

The Ministry of the Church to People with Disability

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Abstract

Jesus' ministry on earth is meant to be a model of the ministry of the church. It affected all types of people regardless of their socio-economic and religious status. Jesus regarded all to be made in the image of God and did everything possible to minister to everyone. He particularly went out of his way to reach those whom society marginalized, neglected, rejected, and deemed worthless. This study aims at generally critically evaluating the ministry of the church today. It specifically attempts to examine the ministry of the church to people with disabilities. While the study largely depends on existing literature, it also refers to observation of the status of people with disabilities in the church today, which on its own may not provide adequate information for solid, conclusive findings. In the church's ministry to people with disabilities, dealing with barriers to their inclusion is core. The article not only examines the challenges faced by the church in addressing issues of inclusion, but identifies specific areas of improvement in the status of people with disabilities.

Keywords

Image of God, marginalized, people with disabilities, inclusion, critical interpretation, salvation

The ministry of the church should make a deliberate effort to address factors that have contributed to keeping people with disabilities from becoming full members of the church, that is, from fully participating and fully enjoying being members of the body of Christ. They should, like other members of the body of Christ, feel invited to participate in the operations and functions of the church. The Great Commission of Christ as outlined in Matthew 28 demands that the church should go out to all parts of society and the world to witness and make disciples of different social and economic status and background. In Luke 14:21 the church is, for instance, called to bring in those who are

poor, crippled, blind, and lame. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul refers to all believers as the body of Christ. In this way, the mission of the church has as its key objective a specific focus on reaching out to all, including people with disabilities. What are the barriers that we need to remove to successfully fulfil this mission? What are the negative attitudes against people with disabilities that have made the churches fail to reach their needs and goals?

This article argues that the church should possess a critical interpretation of the Bible that removes the marginalizing attitudes against people with disabilities. This attitude is believed to be influenced by the teaching of the Bible, particularly that of Jesus, who is not only the founder of the church but the one who commanded the church to propagate the gospel, and whose main purpose is redemptive, liberating, and empowering to all humanity. The ministry of the church is therefore seen as influenced by a redemptive theology, which is based on Jesus' critical and positive teaching that promotes inclusion, accommodation, and redemption.¹ The teachings of Jesus, as well as his attitudes and dealings with people with disabilities in the Bible, shows that he called the church to be a welcoming and inclusive institution to all people, regardless of their culture, gender, or social and economic status. Jesus never saw the physical and health conditions of people as an acceptable barrier in whatever situation. He worked toward removing such tendencies, orientation, and cultural indications.

The article, therefore, takes a position that while the extent of the problem posed by disability in the world is overwhelming, the church has not done enough in addressing it. This point is adequately discussed by Maposa and Taringa, who provide excellent statistical evidence to the challenge posed by disability at the worldwide stage.²

Marginalizing or degrading attitudes of the church

There are many reasons that people with disabilities feel excluded, marginalized, and isolated. George F. White observes that the Christian community has a history of devaluing attitudes toward people with disabilities.³ In support of this, she cites Nancy Eiesland's discussion on the different marginalizing attitudes that churches have regarding people with disabilities. In pursuing Eiesland's discussion, White observes that the ideological funding and charitable practices of the church to people with

¹ R. S. Maposa and N. T. Taringa, "Pastor Responses to People with Disabilities in the African Church," in *Disability in Africa: Resource Book for Theology and Religious Studies*, ed. S. Kabue, J. Amanze, and C. Landman, 301–15 (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2016), 301.

² *Ibid.*, 301–302.

³ G. F. White, "People with Disabilities in the Christian Community," *Journal of the Christian Institute on Disability* 3:1 (2014), 11–35.

disabilities always result in the latter's marginalization. The focus of the church on healing – whereby the evangelists, prophets, and pastors emphasize caring and normalization of the bodies of people with disabilities – is found to be flawed.⁴ Such ideas have the potential to marginalize and devalue people with disabilities. This seems to be a serious problem everywhere. Fidelis Nkomazana points out how persons with disability working for the University of Botswana, for instance, complained that they are devalued when the church and society view them as objects of charity or as people who are sick and in need of healing.⁵ Nkomazana also mentions other forms of negative attitudes that cause people with disability to become devalued when they are overprotected or located as a special group of the church. White argues that people with disabilities want to be treated like other members of the church. He says that they don't need to be favoured in any way or to be given special treatment. All they want is to have the church environment made friendly for them, as it is for everybody else. They don't want a situation where they are treated as different, as victims or disabled, which creates a negative mentality that, White argues, further devalues them. The ministry of the church to people with disability must, therefore, move toward inclusion with a transformed attitude. It should not promote any negative or marginalizing mentality. It should be focused on transforming all its members in the whole and indeed the true body of Christ.

The extent of the problem posed by disability

In his ministry on earth, Jesus found that disability was a big problem and worked toward eliminating it. He understood disability to be a massive hindrance to people's independence, participation, and advancement. At the beginning of his ministry, he outlined his agenda and specifically targeted people with disabilities:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.” And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” (Luke 4:18-21)

Jesus was setting a stage for the ministry of his church, which was expected to prioritize the needs and place of people with disabilities. The New Testament stories, especially

⁴ Ibid., 12.

⁵ F. Nkomazana, “Religion and Disability: The Relation between Spirituality and Gender Life for People with Disability,” Conference on Inclusion and Participation of People with Disabilities in the Social, Economic, Political and Spiritual Life in Society, University of Botswana, 16–19 October 2018.

the synoptic gospels, emphasize Jesus' power of healing all forms of disabilities and also present Jesus as the model and source of hope for every form of disability.⁶

However, contrary to this overwhelming evidence that Jesus promoted a liberating and redemptive theology of disability,⁷ the Bible has sometimes been used to suggest that people with disabilities are not to experience salvation in their condition. The Bible is misinterpreted to associate disability with evil, negativity, and punishment. Francis Machingura, for instance, writes, "Disability is associated with demonic spirits, hence the call for divine healing as a prerequisite for entry into the community of believers and the Kingdom of God. Such deployment of the bible has resulted in the exclusion of PWDS [persons with disabilities]."⁸ To regard people with disability as sick or not whole or to think that their condition is connected with sin or as a manifestation of evil poses a problem. White echoes Satterlee, who quotes Reinders, who writes:

Throughout its history, the church has interpreted scriptural passages, images, and stories that include persons with disabilities in ways that subtly or explicitly reinforce the assertion that physical and developmental disabilities are caused by or are a consequence of sin and may even be God's punishment visited upon the sinner. This hermeneutical approach assumes that getting rid of their disabilities is the chief concern of people who are disabled and the ideal for all people.⁹

The disciples of Jesus also strongly believed that disabilities were caused by sin either in an individual's life or in their parents' lives. The disciples, however, did not realize that their failure to deliver these people from these situations suggested that the church was failing in its healing ministry. To protect themselves from this embarrassment, the church would usually blame the people with disability for lack of faith. Taking this approach, they would sometimes ridicule the person, forcing them to stay away from fellowship and sometimes from the Christian faith. In this way, people with disabilities were alienated, marginalized, and excluded from the body of Christ.¹⁰

John 9:1-3 presents a story that defined Jesus' attitude to the issue. It reads as follows: "As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi,

⁶ F. Machingura, "Disability and the Bible: The New Testament Narratives on Disability," in *Disability in Africa: Resource Book for Theology and Religious Studies*, ed. S. Kabue, J. Amanze, and C. Landman (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2016), 59–60.

⁷ M. S. Fast, "A Theology of Disability: Living as a Theologian of the Cross," *Journal of Religion, Disability and Health* 15:4 (2011), 414–30.

⁸ Machingura, "Disability and the Bible," 60.

⁹ White, "People with Disabilities in the Christian Community," 13.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’ Jesus answered, ‘Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him.’” What is important to note is that Jesus saw the man before he saw the condition, contrary to the disciples, who first saw the condition. They immediately had a wrong understanding of theology and disability. Jesus makes it clear that disability is not a punishment for sin and that God has a purpose in disability.

Machingura, quoting Eiesland, identifies three theological challenges faced by people with disabilities:

- Association of disability with sin. Disability is viewed as punishment for wrongdoing. As a result, PWDs are barred from positions of leadership or stigmatized from their presumed lack of faith.
- Disability as virtuous suffering is identified as suffering that must be endured as purification of the righteous.
- PWDs as objects of charity. Charity subverts justice by segregating PWDs from society and keeping them out of the public eye rather than empowering them for full social, economic, and political participation.¹¹

Agreeing with Eiesland, Machingura refers to this kind of religious position and understanding as a “disabling theology that has been designed against PWDS,” which disempowers and disables people with disabilities more than their physical and mental conditions do.¹² The church, therefore, has a responsibility to embrace what Fast refers to as liberating theology in its ministry. This theology critiques injustice, empowers the oppressed, retrieves the voices of the repressed, and forms solidarity with the oppressed. He also calls this theology “God’s law in action,” because it upholds life and serves the neighbour. Luther calls this kind of theology, service to the “neighbour.”¹³ In the words of scripture the demand is clear: “You shall love your neighbour as yourself” (Gal. 5:14) and “He who loves his neighbour has fulfilled the Law” (Rom. 13:8). “Neighbour” here includes those living with disability.

Another challenge, already mentioned above, that affects the church life of people with disabilities is the tendency of the church to see disability as a social and spiritual condition that needs to be changed. Nelly Mwale and Joseph Chita discussed a theological position generally adopted by Pentecostal churches that sees disability as a curable social and spiritual condition to be dealt with through spiritual healing. Mwale and

¹¹ Machingura, “Disability and the Bible,” 60.

¹² *Ibid.*, 61.

¹³ Fast, “A Theology of Disability,” 7–9.

Chita observed that the Pentecostal engagement with disability and healing has perpetuated a stigma and instilled false hope, failing to deal with disability issues in a comprehensive manner. According to the authors, this approach has resulted not only in commodifying disability through the media but in exploiting people with disabilities. Everywhere in Africa and in other parts of the world, Pentecostal churches emphasize miraculous works and prosperity gospel through their new styles of worship, characterized by speaking in tongues, casting out demons, offering deliverance services, and establishing expansive church infrastructure.¹⁴

This article, therefore, proposes that the ministry of the church should come up with a comprehensive theological approach to disability that does not link biblical understanding of disability to the possession of evil spirits resulting in stigma, shame, and false hope. Disability should not be used as means of promoting media coverage and popularizing the prophetic ministries of certain Pentecostal churches. In this context, Pentecostal healing miracle services are dominated by male leadership, while the majority of those who seek healing are women, even among people with disabilities.¹⁵

In search of miracles to have their disability conditions changed, people with disabilities at times end up moving from place to place. When the promises of miracles are not realized, these people end up feeling exploited, isolated, and marginalized. As part of its mission, the church should, as Mwale and Chita recommend, promote an interdisciplinary approach in the training of church leaders to ensure that they gain a multi-faceted skill base to be able to handle people with different challenges and needs.¹⁶ In the Great Commission (Matt. 28), Jesus called his disciples to make disciples through preaching for repentance and training, in this way producing disciples of all nations. In support of such an effort, Michael Phiri has proposed “constructing an African theology of disability” by promoting, among other things, the concept of salvation as wholeness, which is a salvation for the whole person: mind, soul, and body. This is seen as an important effort to redefine a theology of wholeness that brings in a sense of community within the church, whereby each individual is recognized for their dignity and inherent worth. Phiri also points out that even those with disabilities are integral to the community of believers. This is essential for the development of a relevant theology of

¹⁴ N. Mwale and J. Chita, “Pentecostal Presentation of Disability in Zambia: A Case Study,” in *Disability in Africa: Resource Book for Theology and Religious Studies*, ed. S. Kabue, J. Amanze, and C. Landman (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2016), 254–55.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 258–59.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 261–62.

disability, where the church is understood not only as community but as the body of Christ, where each individual is important, special, and valued.¹⁷

Practical approaches and strategies for an inclusive church and its ministry

The church as a community of believers or the body of Christ has a responsibility to explore ways to remove the alienating, stigmatizing, and exclusionary practices and structures. Some of these ways are discussed below.

I will use a report of a 2016 conference on disability and the church – the Enabling Church Conference – which answered the question “How can churches enable disabled people to be more involved in the life and mission of the church?” to highlight the need for the church. The speakers of the conference were either people with disability or had personal experiences of the issues through family and friends. It was full of ideas and inspiration for all who work with or support children, youth, and families plus anyone having passion to see the abilities of all people recognized. The conference provided many opportunities for networking and interaction and a wide range of resources from a number of organizations. It also provided a framework to be adopted in the ministry of the church to people with disability (Martin Hobgen). The overview of this conference will be helpful and inspiring for a church that wants to shape its future ministry in the area of disability. The aim is to strive for a church where people with disabilities truly belong. Martin Hobgen’s report provides an overview of the conference.¹⁸

Bishop Paul Hendricks, representing the National Catholic Disability Network, gave the keynote speech emphasizing the need for the church to follow Jesus Christ’s example of reaching out and welcoming people who are often excluded from society and pointing out how by doing this we enrich the church. Other speakers provided insights into a wide variety of issues affecting people with disability and their relationship with churches, including the following:

1. Janice Silo, who uses British Sign Language, spoke on the importance of communication with the deaf community.
2. Ann Memmott, advisor to the All Party Parliamentary Group for Autism, presented on the importance of interaction with people with autism.

¹⁷ M. Phiri, “Constructing an African Theology of Disability: Conceptual Imperatives,” in *Disability in Africa: Resource Book for Theology and Religious Studies*, ed. S. Kabue, J. Amanze, and C. Landman (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2016), 267–85.

¹⁸ M. Hobgen, churchesforall.org.uk/e.

3. Tony Phelp-Jones, the director of Ministry for Prospects, a Christian organization that provides advice, training, and resource materials to equip churches for effective ministry and outreach, spoke about how those with learning difficulties may be enabled to participate in church life.
4. Christina Gangemi spoke about the power of using stories to integrate those with learning difficulties.
5. Mat Ray from Livability, a Christian organization seeking to help disadvantaged people achieve and reach independence, encouraged individuals and churches to work for the full inclusion of people with disability in church life. The organization introduces ways that the church can improve the inclusion of people with disabilities.
6. Malcolm Dauncan, pastor at Gold Hill Baptist Church, presented a video encouraging participants to realize that people with disability are first of all children of God and therefore should be included in the life and mission of the church and empowered to fulfil God's calling in their lives.
7. Kay Morgan-Gurr, the general director of Children Worldwide, talked about issues facing children and young people with disabilities. Generally, the church must be a major social and political support system for families in the raising of their children. The Sunday School programme should be an integral part of the life of the church. Children with disabilities need to be accommodated within the Sunday School programme and activities within the church. The church must express unconditional love for these children and have a budget to accommodate them in terms of accessibility. The church has the responsibility to support parents with a child with intellectual disabilities, visual impairments, and so on, in order to improve the situation. It must see raising children with disabilities or parents with disabilities as part of the church's commitment.

From the above list, this article has chosen to further examine three important aspects which can contribute toward increasing the church's effective ministry to people with disability. These are the issues of language, accessibility/mobility, and pastoral care.

The language factor

Language is an important vehicle of the message of the church. It is a medium through which the proclamation of the gospel is passed. It can be used to empower people with disabilities to unite with the rest of the members in doing ministry, rather than as a tool to manipulate, discriminate against, and abuse them. The use of abusive language and words around people with disabilities not only affects communication, but also damages social relations. In this regard, Tarisayi Andrea Chimuka sees language as a vehicle

of communication and a tool for the exchange of ideas. It is the means by which people's social reality is constructed, accomplished, preserved, and transmitted from generation to generation and person to person.¹⁹ Furthermore, language is the vehicle for the transmission of cultural knowledge, which should shape people's view of the world and how they interact with others. It has not only the power to transform the church and its membership but also the ability to communicate meaning and ideas in a uniting and inclusive manner.²⁰ Chimuka, for instance, discusses ways of speaking about disability that are not exclusive, stigmatizing, and marginalizing. As part of its ministry to communities, the church is called to avoid using hurtful, discriminating, and marginalizing language in its preaching activities. He writes, "Much spiritual damage occurs when preachers or singers present the various dimensions of disability as a result of sin or as punishment from God. They may be expressing their views innocently, unaware that their words are hurting other people. Thus, the language used in church when referring to disability needs careful scrutiny and sensitivity."²¹

In his conclusion, Chimuka points out that some of the language used in the Bible and in Christian hymns are a source of the problem. These texts are characterized by words such as "blindness," "dumbness," and "deafness," which are stigmatizing and hence become a source of harm and suffering and lead to a negative attitude and prejudice in the ministry of the church. Joseph B. R. Gaie agrees with this observation. He argues that the everyday language used to refer to people with disabilities tends to reinforce stereotypes and negative notions. Gaie also observes that words such as "disabled," "lunatic," "insane," "dwarf," "mentally," and "defective" are not only inappropriate but do not benefit the target people. They undermine, demean, belittle, isolate, and disempower people with disabilities.²² In Chichewa, the word for a person living with disability is *chilema* (meaning a "cripple"). For albinism, the Shona of Zimbabwe use the term *murungudunbu* to mean a local white person. These labels are demeaning and abusive, thus developing a culture of insensitive language use when referring to persons living with disability.²³ Kayange has also pointed out that the use of words such as hearing impairment, visual impairment,

¹⁹ T. A. Chimuka, "Overcoming the Alienating and Stigmatizing Uses of Language of Persons with Disability in Southern Africa," in *Disability in Africa: Resource Book for Theology and Religious Studies*, ed. S. Kabue, J. Amanze, and C. Landman (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2016), 367–68.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 368–69.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 366.

²² J. B. R. Gaie, "Attitudes towards Disability: An Example of Language in Botswana," in *Disability in Africa: Resource Book for Theology and Religious Studies*, ed. S. Kabue, J. Amanze, and C. Landman, 331–50 (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2016), 343–47.

²³ Chimuka, "Overcoming the Alienating and Stigmatizing Uses of Language of Persons with Disability in Southern Africa," 374.

and speech are a source of marginalization of people with disability, creating a destructive cultural conception of and attitude toward people with disability.²⁴ Kayange, quoting Schoffeleers, also writes, “The praxis of marginalization is at variance with the claims of *umunthu* ethics, namely, that Africans respect one another and are concerned with the status of each person in the community. Such respect is embedded in African traditional religions, affirming that the life of a human being is sacred and a gift from God.”²⁵

Pastoral care

The church has always played a central role in the spiritual care of society and believers. People with disabilities, like everyone else, have social and spiritual needs that are unique and specific. Discussing some of the negative attitudes held toward people with disabilities, Samuel Kabue has observed that, at times, the church, its leaders, and members assume that since a person does not see, walk, or hear they are not capable of committing sin. Kabue furthermore argues that while disabilities such as a weak body, feeble mind, or sensory deprivation are seen by everyone, a weak, hurting, and wounded spirit is not. He points out that this is why the ministry of the church should not only concentrate on the physical or sensory disabilities. Instead, through prayer and fellowship, it should consider the soul, which is mostly forgotten or ignored but can be easily put right and can change the private and public condition of people with disabilities. Kabue argues that the physical dysfunction of people with disabilities should not be allowed to overshadow their spiritual needs, which only the church can minister to. Watchman Nee, a Chinese Christian writer, in his book *The Spiritual Man*, described the soul as not only the seat of personality but also of human beings’ will, intellect, and emotions. He also says that the soul is the origin of human beings’ personality. Pastoral care for people with disability, however, does not mean isolating them or treating them as completely different from the rest of the members of the congregation. Regarding this point, Kabue says, “In the past, the lives of people with disabilities have been spent within conditions of regulated care, mistaken theology and misguided notion of charity. This has been characterised by ‘caring’ for them especially in their formative stage in requested institutions for a long time, bringing about the idea that they are special and different from the rest of society.”²⁶ The negative type of “pastoral care” would

²⁴ G. Kayange, “Marginalisation of Persons with Disabilities in Metaphorical Conceptualization,” in *Disability in Africa: Resource Book for Theology and Religious Studies*, ed. S. Kabue, J. Amanze, and C. Landman (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2016), 351–63.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 352.

²⁶ S. Kabue, “Persons with Disabilities in Church and Society: A Historical and Sociological Perspective,” in *Disability, Society, and Theology: Voices from Africa*, ed. S. Kabue, E. Mombo, J. Galgalo, and C. B. Peter (Limuru: Zapf Chancery, 2011), 15.

result in spiritual and social alienation of people with disabilities from the rest of society.

The truth about the ministry of the church is that it will not be meaningful, complete, and relevant if accessibility and participation are not achieved. People with disabilities will stop going to church when it is difficult to access the church building or when it is not possible to participate when they are there. Kabue, for instance, writes,

I am reminded of a hearing impaired friend who approached a pastor after a church service and said: “Pastor, I understood nothing of what you said.” The pastor retorted, “do not worry, God knows that you are deaf.” My friend left the church very disappointed as he expected a better solution to this problem but which he realised that he could not give. The deaf are not an exception when the bible says in Roman[s] 10:13-15. “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard and how shall they hear without a preacher?”²⁷

When people with disabilities do not go to church, their families also do not go, because they are affected by their exclusion from the preaching objective of the pastor. Eventually, the families will stop going, and thus the church loses an opportunity to take its ministry to entire families in society. When the doors are closed to people with disabilities, the church loses an opportunity to reach them with the word of God, whose power is not only healing to the soul but creates faith in the hearts of people. The Bible says that faith comes by hearing and preaching the word of God. The duty of the church, as Kabue argues, is to reach people with disabilities and their entire families and bring them to a place where they can effectively and easily participate. When this happens, people with disability, like every other Christian in the church, are renewed, resulting in their families being strengthened for the common good.²⁸

As part of its ministerial responsibility, pastoral care, and counselling, the church must begin to address the spiritual negligence, marginalization, and impoverishment usually experienced by people with disabilities. They are also to extend their pastoral care to challenges such as education, unemployment, lack of access to health care, vulnerability to abuse, and social marginalization generally experienced by people with disabilities. The church may not have all the resources to bring solutions to these challenges, but must realize that it has the right to address them and help restore people with disability to wholeness.²⁹

²⁷ Ibid., 15.

²⁸ Ibid., 16; Romans 10:17.

²⁹ Kabue, “Persons with Disabilities in Church and Society,” 17–19.

Accessibility and mobility

Another challenge affecting people with disability is that they are marginalized through inaccessibility. People with disabilities are victims of inaccessible environments and conditions, even within church buildings. The church must advocate for appropriate remedial policies and also come up with practical ways of addressing issues of mobility and accessibility as they affect people with disability.

A greater part of the ministry of the church should involve making their environments and conditions more accessible to people with disabilities. Kabue observes:

Those that permit entry deny further accessibility. A fully accessible church should permit the people with disabilities access to the sanctuary so that they are able to participate in all aspects of the church activities. Fully accessible churches should have programmes for intellectually impaired, some sign language interpreters for the deaf, sitting that can permit wheelchair users to sit with their families and should also assign Sunday readings to blind readers who can read Braille and are willing to do so as a way of encouraging participation.³⁰

Nkomazana observes that the challenge of access to church facilities, amenities, and services is a major concern for people with disabilities. Inaccessibility to places of worship creates a negative environment leading to discomfort in church attendance for people with disabilities. Exclusive church leadership structures is another indication for lack of readiness to allow the people with abilities to participate in decision-making processes.³¹ Nkomazana further argues that it is not only accessibility to church environments and services that is a challenge, but also the usability of the environments. The church has the responsibility to provide reasonable accommodation. They must provide necessary and appropriate modifications and adjustments to all spaces in the church environments. People with disabilities must be able to enjoy equal and full opportunities and access to physical and religious environments without discrimination.³²

Nkomazana insists that accessibility is about respect, acceptance, diversity, and equal opportunity through the development of new technologies, information, and communication technologies; this includes the availability of mobility aids, devices, and assistive technologies. Their ministry of the church should provide accessible information to people with disabilities so that they fully participate in all aspects of church life. It must eliminate obstacles and barriers to buildings, pathways, church transportation,

³⁰ Ibid., 15.

³¹ F. Nkomazana, "Disability, Accessibility and Pentecostal Churches in Botswana," in *Disability in Africa*, ed. S. Kabue, J. Amanze, and C. Landman (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2016), 403.

³² Ibid., 407–08.

and other outdoor and indoor facilities. Citing Nancy Eiesland, Mary Schaefer Fast has called the church a “city on the hill – physically inaccessible and socially inhospitable.” She argues that to build architectural barriers and keep a social and physical distance is to discriminate against people with disabilities and see them as inferior and without value.³³

Conclusion

The mission of the church regarding people with disabilities is to help them cope with limitations, overcome challenges, and enjoy a fulfilling life. The ministry of the church should empower them and improve their independence, helping them to get beyond the challenges they face. The church’s mission to people with disabilities should also be to contribute to helping them accept their disability as a reality and find strategies to move forward, making needed changes and finding new goals. One important way the church can empower people with disabilities is to advocate for them at work and in the health care system. Knowledge is power, facilitating new possibilities in life. People with disabilities must be encouraged to educate themselves about their rights and the resources that are available to them. A major achievement of the church in its mission to people with disability is to help them learn new skills and strategies.

Volunteerism is another important powerful strategy of engaging and equipping people with disabilities. Volunteering is a great way for them to feel more productive and make a difference in their community in the context of limited mobility. There are many opportunities out there; people with disability need to pick something they are passionate about and make a meaningful contribution. Some people with disability may be great with computers and can help technologically challenged family and church members.

Finally, therefore, as part of its ministry, the church should fight against the discrimination, marginalization, and stigma faced by people with disabilities in the church and consequently develop inclusive strategies.

³³ Fast, “A Theology of Disability,” 1, 5.