

Grace Lutheran Church in Clearwater has created a new worship opportunity based on the idea that there are people in our communities that want to attend a Sunday morning Christian worship service but find it difficult to make it *to*, and/or to make it *through*, a typical worship service. Some people are born with issues that make them different, or that present challenges from day one. Others encounter issues as they grow into adulthood, or as they age into their geriatric years. Whatever their special needs, or whenever they may acquire them, too often they encounter subtle or even overt messages that a typical worshipping community cannot, or will not, accommodate or adapt to their needs.

We at Grace Lutheran Church were inspired by the story at the beginning of the second chapter of the Gospel of Mark. This story tells how four friends of a man who was paralyzed were so determined to get their friend to Jesus that they dug a hole in the roof above Jesus and lowered their friend to him. In response to the faith of the friends Jesus forgave the sins of the man who was paralyzed. This is the only time in the Christian scriptures that Jesus is shown forgiving the sins of a person (and then healing him) based on the faith of others. We take this to mean that our faithfulness can make a positive difference – spiritually, physically, emotionally, mentally – in the lives of others.

In the spirit of that story, we've tried remove barriers that might keep those who want to be in the presence of Christ apart from him. Thus we've worked hard to make the service as accommodating as possible:

- an 11:15 am start time
- 30 minutes long
- not requiring standing, yet still allowing for any movement necessary
- flexible seating with tables available
- only gluten-free bread and alcohol-free grape juice for Communion
- a copy of the bulletin available in Braille each week
- a new sound system to make normal volumes as clear as possible to help both those who are hard of hearing and those who are sensitive to loud or harsh sounds
- a paid staff person and additional volunteers on duty each week with special training and experience to work with those with special needs

Most importantly, we emphasize a welcoming and adaptive spirit so that all who attend know there's *always* a place for them at Grace Lutheran Church in Clearwater. In fact, that is the only "non-negotiable" for those that attend – they must be willing, to the best of their ability, to share with any and every one else who attends the service the same grace they themselves received in being welcomed. All are welcomed.

For more information, contact Grace Lutheran Church, Clearwater, Florida at graceclw.com