

A Commitment to Accessibility, January 2019.

The new year is a good time for us as a congregation to consider who we are and who we want to become as we move forward together as a caring community.

Many in our community have differing needs, and during the past several years we have made important strides toward creating an accessible environment for all. When our congregation moved to Lily Pads, we recognized that the stairs would be a barrier for some. The response was to install a ramp. Several handicapped parking spaces were also designated. Later, accessible seating in the sanctuary was marked, temporary additional accessible parking spaces for services are designated, and a sign shows the ramp location. Progress continues. In the fall, we received an accessibility grant through the Paul V. Sherlock Center at Rhode Island College to partially pay for an automatic door opening system at the top of the ramp. Installation should begin in January.

Many members and friends have hearing challenges. A few years ago, we set up an assistive listening system in the sanctuary consisting of electronic loops, supportive speakers, digital FM devices, and high-quality digital microphones.

Some congregation members have difficulty reading the Order of Service and other written information. Large-print Orders of Service are available each Sunday, and several sets of large-print hymnals were donated recently. An accommodations tab at the top of the UUCSC website homepage helps readers enlarge the text or hear text spoken.

The UUCSC's Disability Justice Team, part of our Social Justice Team, recognizes that there still is much to do to make our congregation accessible for persons of all backgrounds, ages, and needs. The sanctuary's hearing loop is adequate, but the supporting speaker system does not operate as it should. A new speaker system is under consideration.

Also, we recognize that our coffee hour, as currently structured, causes difficulty for those with anxiety and spatial issues.

The Unitarian Universalist Association assists congregations with their accessibility challenges. Accessibility guidance is available on the UUA website (<https://www.uua.org/accessibility>) and through the New England Region UUA Office.

Physical access is just one part of the challenge. Developmental, social, mental, and emotional needs and hidden disabilities must also be supported. Members of the Disability Justice Team believe that in order to live up to the words of our shared covenant, "To dwell together in peace, to seek the truth in love, and to help one and other," our congregation must make a commitment to accessibility.