

A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR



Disability and the Church author and pastor with Autism Spectrum Disorder, Lamar Hardwick writes, “Every human that God has taken the time to skillfully craft in the womb comes complete with a *purpose*, a mission if you will, and while that is absolutely true and gives meaning and value to all life, purpose isn’t fulfilled in a vacuum—purpose must have a place.”

Highland Park United Methodist Church is where I found my purpose and Belong Disability Ministry is where I gave it a place; a ministry that nurtures the purposes and potential of individuals of all ages, socioeconomic statuses, and abilities.

In 2011, as a freshman at Southern Methodist University, I attended my first Cornerstone worship service. On my way out, I grabbed a bulletin and jumped to the volunteer opportunities section, “*Volunteers needed for Jesters, a musical theater program for teens and adults with disabilities.*” That afternoon I reached out, and the following Saturday I attended my first Jesters rehearsal. From the first script read-through, my purpose was ignited, and by volunteering with the Spotlight Musical Theater program, I kept the fire alive.

Though my title has changed over the years from volunteer to coordinator to director, one thing that hasn’t changed is my passion for the Belong Disability Ministry. As of today, over 240 participants attend our programs, and thanks to the generosity of HPUMC families, volunteers, and staff, participants are also provided a safe place to discover their purposes and continue to grow in confidence, faith, and community. We look forward to an exciting year of programs and welcoming new members into the Belong family.

Blessings to you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stephanie Newland".

Stephanie Newland
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