***. Listen to any instructions that the individual gives about the best way to assist them.
- When talking with a person who has a disability, speak directly to them rather than to a companion or interpreter who may be with them.
- Speak in a normal voice. Do not shout unless someone has indicated that they are hard of hearing and prefer this method of communication.
- As with anyone else, let a person with a disability make their own decisions regarding what they can or cannot do. Be careful not to be overprotective.
- Be considerate of the extra time it may take some people with disabilities to complete a task or get somewhere.

## **Accessibility and MCC's General Conference**

As our largest and most widely attended global event, MCC's General Conference provides us an opportunity to tend to accessibility for our whole church. Volunteers and Staff of the MCC denominational offices work together to coordinate and prepare universal access to the events within our General Conference gathering. As part of our efforts, conference staff begins the process of preparation by choosing locations that are already well equipped to address accessibility needs. In addition, a volunteer Accessibility Coordinator provides on-site support for accessibility needs throughout conference.

The 2013 General Conference Accessibility Coordinator is Rev. Mel Martinez of Wichita Falls MCC (Texas, USA). Pastor Mel is available throughout each conference day to assist people with specific accessibility needs in gaining access to conference events, if at all possible. Mel is a volunteer in this role, and will be available on-call from 8am to the close of evening worship. To reach her, call or text 940-257-1738. Please do not call after 10:00pm or before 8:00am. In case of emergency, call 911 and notify hotel staff.

## **Ushers, Greeters, Volunteers, and MCC Staff**

The role of our worship Ushers and Greeters, our Conference Volunteers, and our MCC Staff Members (hereby all referred to as "personnel") is to assist conference participants in whatever way possible and viable for their own abilities and expertise. Every volunteer has a different history and expertise, and must not be considered liable or responsible for access emergencies or accidents. In general, such personnel may seek resources to aid your access, but is not responsible for guaranteeing a solution. For each area of access need, certain limitations apply. Those limitations are listed below.

- **Mobility Access Needs**
  - Personnel may accompany persons with mobility access needs as an escort from one event to another.
  - Personnel may NOT assist in chair transfers, transfer of persons from the floor to a seated position, or any other maneuver of another's body position.
  - Personnel may NOT reserve or obtain assistive equipment on behalf of a person with an access need without express permission from that person.
  - Personnel may NOT reserve or obtain assistive equipment for a participant a conference who has not provided their own equipment.
- **Cognitive Access Needs**
  - Personnel may, to the best of their ability, take additional time to make needed explanations to assist in understanding.
  - Personnel may, to the best of their ability, utilize multiple means of communication in order to assist in understanding.
- **Chronic Illness/Condition Access Needs**
  - Personnel may assist in communicating needs to hotel staff and MCC Leadership, as needed.
  - Personnel may NOT provide any foods, candies, or beverages to address issues of access in an emergent situation unless the participant specifically asks for a food or beverage item.
  - In the case of an apparent emergency due to chronic illness or condition, call 911 from a local cell phone or landline and notify hotel staff.
- **Speech Access Needs**
  - Personnel may, to the best of their ability, take additional time with a conference participant to ensure that others understand their communication.
- **Vision Access Needs**
  - Personnel may NOT handle, pet or engage with a service animal without the express permission of the animal's owner.

- Personnel may NOT feed or otherwise provide care for a service animal that does not belong to them.
- Personnel is asked to be attentive to those with apparent visual challenges to ensure that pathways are clear of obstacles.
- Personnel may offer to guide persons with vision access needs to their seat or another location.
- **Hearing Access Needs**
  - Personnel are asked to seek out a qualified interpreter for hearing access needs.
- **Environmental Access Needs**
  - Personnel are asked to be attentive to their own presence regarding the use of perfumes, colognes, deodorants, and other strongly odorous personal items.
  - Personnel may NOT provide breathing assistive devices (inhalers, oxygen, etc.) in an attempt to assist an access need. In the case of emergency, call 911 from a local cell phone or landline and notify hotel staff.
- **Height/Weight Access Needs**
  - Personnel may make changes to the structure/setup of a room's space with the request of a person with an access need.
- **Parents with Small Children**
  - Personnel may NOT take possession of any child that is not their own.
  - Personnel may NOT offer non-emergent care of a child (feeding, diaper change, etc.) that is not their own, or without the express permission of a parent.
  - Personnel may offer to stow large bags, strollers, etc. in non-traversed area with the permission of a parent. NOTE: Personnel will need to be attentive to assisting in getting such equipment returned to the parent.
- **Pregnant Women**
  - Personnel may, to the best of their ability, provide information to a person in need of access.

### **“Access Hospitality” Cards**

Orange cards are available from the registration desk with additional instructions for your safety and access needs. In any all-conference meeting (including worship, business forums, plenaries, and business meetings) the card may be used to attract the attention of personnel to help address an issue of access. To gain assistance, raise the card to gain the attention of a member of personnel.

### **The Fairmont Millennium Park Hotel**

Our conference in 2013 is being hosted at the Fairmont Millennium Park Hotel in Chicago, Illinois (USA). This hotel is ADA compliant. There is a trained security staff on site 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Safety kits are available by request and the hotel endeavors to ensure that all needs of an emergent nature are met. If you have an emergency while on hotel premises, please call 911 from a local cell phone or landline. If possible, also notify a member of hotel staff to gain immediate attention and assist in emergency personnel navigating the hotel to reach you.

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The MCC Accessibility Advisory Council hopes you will enjoy your experience at MCC's General Conference. We also hope you will join us at this year's Accessibility Affinity Group to learn more about our work and provide your perspective on accessibility in MCC. That meeting will take place on Monday, July 1, at 9:00pm. See your program book for location.

Prepared by Rev. Mel Martinez (General Conference Accessibility Coordinator)  
in conjunction with MCC's Accessibility Advisory Council  
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