Dear Center for,

What does it mean to give the blind a chance in your church and community? What are you doing? I was privileged to write about this topic for a recent edition of *Adventist World* magazine (PDF copy available here). Giving blind people a chance can be a simple as saying "Hello."

Because this is a subject for which there is more than one "right" answer, we at Christian Record want to know how your church and community reaches out and befriends people who live with low vision. If your church or community doesn't have a plan, perhaps this month’s edition will help you get started.

I think Helen Keller said it best: "Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much."

Blessings!

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Christian Record Annual Day of Giving

You can help Christian Record reach out and befriend people who are
2014 CRSB/NCBC Event Calendar

April 12, 2014
Christian Record Annual Day of Giving

May 22, 2014
NCBC Timber Ridge Registration Deadline

May 25, 2014
NCBC Blind Bikers Across Tennessee Registration Deadline

May 29, 2014
Give to Lincoln Day

Click here for more information about NCBC!

CRSB Resource Focus:
Light Magazine

blind or visually impaired.

We are looking for Day of Giving Ambassadors:

- Visit www.CRSBday.org
  - Informational videos
  - Tips and ideas
  - Printables
- Tell how you feel Christian Record gives the blind a chance through special initiatives and programs: blind camps, audio books, large print magazines, and more
- Encourage your church or group to join you in supporting the outreach of Christian Record.

April 12 is the designated date, but any date is perfect for sharing these practical and easy ideas. Thank you in advance for being a Day of Giving Ambassador.

A Free Resource for You:

Legacy for Blind

Those who donate to Christian Record typically choose to do so monthly, annually, or when a special need arises. Have you ever considered including Christian Record in your will or estate plan?

Legacy for Blind is a website designed to help you learn about planned giving options. Click here to learn more.

What is Christian Record?

Christian Record Services for the Blind (CRSB) offers materials, programs, and friendship to children and adults who are blind or visually impaired.

The following services are provided free to all qualified individuals:

- Magazines and resources in braille, large print, and audio
- Audio lending library
- Bible school
- National Camps for Blind Children (NCBC)
- inSight4Vets digital players
Light magazine offers a Christian perspective on topics such as personal relationships, disabilities, health, and other issues of current interest.

Beginning publication in January of 2013, Light was preceded by the large-print magazine Lifeglow, which was published from 1974 to 2012. Issues of Lifeglow and Light are archived here.

To learn more about Christian Record and to request information about enrolling in services, click here.

All services and programs offered by Christian Record Services for the Blind are funded by generous financial gifts. Would you consider giving a gift today to help a person who is blind see Jesus?

Click the icons below to learn more!

The Constant Contact Cares for Kids program supports youth oriented nonprofit organizations. Learn more about the Cares for Kids program.

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Spam
Not spam
Forget previous vote
I have been guilty of doing this, and it hurts people in my church. It promotes isolationism. It encourages people to be distant. It builds walls and prevents people from building real relationships.

Other fellow church members have done this too.

What are we doing, and who is being hurt?

Let me explain with a short story of my own experience.

I attend a large church, where it’s sometimes difficult to identify visitors and members. However, on this particular Sabbath I knew that this particular couple had not been to my church in a long time. They sat alone through the church service in a pew that would normally hold a dozen people. The pews in front and behind them were also empty. No one greeted them after the service concluded, not even a breezy “Happy Sabbath” as they walked by.

My husband noticed them first and whispered, “Hey, you should say hello.” I froze. He and I knew this couple. The husband is visually impaired, and the wife is completely blind. They would recognize me by my voice before I finished my greeting, yet I remained firmly in the pew.

In my work at Christian Record Services for the Blind, I had interacted with this couple. My job is to communicate a message of welcoming acceptance, “see each blind person as a person first,” and so many other things. But this moment wasn’t about marketing spin or well-timed Facebook posts or appealing for funds; it was about me and my own fears, when it should have been about them and their need for acceptance and belonging.

To my relief, one of the pastors walked over and started chatting with the couple. I had escaped what could
have been an awkward and uncomfortable conversation. Or maybe not. “Go talk to them,” a still and small voice prodded me. I allowed myself to become distracted by something insignificant. When I looked over to where the two sat, they were walking to a Sabbath school class. There went my opportunity. Had I acted, I know others would have joined us, and we would have had a wonderful time reconnecting with these individuals.

When I’ve shared this story with others, I’ve heard some say with an uncomfortable giggle, “Well, they can’t see you anyway.” And just like that, the topic is closed, and another is hurriedly started. Because, really, if someone is blind, they can’t hear, right? Wrong.

My blind or visually impaired friends have shared many stories about hearing a person walk toward them, then scurry away. Other stories are shared of conversations started, then abruptly ended, often while my friends are talking, leaving them feeling embarrassed and isolated. There are even more stories of walking into church and being welcomed by no one, not knowing the order of service or when offering was called, not being guided to restrooms or Sabbath school, and smelling the fellowship meal but not being invited.

Are we really, as a church, as individuals, that cold and distant? While it’s easy to read this article and say, “I’d never do that,” have you actively sought out those who experience neglect? Isn’t it time we all make a conscious effort to give those who are blind a chance?

What Does That Mean?
So much of modern culture depends on what is seen. Basic, everyday activities require vision to ensure success (shampoo versus conditioner, matching clothing and shoes, proper grooming, etc.). Once out the door, getting to work or the daily activity also demands visual acuity, whether using public transportation, walking, or driving a car.

The work world is filled with visual cues and stimuli. Interacting with coworkers and supervisors is always better face to face, because most communication is delivered in vocal tone, facial expression, and body language.

What about mealtimes? Packing a lunch of peanut butter and jelly requires knowing which jar is the jelly and not pickle relish, though I’ve been told not to knock that combo either.

How about church, especially when visiting one for the first time? Our church services are loaded with visual elements: such as printed bulletins, song lyrics projected on a screen, print Bibles. Our church buildings may offer printed maps for finding exits, restrooms, and Sabbath school rooms. The occasional braille sign indicates the location of an elevator or the restroom, but how does the person who is blind or visually impaired find the signs to know where they are?

For those who are visually impaired, life operates much the same as it does for those who have full vision. Most have learned work-arounds (a rubber band on the conditioner bottle, braille tags for identifying colors on clothing, careful shoe placement in the closet, memorized grooming techniques, and more).

Employment is an option for some with visual impairment, though employers can do much more to be welcoming and accommodating to qualified applicants regardless of physical challenges. Technology offers much in the way of “reading” or magnifying documents and Web sites. Cellular telephones, such as the iPhone, come equipped with accessibility options that enable users to magnify text or “read” all navigation and activity within the device. Web chats offer much in the way of communicating with coworkers across the office or around the world. Laws in many countries help in this regard, laying out standards for which accommodations make employment opportunities more attainable.

Churches can offer bulletins in braille; greeters can enlist helpers to guide guests to the sanctuary, the restroom, and Sabbath school classrooms. Churches can also help members with Sabbath school lessons and Bibles in their preferred format (braille, large print, or audio) through Christian Record Services for the Blind (ChristianRecord.org). In fact, Christian Record stands ready as your church’s partner in ministry to help those who need assistance in receiving needed materials.

Being blind doesn’t mean that life stops; it means that life is approached differently. To give a blind person a chance involves changing what we think about blind people, and how they choose to function in a visually driven world. We should not assume that because a person cannot see, they also cannot think.

When we look at the world through the lens of openness and acceptance, we may encounter blind people who hold doctoral degrees, who are bankers, who are prizewinning authors, who are sought-after pastors and orators, musicians, and more! Giving the blind a chance means setting aside our own limited vision and taking on an expanded view of the world, one that includes visually impaired individuals and all who live with physical challenges.
Jesus’ Method

In John 9, John shares a story about Jesus curing a man born blind. The story reflects a societal belief regarding those who were blind: the man’s disability was caused by his parents’ sinfulness.

Though his perspective is not shared in the story, I can allow my imagination to explore what it would have been like for this man . . .

Footsteps and excited voices coming toward me.

Questions about me, not asked to me. Speaking as if I were a broken brick on the city wall.

A different voice: His voice is kind, but I’m not sure what’s going on. I begin to shake. So many people on so many other days have tricked me into trusting, That’s when I lose the few coins I’ve gathered, or someone utters a curse at me, or others kick and spit on me. I brace for another attack.

Someone kneels in front of me. I hear His robes, His breath, and dirt being scraped from the ground. I tense and turn away.

I jolt at the sound of spit, but this time it wasn’t aimed at my face or my feet.

Gentle hands touch my face. I feel kindness in His touch. Something warm and wet is patted on my eyelids.

“Go wash in the Pool of Siloam.” I’m helped to my feet.

What does this all mean? I have mud on my face, and I don’t care. I’ve never felt such peace and joy. Who is that Man?

In giving this man sight, Jesus opened the eyes of many, including those of us who read the story today. In one act Jesus drew away the curtain regarding cultural beliefs surrounding people with physical challenges. In giving this man vision, as well as the courage to testify (remember: he was thrown out of the synagogue for answering the Pharisees’ questions), the blindness of the religious leaders was also exposed.

Coming Full Circle

I often think back to that Sabbath when I didn’t show the love of Christ to our visually impaired visitors. That moment serves as a lesson to me to never let an opportunity slide by to be the hands and feet of Jesus in ways that are simple and practical.

Perhaps you feel quivers of nervousness as you read this. Maybe you are simply uncomfortable about reaching out to others. If so, such words as “hospitality is not my spiritual gift” might flow from your lips.

Consider: If this couple were your grandparents, or someone very special to you, would you behave differently?

Would you jump up to greet them? What else would you do to make sure their visit to your church was as pleasant as possible?

Sharing this same kind of love with the physically challenged people who visit and attend your church should be obvious, really. This should not fall solely on pastors and elders. This is not someone else’s duty.

Practically speaking, consider the following tips you can use when you encounter someone who is blind or visually impaired:

- **Just say hello:** The simplest greeting is best. Face the person, extend your own hand and take his or hers in your own for a handshake, and give a genuine welcome.

- **Manners matter:** A person who cannot see does not have the same visual distractions you do. When you
are in conversation, focus only on them. Do not suddenly end the conversation, walk away, or talk above or away from them.

Include others: If other friends come by, invite them to join the conversation and make introductions.

FORT for thought: Looking for topics to discuss? FORT is a useful acronym to remember.

Family
Occupation
Recreation
Testimony

Worship together: If the bulletin is not available in braille or large print, offer to read it to your visitors. Consider purchasing large-print Bibles for visitor use. Assist in describing visual elements of the church service and give cues for prayer times and offering.

GPS, church-style: A visually impaired visitor may not know how to find the restroom, Sabbath school classrooms, or sanctuary. Offer to show them around so they are comfortable navigating the building.

Does your guest use a cane? Do they prefer to take your arm and allow you to lead them? It’s always good to ask—taking and leading a blind person by the arm is not always a good practice.

Does your guest have a guide dog? Seeing Eye and other assistive dogs belong in church with their owners. Ask if any other accommodation (water, a patch of lawn, etc.) might be helpful. Educate other members to relate to these valuable helpers in a golden rule way.

Let’s go to lunch: If your church offers a fellowship meal, invite your guests to join you and your family. If no meal is scheduled, invite the guest to your home to enjoy a meal.

Learn more: How did your new friends travel to church? What can you do to help them attend every week? Who can help you implement this plan?

Why Give the Blind a Chance?

Followers of Jesus have a unique commission. Ellen G. White wrote on this topic: “I saw that it is in the providence of God that widows and orphans, the blind, the deaf, the lame, and persons afflicted in a variety of ways, have been placed in close Christian relationship to His church; it is to prove His people and develop their true character. Angels of God are watching to see how we treat these persons who need our sympathy, love,
Our actions and attitudes are an outpouring of the love of Christ within our hearts.

and disinterested benevolence. This is God’s test of our character. If we have the true religion of the Bible, we shall feel that a debt of love, kindness, and interest is due Christ in behalf of His [brothers and sisters]; and we can do no less than to show our gratitude for His immeasurable love to us while we were sinners unworthy of His grace, by having a deep interest and unselfish love for those who are our [brothers and sisters] and who are less fortunate than ourselves.**

By giving people who are blind or visually impaired a chance to fully participate and feel included in your church, we are not merely participating in some cosmic lab experiment. Rather, our actions and attitudes are an outpouring of the love of Christ within our own hearts.

By practicing kindness, a kindness “muscle” gains strength, flexibility, and stamina.

Since that day I have received many other opportunities when I could extend a hand of friendship and a word of encouragement to a person who is blind. That first time, my heart pounded, my voice trembled a bit, then I was reminded that I was in the presence of a friend. Give blind persons a chance today, in your church and in everyday situations. By giving blind individuals a chance, you’re allowing God to give you a chance to minister in your hometown mission field. ■


Jeri Lyn Rogge is assistant to the president for development at Christian Record Services for the Blind. She writes from Lincoln, Nebraska, and is constantly learning new ways to give the blind a chance. To learn more, visit CRSBday.org.