Sometimes the quest for accessibility at church doesn't end when the wheelchair ramp is installed. Accessibility takes other forms, too. It is found in attitudes, in opportunities to serve, in social connections. At a recent Disability Specific Training for Faith Based Organizations session, presenters stressed that while many church buildings provide physical accommodations, attitudes sometimes still get in the way. The training sessions are offered through the CPD, and they focus on dispelling both physical and attitudinal barriers. In addition to offering training, a website advises leaders of all faiths on ways to make sure all members are included. Here is a quote from its homepage: “The National Organization on Disability found that approximately 85% of people with and without disabilities state their religious faith is important in their lives, but only 47% of people with disabilities attend church at least once a month, most likely due to architectural and invisible barriers. But perhaps the biggest mistake that people without disabilities can make is to be so paralyzed by the fear of messing up that they don’t do anything. The best way to get over that fear is to get to know the people with disabilities in the congregation on a personal level. Presenters agreed that a lot of specialized training isn’t usually necessary, but interaction is. Break the ice. Don’t worry so much about saying the wrong thing that you say nothing at all. “Be creative”, said Sachin Pavithran, the assistive technology specialist at the Center for Persons with Disabilities. If one solution doesn’t work, try another. Treat the person with the disability and their family members as your best advisors on how to make accommodations. And if you need advice on how to include everyone in your church service, here are some resources: The Disabilities and Faith website is a great one-stop shop for finding training, resources and information on assistive technology. The Access Utah Network is Utah’s prime source for information and referral for individuals with disabilities and their caregivers. The LDS Ability website offers resources and information on specific disabilities.
A DVD with more information is available through Marilyn Hammond.
Additional Disability Specific Training for Faith Based Organizations sessions will take place in Tooele on June 2 and in Randolph/Garden City on June 9. For more information contact Connie Panter.