

## **Accessibility Policies November 2011**

### **Identifying what we offer**

Orono United Church's prime function is to worship God and to be God's ministers in our community. This means that we:

- Host regular Sunday worship services
- Host worship services that reflect our Christian calendar, such as Christmas Eve, Good Friday
- Host weddings and funerals
- Host community organizations, such as Orono Horticultural Society, and Scouting and Guiding groups
- Host fundraising events, such as suppers, sales and social events, including bingo.
- Host a resale shop

### **Identifying gaps in accessibility and training**

As an organization that relies largely on volunteers, we recognize that gaps exist in our knowledge on accessibility issues. As these are recognized we will undertake to fill them via training and any applicable policies. In particular, we recognize the need for those passing on responsibilities to someone else to ensure that any task-specific knowledge they have gained is also passed on.

### **Our Attitudes**

A church, almost by definition, should be somewhere where everyone feels welcomed. The people of Orono United Church accept that none of us are perfect in any way, and therefore none of us should be judgmental in any way. Sadly, through our imperfections, we recognize that this isn't always the case. Nevertheless, we will strive to make our church a place where no-one is made to feel unwelcome. This means that we must not discriminate against anyone on the grounds of 'who they are or have been' or 'what they are or have been'.

We strive to be a welcoming place for all, regardless of age, gender, race, sexual identity, culture or physical appearance and abilities. We will not discriminate on the grounds of wealth, background, beliefs, political leanings, culture, history, record or length of attendance, or social standing. We will take as our example the way Jesus Christ welcomed all, even at the risk of his popularity and reputation. We recognize that is not only advantageous to those with disabilities but also for us as a church as we seek to fulfill our task of taking the Gospel to all.

## **Physical accessibility and limitations**

Physical access to Orono United Church is good. We have a powered lift that can reach almost all levels, and it is our policy that its availability will be noted to all users of the building. We also have a ramp that accesses the rear of the building for access to the resale shop.

We recognize that there are still some places that cannot be reached by anyone in a wheelchair or who has trouble using stairs but these are the exception. They include the washrooms near the lower hall, the choir stalls, the communion table, the sanctuary balcony and the stage. We do have a single washroom available without the need to negotiate stairs that is also large enough to accommodate those in wheelchairs. We also recognize that there are times when people trained in the use of the lift are not available – we will seek to counter this through wider training.

Our sanctuary is available to anyone with mobility issues via the lift. The main entrance has two small steps with available handrails and while not ideal, it is still preferred to the lift by some with mobility issues and when this is the case, we strive to ensure people are present to offer any assistance required. This entrance also offers double doors to ensure that it is wide enough to accommodate walking aides, wheelchairs and support persons.

Our sanctuary also has aisles wide enough for easy mobility for those with walking aides or wheelchairs. It also has space suitable for several wheelchairs that gives a full view of our worship services, although we recognize that there is a risk of this area being seen as somehow separate from the main body of worshipers due to its specific location. It is, however, as close to the lift as reasonably practicable.

During our worship services, there are times when most people will stand. It will remain our policy that those who are unable to do so or who are not comfortable doing so, will not be discriminated against and will be made aware that they are free to remain seated without being judged by the rest. There may also be times when the people are invited to move around the sanctuary (such as our greeting time) and again those unable or unwilling to will not be judged or excluded.

When we share in the Sacrament of Holy Communion, it is our usual practice to take the elements to the people in their seats. On the few occasions when the people are invited to come forward to receive the elements, it will be our policy that those who are unable to do so will have the elements brought to them.

Our church has successfully hosted weddings and funerals where mobility issues were a factor. In fact one couple seeking marriage chose our sanctuary because it was so accessible to the bride, who needed to be able to remain in her wheelchair for the entire ceremony. It will be our policy to at least maintain this standard of accessibility.

Wherever practical , the service will strive to reflect the needs of those taking part, seeking to exclude no-one from taking a full role due to physical limitations. All will be welcome and equal at Orono United Church.

We reach out to those unable to come out to our church through the use of recordings of most services and through visitation.

### **Accessible communications**

We recognize that offering accessible communications to all provides a serious challenge to Orono United Church. This takes many forms.

Our Sunday services may present difficulties for those with impaired vision or learning difficulties. We share in prayers and hymns in unison, which will usually require a level of reading ability. In terms of reading comprehension, although every effort will be made to keep the wording as straightforward as possible, it would defeat their purpose if they did not reflect the thoughts and concepts they are meant to convey. In terms of being accessible to those with impaired vision, we will endeavor to make the print as large as possible within the limitations of the paper size. Where a need is recognized, we will make try to make available a copy with even larger print.

Our Sunday services also include a large amount of spoken word and music. We use a sound system to amplify spoken words to enable those with a low level of hearing impairment to be able to understand what is being said. We also have a small number of hearing assist devices available for worshipers to use. We do not, regrettably, have any resources available for those who are deaf.

We have adopted the use of several different media during our services of worship, primarily via a computer and a projector, which is displayed on a section of wall at the front of our sanctuary. We recognize that this must also be accessible by all. The audio is amplified but the video is not as visible from some parts of the sanctuary as others. This is not because of obstacles but rather the different angles of line of sight. The line of sight is worst for those who may be seated in or near the area identified as best suited to wheelchairs and those unable to move far from the lift.

We also communicate via our website. It is not practical for us to maintain a website that meets all accessibility standards at present, but we will undertake to consider these as far as possible. For example, wherever possible, text will be resizable to meet the user's needs, and contrast between background and the text will be a primary design consideration.

### **Feedback**

We will actively encourage feedback, negative and positive, regarding our accessibility to all. This will happen in several ways. We will make written feedback forms available at our main entrances. We will also post information on how feedback can be delivered, and to whom, in prominent places that are easily accessed. There will also be a feedback form available on our website, as well as a copy of our policies. An accessibility item will be placed on the agenda for our annual meetings to give people an opportunity to express any concerns or other feedback. If the feedback concerns any inabilities to share in our worship, it shall be directed in the first instance to Session. If it concerns physical accessibility to our buildings and/or non-worship events, it will be directed to the Stewards. If there is any uncertainty as to where the feedback should be forwarded, it will be sent first to the Official Board for direction.

### **Service animals**

Bona fide service animals will be welcomed at all events at Orono United Church.

### **Support persons**

Support persons will be welcome at all events at Orono United Church. If the event carries an admission fee, the fee will be waived for support persons who are required to enable someone to attend. The only exception to this policy is if a meal is being provided – if the support person wishes to share in the meal, they will be expected to pay the same cost as others have paid for the same meal.

### **Conclusion**

Equal accessibility requires the cooperation of all, especially those in positions of influence. We are fortunate in that it also matches our responsibilities of being church to the world. If we are not striving to match the requirements of Ontario accessibility legislation then we are also not striving to be the church to all people.