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Title: Descriptive Analysis of Participation and Belonging among People with Disabilities in the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists

Abstract (50 words): More than 25% of adults in the U.S. live with a disability, while only 10% of NAD church members report disabilities. The good news is, those who are attending church are no different in measures of "being present," "being needed," and "being cared for." Recommendations to increase belonging are given.

Summary (250 to 500 words): Twenty-six percent of adults in the United States live with a disability and as age increases, so does prevalence (Lauer & Houtenville, 2019; Okoro et al., 2016). In church congregations with increasing losses of young adults, the proportion of members who have disabilities will continue to grow. Many people with disabilities (PWD) experience barriers in their communities and in their churches. These barriers are often social. Without careful attention to the physical and social barriers often experienced by these members, feelings of marginalization and retreat from church life may occur.

Sense belonging to a community is essential to overall wellbeing (Mannarini & Fedi, 2009; Roffey, 2013; Stewart et al., 2008). In contrast, the effects of social exclusion include low sense of self-worth, feelings of powerlessness, a tendency towards further isolation, and early mortality (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015; Stewart et al., 2008). In light of these findings, religious communities have the potential to combat the effects of isolation and contribute to wellbeing.

The Dimensions of Belonging framework, a multidimensional tool developed by Carter (2016) to explain sense of belonging among young church goers with intellectual and developmental disabilities, was used as a framework for this analysis. The ten dimensions of belonging include; being present, invited, welcomed, known, accepted, supported, cared for, befriended, needed, and loved. This framework was developed based on these assumptions; 1) "disability is a natural part of the human experience and in no way diminishes the right of individuals to participate in or contribute to society" and 2) "churches are called to be places of welcome, belonging, and contribution for people with disabilities and their families," (pg. 167). We accept these assumptions, and extrapolate the dimensions of belonging to include all types of disability.

Data collected from the Seventh-day Adventist Global Church Survey North American Division subset (n= 1,923) are used for this descriptive analysis. Three dimensions of belonging are explored including "being present," "being needed," and "being cared for." While there are significantly fewer people with disabilities attending the SDA church in the NAD than are represented in the U.S. population, preliminary findings suggest that those who are attending have the same perceptions of being needed, being cared for, and attend at similar rates to those

without disabilities. Recommendations are made about how churches can increase participation and how these same churches can remove barriers as they come to greater understanding of the needs of people with disabilities. The presentation concludes with strategies for increasing belonging among this "under-reached" people group.

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