

Building Welcoming Spaces with Universal Design Webinar Transcript

Pablo: Welcome to this one-hour webinar. We are pleased by your interest in today's topic, Building Welcoming Spaces with Universal Design. Miriam Spies and Alice Schuda are facilitating the webinar. Welcome Miriam and Alice. Before I turn over to Miriam, I would like to give a few comments. First, I would like to thank you for giving us permission to record this webinar. Second, those who have joined through computer or tablets, I have turned off your video and muted your microphone when you joined the webinar. I turned off your video because we would like to use the screen mostly for the facilitators. When we break into small groups, please turn on your video and when you share, please unmute yourself, and when you are done speaking, please, mute your microphone. When we are back to the large group, please turn off your video. If not, I will turn it off for you. When the facilitators ask you questions or comments, please write them down in the chat box. If you are joining us through phone, we will unmute you when we break into small groups and mute you when you return to the large group. Lastly, if you have a technical issue, send me or Nicole Roccas a private message. Nicole is our tech support person for today's webinar.

Miriam, we'll start with you. Miriam is a UCC Minister and PhD student focusing on disability and leadership in the church.
Welcome.

Miriam: As I was praying and reflecting on the material that Alice is presenting today, I was struck by the liturgical season the church will soon enter, the season of Advent. For me Advent is a time of waiting, naming our fears, hoping, working together, praying, and anticipating God coming once again into our lives and into our world. God coming at a particular time in a particular place within a particular community. And yet, by coming in Jesus, God's love became universal – traveling throughout many times, places, and communities. The good news of the vulnerable and beautiful baby, the crucified and disabled Anointed One is in our midst and will continue traveling throughout generations.

My dad is a collector of nativity scenes. He has big ones including one that take up a window sill, and little ones including one nestled into a ring box. And he has ones from places around the world: Italian – with angels in flowing gowns and so on, South America – with the family in a boat, Guatemalan – with figures shaped as an egg, and from somewhere else, the holy family as knitted figures. My dad also has a scene my grandma found in little shop. With time, the faces on the figures' faded, and so if you look closely at Mary you'll see two eyes, a nose, and a mouth drawn with pencil crayon by my grandma. Whenever people open the story of the Christ child, God coming in our human flesh, we make Jesus and his family look like us. The particular person of Jesus, born a refugee in

Palestine, is made universal and seen as God-with-us in our particular places and contexts. The universality of God's love for people in our particular time and place is a beautiful gift.

I am not suggesting we make our way to the manger immediately. The pilgrimage to the manger, to the universal love of God for our particular time and place, is not something to be rushed. And though God's love and grace reaches us simply for who we are and not what we accomplish, we are called to help prepare the way. We are called to make space for the Universal Love to reach particular places and peoples, in our own communities and around the world. In helping prepare the way God's Love can be borne by all and for all.

That is the gift I experience universal design offering to the church. It is important to discern how it impacts the particular people in your particular context. And, it is important to speak with people with disabilities about their/our particular needs and have a variety of perspectives shape the conversation. Though in doing so, it is essential the particular "accommodation" becomes universally available. Moving the conversation from cutting a pew so Miriam can sit there in her wheelchair, to having space where the Body of Christ can worship God together. Moving the conversation from how to create specialized ministries where Joe can have a safe space (though those are important too) to how can our bible studies /

games nights / potluck gatherings be a place for the whole community. These moves help shift us from a medical model of disability, seeing the individual as a “problem to be solved” to a social model of disability, asking how our environments/ contexts disable people from participating and leading. In doing so, we are making the church not Miriam- or Joe-friendly, but rather making our congregation reflect and practice how we make space for God’s Universal Love to be experienced by all.

Miriam Let us pray together,
 Creating God,
 As we listen and learn from one another,
 Create in us the tone humility to speak our needs while listening
 to each other’s.
 Create in us the spirit of possibility, working towards your
 kindom on earth.
 Create in us the call to become united for justice for all,
 so that we help prepare the way for
 your Universal Love covering our lives and our world.
 We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Pablo: Thank you, Miriam for that faith-focus for our discussion. We
 now are going to turn to Alice who will offer information and
 insights about universal design for building welcoming spaces.
 Alice teaches Inclusive Leadership Practices and is part Anti-
 Oppression and Inclusive Design communities of practice at
 Centennial College. Welcome, Alice.

Alice: Thank you, Miriam and Pablo. Miriam, your reflection grounds a discussion of universal design perfectly.

The work of creating welcoming spaces is a project of diverse groups and communities. In today's short webinar, we can offer only a glimpse at a few principles and approaches. There is no one-size fits all approach. Inclusive Design is contextual. If you are interested in learning more, please look through the resource list provided with this webinar.

Slide 1: Blue sky over yellow grass field with the words "Welcome. We are glad that you are here."

Alice: What makes a space welcoming for you? Feel free to add words or phrases in response in the chat area.

Pause for responses

Alice: I work in post-secondary education, and the primary framework I use for creating open, effective and welcoming spaces for learning is Universal Design for Learning, or UDL.

UDL sits within a larger movement toward Inclusive Design. Both are human-centred approaches focused on providing flexibility, options and ease of use. UDL and Inclusive Design are in use across sectors.

Slide 2: Coloured stripes across top and bottom of slide with title and date of webinar. Three icons across the middle – orange hand under individual to represent inclusive structures; purple circle of individuals to represent inclusive practices; and teal green group of individuals to represent inclusive relationships.

Alice: I will look at inclusive design in three areas – inclusive structures, physical space; inclusive practices, engagement space; and inclusive relationships, emotional space. Though I have separated these three areas for the purpose, I want to highlight that in real life, these areas are in play simultaneously. I want, too, to acknowledge that individuals are complex with identities shaped by a wide variety of personal experience, social factors and positionality within systems of power. Awareness of the complexity and intersectionality of identities is important in shaping conversations about inclusion.

With that said, it is important to point out that our understanding of disability, in particular, determines our responses. There are two prevailing models for understanding disability.

Slide 3: Medical Model of Disability

Black and white drawing of a person with arrows pointing at him and labeled "problem".

Alice: The medical model continues to shape a great deal of legislation and institutional accommodation practices. In this model, a person with a disability is seen to be the problem. The focus is on deficit, what individuals can't do. Solutions tend to be individual rather than system focused. The burden often is on the individual to identify and to ask for appropriate accommodations.

Slide 4: Social Model of Disability

Black and white drawing of a person with arrows pointing outward to society.

Alice: The social model focuses on systemic barriers and asks about inclusion.

Who is not included?

What could contribute to this exclusion?

What can you do differently to ensure inclusion?

Inclusive Design is one example of a broader, systemic approach for building welcoming and inclusive spaces.

Alice: Inclusive design focuses on reducing systemic barriers as it brings together usability and accessibility. While it is rooted in architectural and urban design, Inclusive Design is in use in many sectors, including post-secondary education.

Slide 5: Inclusive Structure – Physical Space

Dark orange speech bubble and icon of hand holding line-drawing of person to illustrate support.

Alice: When we talk about building welcoming spaces, we are talking about a space where people find themselves reflected and represented and where they see that all people are treated with respect.

The first space we will consider, is the physical space.

Slide 6: Inclusive Design Principles

Orange icon of hand holding line-drawing of person to represent support.

Alice; The principles of Inclusive Design include:

Equitable and Flexible Use

The design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences, abilities and needs. There are options for easy adjustments and changing configurations.

Low physical effort and tolerance for error

Efficient and comfortable use with minimal adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions. Access is easy. There are lots of safety nets built in – clear markings, soft edges, chances to reconsider – “Are you sure you want to delete this?”

Adequate space for all:

Appropriate size and space for approach, reach, manipulation, and use regardless of user's body size, posture or mobility.

Slide 7 Part I:

Photo of curb cut out on a sidewalk corner.

Alice: The lowly curb cut out has become a common symbol for inclusive design. While it was designed as an accessibility measure for individuals with mobility devices, it serves a much broader purpose for a number of other individuals.

Slide 7 Part II - Photos of man with bag on wheels, skateboarder, man in wheelchair, man with walker, and women with strollers added to the photo of the curb cut out.

Slide 8: Inclusive Design Aims for the Margins

Cartoon of man shoveling snow off of stairs while several people wait. Man in mobility device asks him to clear the ramp. Man shoveling says people are waiting for stairs. Man in mobility device says that if the ramp is cleared, everyone can go inside.

Alice: This cartoon just popped on Facebook this week. It shows a man shoveling snow from stairs while several people wait. A man with a mobility device asks if he can clear the ramp, and the man shoveling says that there are people waiting to use the stairs so he is clearing them first. The man with the mobility device points out that if the ramp is clear then they all can go inside.

That is the essence of inclusive and universal design. It aims at addressing the needs of those on the extreme ends of the spectrum. And in so doing, provides for everyone in between.

Slide 9: Group Discuss

Coloured speech bubbles to suggest conversation with two prompting questions for small group discussion.

Alice: We want to give you a chance to talk together. When you see the invitation pop on your screen, join the small group room. Your small groups will have five (5) minutes to discuss these two questions:

What inclusive structures are in place in you church or agency space and what barriers could be removed to make it more inclusive.

Feel free to add any significant insight from your conversations that you wish to share with the full group to the chat box.

Slide 10: Inclusive Practices

Purple speech bubble with purple and gray line drawing of heads in a circle to illustrate a group working together.

Alice: The next area is inclusive practices, how we shape engagement. This involves anticipating the full range of your community members. Who will engage? How will they engage? What barriers might exist?

Slide 11: Anticipate Diversity

Alice: As we consider methods of engagement, the practices we use for events, meetings, collaboration, there is a need to anticipate diversity of disabilities within key areas that impact how individuals access, process and engage information and then build to address that diversity.

And it is important to consider the continuum of disability as we imagine diversity. If you are designing to address hearing impairment, you actually may be addressing those who never have had hearing, those who are newly hearing impaired, those temporarily hearing impaired or those simply dealing with noise around them.

Likewise, there is a variety of situations that impact sight or speech or touch. Inclusive design aims at building supportive practices around the full continuum.

There also are invisible impairments to address – learning disabilities, mental health, situational stress or illness that can impact an individual’s abilities permanently or temporarily.

It also is important to recognize the intersectionality of needs that could require responses that are unique to any used to address just one particular disability.

Slide 12 – Universal Design Principles

Pink square with Multiple Means of Representation, blue square with Multiple Means of Action and Green Square with Multiple Means of Engagement.

Alice: Universal Design for Learning or UDL is a model of inclusive design particular to education, but its principles can help to shape inclusive practices in our communities as well. Universal design emphasizes flexibility and choice in three important areas.

UDL offers multiple means of representation to respond to unique ways individuals receive and process information. This webinar, for example, provides visual content, written content and verbal (auditory) content. An individual can use text reader or other assistive device to access the content.

Universal design then offers multiple means for individuals to internalize and manipulate the information. This might mean offering discussion, written reflection or allowing individuals to use play dough or other art supplies or to perform sketches, dances or other movements as they process content.

Finally, universal design provides multiple means of engagement. Perhaps individual quiet reflection or group discussions or through social media channel in the moment, over time.

I want to check in here to see if there are any questions. Please add them to the chat box. Are there specific questions about these UDL principles?

We hope to hold time at the end for your questions, so feel free to add them to the chat box as we move along, and we will come back to them before we close if time allows.

Slide 13: Group Discussion

Coloured speech bubbles to suggest conversation with two prompting questions for small group discussion.

Alice: So now you will have a chance to consider Universal Design for your next meeting, worship service or community event. When

you see the invitation pop on your screen, join the small group room. Your group will have five (5) minutes to discuss ways that you use these three UDL principles – Multiple Representation, Multiple Means of Action and Multiple Means of Engagement to reduce potential barriers to participation.

Feel free to add any significant insight from your conversation to the chat box.

Slide 14: Signs of Welcome

Blue and white handicap symbol with wheelchair. Other signs appear for scent-free space, sensory friendly movie screenings, closed-captioning on videos and signs that are colour codes and include both words and symbols.

Alice: Inclusive Design signals to all that a space is welcoming and supportive. The signs we post in our spaces can make our practices and commitments more intentionally displayed. Many may be familiar with the blue and white handicap symbol which tells us that there is a designated space or service for persons with certain disabilities. There are other ways you can communicate welcome to individuals with diverse needs.

Signs can communicate that you have anticipated diverse needs and put practices put into place to address them. Here are just a few examples. Spaces that encourage scent free practices, sensory friendly spaces, signage that uses UDL

multiple means of representation by providing icons, words and colour coding, or closed captioning on videos.

Slide 15: Inclusive Relationships

Teal green speech bubble with teal green and gray line drawing of many individuals together in a group to represent inclusive relationships.

Alice: Finally, inclusive design can consider relationships, how we treat one another, the commitments that shape our relationships, the emotional space that we create for and with one another.

Slide 16:

Teal green and gray line drawing of many individuals together in a group to represent inclusive relationships.

Alice: Inclusive Design offers a few basic rules for engagement. It would suggest that we come to our relationships with:

- Good heart
- Good mind
- Self-awareness
- Consultation
- Respect

Many of these traits may be familiar to you. They resonate with Miriam's reflection and prayer. Developing and articulating rules

for engagement or relationship commitments can be one more way to make welcome perceptible in your spaces.

Slide 17: Language Matters

Orange square with large title – Ableist Language and text box describing the impact of ableist language.

Alice: Language is a powerful relationship tool. Our words reflect the meditations of our hearts, our thoughts and biases. Language matters.

Ableism is a form of discrimination against individuals with disabilities, and it can take many forms. Everyday language is one of the most common ways negative views about people with disabilities are reinforced.

Slide 18: Words Matter

Orange geometric shape with words that avoid negative impact and pale green label – Say This. Second orange geometric shape with words that have potential for negative impact and pale green label – Not That.

Alice: We build welcoming spaces when we are aware of our words and choose words that communicate awareness and inclusion.

Slide 19: Thank you and Questions

Coloured stripes on top and bottom of slide with title and date of webinar. Large black question mark in the middle of the slide to invite questions.

Alice: I will end with by sharing our thanks for your interest and your commitments to building welcoming spaces. If we have time now for your questions, Miriam and I will respond as we are able. Please type your questions in the chat box.

Pablo: Thank you Alice and Miriam for facilitating this wonderful webinar. And thank you all for participating. This is the first in a series of webinar being offered by the Forum for Intercultural Leadership and Learning (FILL). In January 2020, we will have another webinar. For the exact topic and date, we will let you know through our website. If you have a webinar topic that you want us to offer, please let us know. And, if are interested to facilitate a webinar, please let us know. Lastly, if you want to sign up for our e-newsletter and learn more what FILL does, leave your contact information in the chat box or simply, email me. Wherever you are, have a great afternoon or evening.
Peace!