

DISABILITY IN MINISTRY

The Disability Concerns Network Quarterly Newsletter

This Lausanne Movement newsletter connects influencers and ideas for global disability ministry, as mandated by Luke 14:21-23, strengthening and multiplying disability leaders globally.

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Responding to the COVID-19 Crisis

Thankfully, with the emergence of vaccinations, global situations are beginning to improve, but situations are still dire for marginalized groups like those with disabilities. In the poorest areas where starvation is crouching at the door, few are concerning themselves with disability rights or with the spiritual well-being of the marginalized. The World Bank Group laments that “the quest to end [global] poverty has suffered the worst setback.”

In times of such crisis, how can we, as Lausanne leaders in disability ministry, best respond? There is a vastness of cultures and needs across our world, but this newsletter aims to highlight how others are responding, offering ideas which can inspire and encourage you in your local communities. May the Lord give you wisdom and strength as you pour out your heart to reach and disciple those with disabilities and their families.

- Joni Eareckson Tada, board member of Lausanne and founder of Joni and Friends International, has been at the forefront of COVID-19 response. In these weeks and months of the pandemic, she has said, “Personally, I am committing every ounce of effort to ‘be aglow and burning with the Spirit as I serve the Lord’ in 2021 – the desperate needs among the world’s disabled are just too urgent.” This leadership has lifted up fervent prayer and innovative ways to offer incarnational disability ministry, while still upholding safety. In 2020, Joni and Friends prayerfully pressed forward with its “40 weeks of service” to help resolve this global crisis. For details, see [Nov/Dec 2020 Ministry News](#).
- In further prayer response to COVID-19, Joni and Friends International has started the Joni’s House ministry in these recent months of 2021. Each Joni’s House location reaches out to those with disabilities and their families in critically poor areas, where starvation is often feared more than COVID-19. Partnering with local churches and government partners, Joni and Friends is providing medical and mobility support as well as patient advocacy for patients and families affected by disability. As they are providing necessary physical care, these ministries also are providing spiritual and emotional care. Such wholistic care is an inspiring example of serving as the hands and feet of Jesus, fulfilling



the Luke 14 mandate. For specific Joni's House stories and needs in places like El Salvador, India and Uganda, follow this link to [Joni's House](#).

We pray that all of us involved in disability ministry can be the hands and feet of Christ. Even in wealthier places like the United States where basic survival needs may have been met, another struggle is chronic loneliness, which significantly affects health and general wellbeing. Isolation is a hardship facing all groups of people, but an August 2020 [study](#) in *Disability Health* has shown the rate of loneliness to be significantly higher among those with disabilities. In "Almost Friends," [an article](#) from the *Journal of the Christian Institute on Disability*, Jennifer Baca and Dr. Jeff McNair discuss how paid caregivers or medical staff are often the only "friends" individuals with disabilities have. COVID has exacerbated this situation.

As leaders in disability ministry, what can we virtually do to offset such loneliness? Although a different approach will likely be necessary in poverty-stricken areas, social media has great potential for those with access to technology. Check out the "Disability in Mission Through Technology" [article](#). Also, a British woman with blindness has written a [blog](#) called "Everyone Can" about the benefits of social media to people with physical and intellectual disabilities. Although a secular blog, it provides some helpful ideas. Also, we cannot forget other long distance-care. There is always a good reason to call or send a special card.

Of course, we continue to pray for release from COVID-19, whether through the new vaccinations or through other innovative ways. We want to invite our new friends to come and be with us in fellowship and in times of worship. Listen about such a place of belonging through [a podcast](#) provided by Joni and Friends' Church Engagement.

Disability Ministry Training

In 2 Timothy 2:15, Paul instructs Timothy, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth." Likewise, we too want to be equipped for disability ministry. Not only do we want to correctly use the word of truth as we minister to those with disabilities, but also, we want to have a thorough understanding of those we serve. Training is vital. There is always something we can glean from others, which can educate, encourage and inspire. This section aims to provide some links to help in this pursuit.

- For those beginning to work in disability ministry as well as for those more experienced, Lausanne Global Classroom offers a [9-video](#) series regarding Disability Concerns.
- We also encourage the [reading](#) of "God's Story of Disability: The Unfolding Plan from Genesis to Revelation" by Dave Deuel, from the *Journal of the Christian Institute on Disability* (JCID).
- Baylor University's Institute for Faith and Learning offers [several resources](#) that provide instruction in areas of biblical and disability studies. You can download the whole *Disability* issue, with six study guides and lesson plans. Also, you will see additional resources like book reviews, hymns, and further readings.

With such resources, the hope is for you to study and engage with the articles through the lens of Scripture. It can be very beneficial to journal. We also encourage you to dialogue with others, especially others involved with disability ministry. As iron sharpens iron (Proverbs 27:17), we too should sharpen each other. This is why Joni and Friends promotes such opportunities as Global Access. Learning together is always a deeper, fuller experience.

Disability in Mission

The Cape Town Commitment II-B-4 established that we, as part of the Lausanne Movement, encourage church and mission leaders to think not only of mission among those with a disability, but to recognize, affirm and facilitate the missional calling of believers with disabilities themselves as part of the Body of Christ.

In other words, we recognize that those with disabilities should not only be encouraged to be an active part of disability ministry, but also, they need to be leaders in the Lord's "upside-down" kingdom. The following highlights both inspire and transform our missiological perspectives:

- On a regular basis, Joni and Friends updates its "Disability in Mission" blog. Each first-person account shares how God is using disability to give an unexpected advantage in ministry.
 - The book *Disability in Mission: The Church's Hidden Treasure*, edited by Dave Deuel and Nathan John, provides a radical change in approaches to missiology, missions, and praxis for the twenty-first-century global cultural context. It explores a pattern whereby God works powerfully in missions through disability and not in spite of it.
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Calls to Action for the Disability Community

Refute Speak Train Heed
Stigmas Truth Leaders Insights

At the Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization in 2010 at Cape Town, South Africa, a key focus centered on how the church should build the peace of Christ in our divided and broken world. This brokenness includes disability. Therefore, the Lausanne Congress included disability concerns in its calls to action (read *Commitment II-B-4*).

For those with disabilities, we have been called to:

- Refute stigmas, stereotypes and poor theology.
- Speak the truth, using God's Word as the standard.
 - All people have been created in God's image.
 - Disability does not stem from sin or a lack of faith.
- Raise up leaders in the church and its mission.
 - Individuals with disabilities should not merely be participants.
- Make our churches places of inclusion and equality.
 - We must listen to those with disabilities and heed their insights.



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