

# RETHINKING THE ISSUES – BUILDING ACCESSIBILITY

Demographics are changing. One in 8 Canadians are over 65, a number that is expected to double within the next 35 years. With our healthcare, there is an increasing number who will continue to be active beyond the age of 85. Couple this with the number of individuals who use a wheelchair and we have a significant portion of the Canadian population who need special consideration to access buildings.

If your church building was designed prior to the 1960's then you are likely well aware of the challenges it presents to elderly and handicapped worshippers. These older church buildings generally have many stairs with narrow doors and hallways. Are there things your congregation could do to make your building more accessible to seniors and handicapped persons?

## Building Code Requirements

Although building codes will vary from province to province ground floor accessibility is generally required in all new construction. Ground floor accessibility could also become a requirement in a major renovation. At this point, access to the basement or to upper floors has not been mandated unless the building is designated for use by people with physical disabilities. Therefore, in many provinces, if you are not planning a major renovation, the building code with its modern accessibility standards may not apply to your church building.

## Building Priority

Although the various building codes and laws may not require handicap accessibility, congregations want their buildings to serve their ministry. Could your building better serve your ministry? Is access to your building preventing you from reaching elderly people and people with disabilities? Ask yourself the following questions.

## Basic Accessibility Checklist

- If your church has a parking lot, do you have handicapped parking spaces (minimum 8ft. wide) close to the main entrance? Or, if your church doesn't have a parking lot, have you worked with your municipality to get "restricted parking" signs for the street in front of your entrance?
- Is the pedestrian walkway smooth from leaving their car to the front entry?
- Do you have ground level entrance, a ramp, or an elevator to the main floor entry?
- If another entry is required for disabled persons, is it attractive and easy to operate by a person in a wheelchair?
- Can the elevator be used without assistance? If not is a call button provided?
- Are there places for wheelchairs to fit comfortably in a variety of places in the sanctuary?
- Is the hallway from the main entry to the other building areas easily accessible?
- Is there a wheelchair washroom available on each level for the disabled?

## Resource for Restoration Churches in Canada

If the answer to some of the questions on the checklist is “No” and your congregation is considering one or more projects to make your building more accessible then Church of Christ Development Company Ltd. may be able to help. We provide low interest loans for capital projects including renovations to improve accessibility. Please contact us at [info@churchdevelopment.ca](mailto:info@churchdevelopment.ca) or call 780 406 1045 to learn about our loan process and Consultation which is offered at no charge to your congregation.<sup>[1]</sup>

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Note 1 - Acknowledgment to Church Extension “*Planning Guide*” publications