

Developing a Disability Ministry



Let's look at Jesus' example as a model for encountering people affected by disability. He noticed them, prayed to His Father for them, and ministered to them. So what can you do to build a disability ministry?

- 1. Pray** Prayer is the best place to start. Pray for God's wisdom for yourself and for discernment for leaders in your church. Ask God to call people to serve in the ministry and to bring people affected by disability in your community into the life of your church.
- 2. Enlist Leadership Support** Leadership support must be obtained for a strong disability ministry. It is vital to stay connected with your minister(s) and any governing boards for their support and commitment. Follow the normal protocol for starting a ministry at your church.
- 3. Gather a Team** A team is at the heart of any successful ministry. Gather a core leadership team to oversee the ongoing development of the ministry. It also takes many willing volunteers to build and support a growing inclusive program.
- 4. Begin Small** Begin with the people and resources that God provides. You can't go too slowly, but you can try to move too fast. Develop a plan utilizing resources which will accommodate the current needs of worshipers with disabilities. Look for available resources and wait for God to provide the increase.
- 5. Educate Team and Congregation** Educate your team and the church. Obtain training resources from Joni and Friends or other sources to train your team and congregation. Conduct a church survey to discover unknown needs within your congregation and to raise awareness.
- 6. Assimilate into the Church** Assimilate people affected by disability into the fabric of the church. Look for ways to include people affected by disability in existing church programs. When possible, allow people with disabilities to use their spiritual gifts to serve the church body.
- 7. Adjust and Grow the Ministry** The needs of children and adults with disabilities are ever changing. Be ready to adjust to them as new opportunities become available. If a plan is not working, try something new. Contact [Joni and Friends local offices](#) for support, or visit the [Church Relations Department](#) at Joni and Friends.

See the [Developing Disability Ministry Map](#) or [Frequently Asked Questions](#) on the following pages for more detailed information.

Developing Disability Ministry

So you are thinking of starting a disability ministry and not sure what to do next? Sometimes, disability ministry appears complicated and complex. Joni and Friends, with our [Field Ministry](#) offices, is here to walk alongside you in the process of starting or growing a ministry. Your church can start disability ministry with something as simple as having a person by the parking spaces designated for people affected by disability, to welcome, escort, assist or otherwise help. This practical and yet uncomplicated action puts you ahead of 85% of the churches in America!

A disability ministry grows over time. Start out simple, ministering to the needs of those God has placed in the church or in the local neighborhood. As individual and family spiritual needs are attended to, other opportunities will arise that allow the ministry to grow. Each and every church is unique (just as we are as individuals), so there is no one path or exact set of things you need to get started, but it is a process. Start out by utilizing the resources God has already provided.

Resources include individuals in your church who work with people affected by disability in the secular world: doctors and nurses, special needs educators, physical and occupational therapists and many more. Resources also include your current church facilities. God has supplied the resources for the ministry He has called your church to do in your community.

Having another pair of eyes, or being able to talk with someone else, can help shed light on workable answers to what seem like insurmountable challenges. This is where the local [Field Ministry office](#) of Joni and Friends can provide assistance. Assistance in: education and training for your church; hosting a disability awareness event for the congregation; establishing a team to lead the effort; deciding to mainstream or have a special needs classroom; truly assimilating those who have been affected by disability into the fabric of the church; serving the congregation; and much more.

Starting a disability ministry does not have to be a complicated or scary process. We're here to help. Please look at the [Developing a Disability Ministry Map](#) on page 4 or use the [Frequently Asked Questions](#) (FAQ) on page 5. In any case, please let us serve your church from the local [Field Ministry office](#) or from the [International Disability Center](#).

God bless,
Joni and Friends

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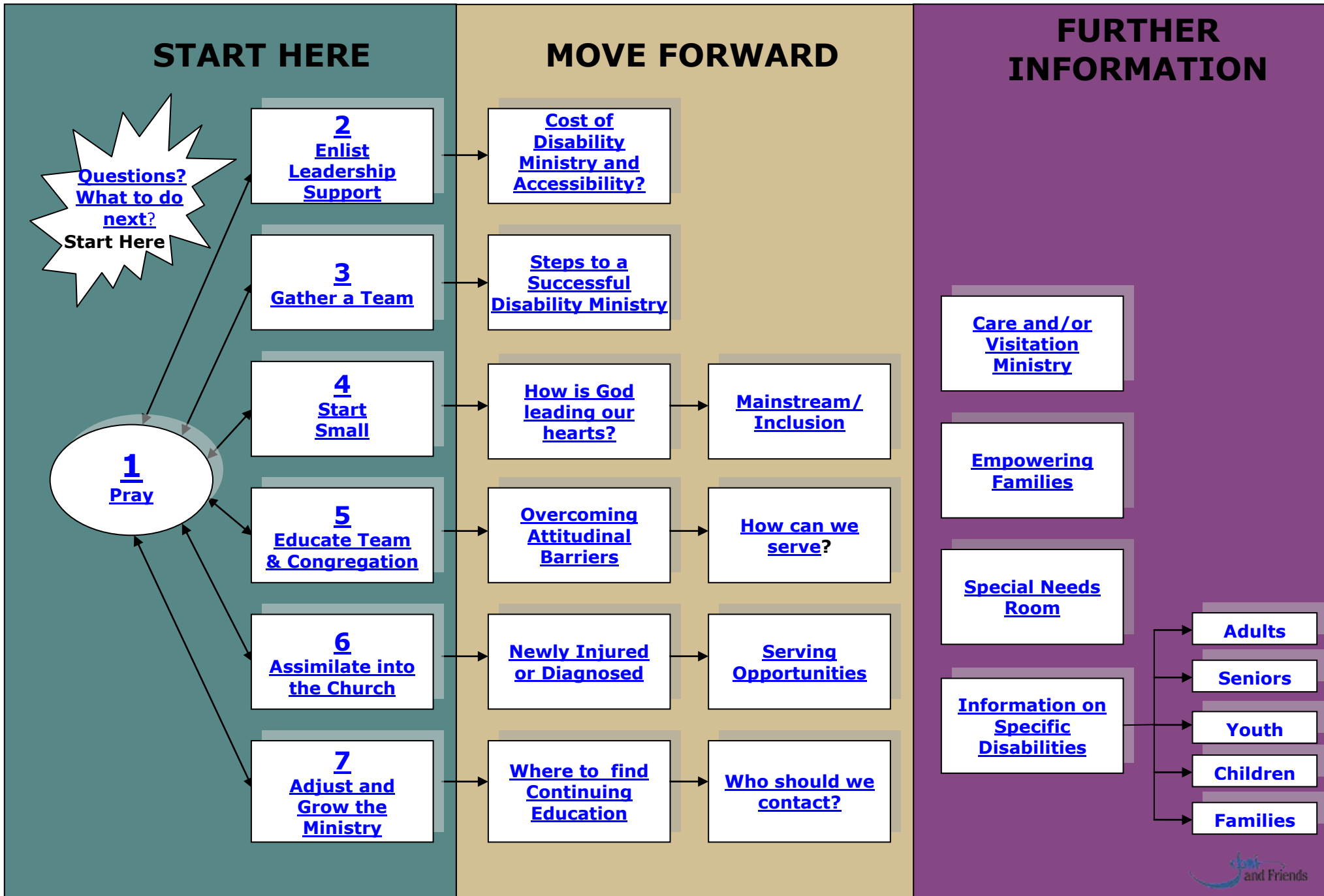
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If you are using a screen reader please proceed to [Frequently Asked Questions](#) (page 4). Page 3 is not completely accessible to screen readers, but all of the information from page 3 is contained on [page 4](#).

Developing a Disability Ministry



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

CLICK ON THE LINKS BELOW FOR DETAILED INFORMATION ON EACH TOPIC

1. Pray

- [Pray, pray and pray some more](#)

2. Enlist Leadership Support

- [How do we enlist leadership support?](#)
Move Forward
 - [What are the costs of Disability Ministry and Accessibility?](#)

3. Gather a Team

- [How do we assemble a team?](#)
Move Forward
 - [What are the steps to a successful Disability Ministry?](#)

4. Begin Small

- Move Forward*
- [How is God leading our hearts?](#)
 - [Mainstream/Inclusion](#)

5. Educate Team and Congregation

- [How do we educate the team and the congregation?](#)
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 - [How do we overcome attitudinal barriers?](#)
 - [How can we start serving the people God places in our church's path?](#)

6. Assimilate into the Church

- [How do we assimilate those with disabilities and their families into the fabric of the church?](#)
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7. Adjust and Grow the Ministry

- [How can we help our disability ministry adjust and grow?](#)
Move Forward
 - [Where to find continuing education](#)
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Further Information

- [Care and/or Visitation Ministry](#)
- [Empowering Families](#)
- [Special Needs Room](#)
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Questions? What to do next? Start Here

When God bring you a special needs individual and family Join and Friends is here to help your church know how to include them. Contact the [local Joni and Friends Field Ministry Office](#) and they will be glad to help you analyze the resources the Lord has provided and the challenges you face in starting or growing a disability ministry. Enter your zip code in the box and then contact (call or email) the Field Ministry office near you.

- Typically the boxes in the first column (in the [diagram above](#)) are the most common starting points to begin a disability ministry. Following the numbers (1 -7) lead to the next step(s). You can find more information or go deeper into a topic by following the black arrows to the right.
- You can also click on any of the boxes for information on that particular topic; you don't have to follow a pre-defined path or order (although the first four steps are critical to a sustaining ministry).
- [Start small](#). Your church can start a disability ministry with something as simple as having a person in the parking lot, by the spaces designated for people affected by disability, to welcome, escort, assist families or otherwise help.
- A disability ministry grows over time. Start out simple, ministering to the needs of those God has placed in the church or in the local neighborhood. As these individuals and family's spiritual needs are attended to, you will see other opportunities arise that will allow the ministry to grow. Start by utilizing the resources God has already provided and then grow the ministry over time.
- Remember to pray, pray and pray!

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How Do We Start a Disability Ministry?

Contact the [local Joni and Friends Field Ministry Office](#) . They will be glad to help you analyze the resources the Lord has provided, and the challenges you face, starting a disability ministry in your church. Follow the step in the map and you be off to a good start.

- ["Special Needs Smart Pages"](#) - You'll find advice, answers, and articles about teaching children with special needs. This is a comprehensive resource, providing churches with tools for reaching out to children with special needs.
- Review in the Gospels the example of Jesus and how He treated disabled persons. Ask several Christians to pray for you as you endeavor to reach out to the disabled in your community. Read ["Successful Models of Disability Ministry"](#) to see how others have been successful in starting a disability ministry.
- ["The Father's House"](#) - *Welcoming and Including People and Families Affected by Disability*. This DVD for church use, presents 10 practical ideas for becoming a disability friendly church. It also helps churches address fears and misunderstandings that are common when beginning disability ministry.
- Look for upcoming Disability Ministry Training Events sponsored by some of our [Field Offices](#) and the Joni and Friends International Disability Center in Agoura Hills. These events are great opportunities to meet others interested in disability ministry, network with other churches and gain valuable information on starting and growing disability ministry.
- ["Christianity with Sleeves Rolled Up"](#) booklet - Discover your spiritual gift and how to use it to start ministering to others.
- ["Through the Roof"](#) - *A Guide to Assist Churches in Developing an Effective Disability Ministry* - This manual will explain how to prepare for a disability ministry and outreach. Includes a ministry worker's training course, plus a myriad of recommended resources.
- ["Exceptional Teaching"](#) by Jim Pierson - Helping children with special needs reach their full potential has been the lifework of Jim Pierson. Now, with this book, he shares his knowledge so that you can become the exceptional teacher.
- ["Practical Pathways"](#) - *Reaching and Training Volunteers for Ministry with Special Needs Children* - This invaluable resource is designed to help church leaders inspire and involve volunteers in disability ministry.
- ["So That My House Will Be Full"](#) - *A Guide to Including People with Disabilities in the Church* - This resource presents ideas for inclusion in areas such as evangelism, baptism and communion, worship, children's ministry, and church leadership.
- ["All Things Possible"](#)- *Calling Your Church Leadership to Embrace Disability Ministry* - Here is a discussion of the scriptural basis for disability ministry, a thoughtful look at a Christ-like posture and purpose that will call your church leadership to action that will transform your church.
- ["Give Them Jesus"](#) - *Evangelizing Children with Special Needs* by Pat Verbal - All children are capable of experiencing God's love in amazing ways. It is never too early (or too late) to tell a child about Jesus.
- ["Responding with Compassion"](#) - *Ministry Models for Families Affected by Disability* - Every family is precious to God, however those affected by disability go to church with unique needs.
- Contact other [Churches and Organizations that have a Disability Ministry](#) near you who have already started a Disability Ministry for help and guidance.

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Pray

Be faithful in prayer. The most important starting point for any ministry effort is prayer. It is interesting to note that Jesus Himself took the time to pray to the Father before He selected the twelve apostles.

Prayer helps us remember to put God first in all that we do. It reminds us to rely solely on Him for wisdom, guidance, and strength. In prayer we can also ask God to help us view people who have disabilities, and disability ministry, through His eyes instead of our own. For these reasons, prayer ought to undergird all you do in your church's Disability Ministry Outreach.

- Pray that your church will recognize the need to welcome people who have disabilities.
 - Pray for opportunities to develop friendships with individuals who have disabilities.
 - Pray for each member of the group that is setting up a Disability Ministry. Ask that you would work well together as a team.
 - Pray that God would move the hearts of people to serve in the disability ministry.
 - Pray that your church's disability ministry would serve as a role model to the surrounding community.
- What is God laying on your heart?
 - Jot that down to share with your church leadership
 - "[Helping Those Who Hurt](#)" by H. Norman Wright - Have you ever been in the uncomfortable position of not knowing what to do when a friend is suffering a loss or enduring a crisis? It's not a question of whether to help, but of how and when to lend a hand. Specific suggestions tell you not only what to do but what not to do.
 - Enter "[Prayer](#)" on the Joni and Friends website in the Search box under the Help & Resources page

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Enlist Leadership Support

- Questions to answer:
 - a. Have you talked with your pastor or minister? This is so important! You need your pastor's support and approval, someone to turn to with questions and for help.
 - b. Have you talked with any other governing board(s)? This also is very important! You want enthusiastic support from your church board.
 - c. How does a disability ministry fit the mission of your church? Review your church's mission statement.
 - d. Follow the normal protocol for starting a ministry at your church. There may be several times in the process that you need to seek leadership approval.
- Disability Outreach: "[Helpful Tips for Pastors](#)" by Joni Eareckson Tada
- "[The Father's House](#)" DVD - Welcoming and Including People and Families Affected by Disability This DVD for church use presents 10 practical ideas for becoming a disability friendly church. It also helps churches address fears and misunderstandings that are common when beginning disability ministry.
- "[All Things Possible](#)" - *Calling Your Church Leadership to Embrace Disability Ministry* - by Stephanie O. Hubach - Do you have a passion to see people with disabilities and their families embraced and included in the life of your local church? Would you like to share that passion with those in church leadership? Here is a discussion of the scriptural basis for disability ministry, a thoughtful look at a Christ-like posture and purpose that will call your church leadership to action that will transform your church.
- Review "[In His Image](#)" DVD - Families affected by disability need the support of a caring church family. In this DVD, you'll see how one church is reaching out to serve children with disabilities. You will hear from parents who want God's best for their children and discover how God is drawing them into a faith community. This is a great promotional tool for recruiting volunteers in your church
- *Through the Roof* Introduction video by Joni (coming soon)
- "Amsterdam 2000" video by Joni (coming soon)
- Luke 14 Mandate
- Luke 14 Video (coming soon)

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Cost of Disability Ministry and Accessibility?

There are many aspects of disability ministry that have little or no cost associate with starting and running them, other than a few volunteers to assist. For example, having a greeter by the accessibility parking space to offer assistance, if need. Doing just this one item would put your church further down the road than 85% of the churches in America. Another no cost example is using 'Buddies' to assist those affected by disability to include them in the typically classroom situation. This concept can be for children or adults.

Again please don't let the excuse of "We don't have the funds to start a disability ministry" be the reason your church is not welcoming to those people and their families who are affected by disability. As they say with the Nike brand "Just do it"®, God will provide direction and the needed assistance from volunteers.

- ["Five Myths of Starting a Ministry to Those with a Disability"...](#) It's easier than you might think!
- [Accessibility Checklist](#) – Ideas on how to make your church disability friendly.
- [Christian Fund for the Disabled](#) – The Christian Fund for the Disabled provides one-time grants to qualifying individuals through churches that are willing to provide matching funds. The CFD is administered through Joni and Friends and its Area Ministries in the U.S. They provide CFD applications which are then sent to the CFD committee for review. The CFD committee reviews grant requests which reflect a practical or educational need relating to a disability concern, or a Disability Ministry Outreach project or program which includes an evangelism component. Although Joni and Friends manages the CFD, it is solely funded on a periodic basis by a private foundation which provides limited blocks of capital for careful dispersal. This foundation simply wishes to contribute financial assistance on a matching grant basis, all with an emphasis on providing ministry, practical assistance, and a demonstration of Christ's love to disabled people.
- *Creating Safety in Disability Ministry* - Audio workshop – This audio from the 2009 Joni and Friends West Coast Summit will give you ideas on how to have a safe, yet fun environment for those involved in your Disability Ministry. Learn risk management, potential issues and concerns in disability ministry and areas in which volunteers and staff need to be further trained. Available through [Church Relations](#).

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Gather a Team

Begin With Prayer - Ask for wisdom as you consider and invite prospective candidates. Pray for volunteers who will become good matches for people with disabilities. Ask the Lord to provide a team with a diverse range of spiritual gifts, skills, and talents, to meet a wide variety of needs.

Define the Purpose and Goals - It's essential to know what you plan to do before you can find the team members who are rightly equipped to help you. Will you focus solely on ministering to people who are blind? Do you want to start a weeknight Bible study at a group home? Clearly stating your purpose and goals will help you determine what kinds of volunteers you need.

Write a brief list of "jobs" along with a brief description for each one. Then when you're ready to talk with potential volunteers, you'll have a better idea of the abilities and skills that are needed.

Recruit the Volunteers - You can search for Disability Ministry/Outreach Team members by:

- Asking for recommendations from other church leaders.
- Placing an announcement in the church bulletin.
- Making announcements in Sunday school classes and the worship service.

Developing a Prayer Team - A Prayer Team can serve two important purposes for your disability ministry. First, by sharing prayer requests with others in your church, you can increase disability awareness. Second, by having such a team, you create a spiritual support.

The people who join your Prayer Team do not have to come from the Disability Ministry/Outreach Team. You may want to invite participants who have a burden for people with disabilities.

This Prayer Team can be comprised of two, three, or four people who get together at regular intervals—such as weekly or bi-weekly. Before each meeting, give them a list of the prayer requests and praises they can bring before the Lord.

Inform the pastor of some of the prayer requests and praises. He may share some of them with the congregation so they can see how God is working in the lives of people in the disability ministry.

- The "[Through the Roof](#)" program provides disability awareness [training](#), [disability ministry tools, resources](#), and [support](#) for churches, ministry leaders and workers as they develop, maintain or expand their disability programs.
- Follow the example of other churches in your area. Go to "[Churches with Disability Ministries](#)" to find a church in your area that already has a disability ministry. Ask their advice in getting a team together.
- Gather a core leadership team to assist in the process of developing a ministry to people affected by disability.
- Where do you start
 - Take a look at who God has placed in the path of the Church
 - What are the existing ministries of the church? Do you have any outreach ministries? Do you have any inclusion ministries?
 - What resources has He provided your church?
 - What does the congregation know about people affected by disability?
 - What will be your focus to start this ministry (most churches need to start with one area: children, adults, elderly, etc. and then expand into other areas, as resources permit).
 - What training is needed for you, your team and/or the congregation? [See page 16.](#)

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Steps to a Successful Disability Ministry

There are five essentials to making your Disability Ministry Outreach successful:

1. **Set Objectives and Goals** – When you plan to take a trip across the country, the first logical step is to look at a map and determine what roads will take you to your destination. You want to find the shortest, most efficient route possible so you don't waste time, effort, and fuel.

Similarly, in setting up your disability ministry, you'll want to begin by determining your goals. There are two immediate benefits of doing this. First, you'll know exactly what you should be doing and thus there will be no wasted effort. Second, everyone on the Disability Ministry/Outreach Team will be able to work in harmony because you're all aiming toward the same finish line.

2. **Develop a Calendar** – Once you've decided your goals, you are ready to plan a schedule for making those goals become a reality. As you plan your schedule, keep in mind the three levels of disability ministry: Awareness, Response, and Outreach. In the beginning of your calendar, schedule events and activities that will enhance awareness. Next, implement your response. That is what you need to do to make your church more accessible. Finally, include steps for reaching out to people with disabilities and inviting them to your church.

If you already have an active disability ministry, you can still use these calendars to help start a new program within your ministry. For example, let's say you want to start a transportation outreach. The same three levels of disability ministry would still apply: you'll begin by increasing awareness of the need for a van, you'll follow with a response that makes it possible to acquire a van, and you'll move on the outreach once the van has been purchased.

3. **Identifying a Budget** - Now that you have determined your goals and the time frame for achieving those goals, you are ready to determine the costs of establishing, maintaining, and expanding the disability ministry.

One major advantage of setting a budget is that it enables you to plan ahead and determine the best way to spend your money. The amount you need could be greater than the amount you have available. Thus you and the Disability Ministry/Outreach Team members can decide together which budget items can be purchased at a later date.

When determining your budget, remember to consider any resources you might already have available. For example, if you want to begin a transportation ministry, it may not be necessary to purchase a van. Someone in your church may be willing to loan a van that can be adapted for such use on Sundays. Or, let's say you need some craft supplies. You may be able to share supplies the have already been purchased for other classes. Another way to save money is to share the cost of resources with another ministry that would like to share the equipment you are purchasing.

Because budgeting will always be a part of your ministry efforts, you may want to form a budget committee made up of members from the Disability Outreach Team. These people, in turn, can be accountable to a pastoral staff member or church leader who can help ensure that financial matters are handled wisely.

4. **Managing the Disability Ministry/Outreach Team (s)** – Once your disability ministry is up and running, how do you keep the team members motivated and working together? You can take a number of steps to help your team reach its maximum potential.
 - Encourage Frequently - A pat on the back or a kind word goes a long way. People need to know when they're doing a good job. Well-placed encouragement helps team members know they are appreciated and they have a valuable role. The apostle Paul frequently used

encouragement in his ministry. For example, in Romans 1:8 he told the Christians at Rome that he thanked God because their faith "is spoken of throughout the whole world."

- Create Motivation – In the Christian race, Paul said that he ran so as to get the prize (Phil.3:14). Paul knew the award that awaited him upon winning the race and that motivated him. Similarly, we can motivate Disability Ministry/Outreach Team members by reminding them of the benefits – the rewards – of disability ministry. The many spiritual benefits are enjoyed by the church as a whole, the Disability Ministry/Outreach Team members, and the people who have disabilities. Remembering these benefits can keep us motivated.
- Maintain Mutual Support – Set up opportunities for the Disability Ministry/Outreach Team to get together to share personal needs, frustrations, prayer requests, and praises. These meetings will allow people to take turns offering support to one another. When we share our problems and burdens, we get the support we need to help us keep going. In any type of ministry, the temptation to quit or give up can become overwhelming. The solution is to bring everyone together to guild up one another. Make a goal of having your team members meet frequently – perhaps once a month.
- Pray Together – As you share burdens, frustrations, and problems, lift them up to the Lord. When you pray together as a group, it reinforces that you are turning your circumstances over to God's own care. Through prayer you acknowledge that only God can do "exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the (His) power that worketh in us" (Eph.3:20)(KJV). Giving matters to the Lord in prayer relieves you anxiety and gives you the "peace of God" which will "keep your hearts and minds" (Phil.4:6-7)(KJV).
- Write Thank-You Letters – If you appreciate someone, put it in writing. A simple thank-you note speaks volumes to the recipient. People enjoy getting a surprise thank-you card in their mailbox. It can serve as a morale booster when they least expect it. You'll notice that the one common thread running throughout these suggestions for managing your team is cultivation of a positive, can-do attitude. Ministry is hard work that can be made much easier and more enjoyable when it's backed by frequent support, encouragement, and love.

5. **Maintaining Resources and Supplies** – Designate one or more members of the Disability Ministry/Outreach Team to be responsible for overseeing the resources and supplies used by the disability ministry. This coordinator can put together a list of resources that are available through the church or people in the congregation. This person will also want to work with the budget committee to determine what types of supplies are needed, when, and where.

The coordinator's responsibilities can include the following:

- Acquiring space for classes, activities, and events.
- Acquiring and setting up needed supplies.
- Contacting people who have access to needed supplies or resources.
- Tracking whether supplies are needed on a temporary basis.
- Maintaining and up-keeping supplies and resources.

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Start Small

Start Small and Build Well - As you begin to build your ministry, remember the Giant Oak tree is grown over a period of years, even decades. It starts from a very small acorn and develops a root system that sustains the tree throughout the many seasons of sunshine, rain, growth... all seasons are important and over time they lead to stability.

It has been said that a ministry can fail if it grows too fast, but there are not failures because a ministry grew too slow. So remember to, try not to tackle too much too quickly. Don't attempt to have 'cradle to grave' range of disability ministry offerings in the first year. Focus on the people God has placed in the path of the church first. These may be people from within the congregation or from nearby in the community.

Some churches start their disability ministry with adults, others with a children's ministry based on who God has put into the church's path or the biggest need. There is not a right or wrong way to start, as long as you get started.

Here are some practical ideas to get started:

- Have an usher in the parking lot by the blue accessible parking spaces to offer assistance.
- Mark off a couple of parking spaces near the door with a cone for those who have a challenge getting into the building, but don't have a disability placard to be able legally park in the blue parking space.
 - For example, a single parent trying to get several children safely into the building.
- Keep vehicles from parking in front of the curb cut by placing a cone or two next to it as a reminder to keep it clear.
- [Training for ushers](#) on seating people affected by disability.
- Review your facilities to see [how accessible](#) they are at this time.
- [Survey](#) the congregation to find those who know people affected by disability and those who have been trained or currently work with people and families affected by disability.
- Instead of trying to build a Special Needs room at the beginning, start with a [Buddy system](#) to accommodate higher functioning children into the existing typical children's programs (Sunday School, mid-week programs like Awana, etc.).

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How is God Leading Our Hearts?

- What do we have a passion for?
- What makes our heart's cry out to God?
- What things make us 'angry' enough to take a stand?
- Who do you have attending your church that is affected by disability
 - People in the congregation?
 - Relatives of congregation members/attendees?
 - Friends and neighbors of congregation members/attendees?
- Nearby to the church are there any:
 - Hospitals
 - Convalescent or nursing homes?
 - Group homes?
 - Schools for children affected by disability?
 - Other care facilities

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Mainstream/Inclusion

Do you plan on having a dedicated room for people affected by disability or will you try to include them in with the rest of the typical folks? This is something to consider for both children and adults affected by disability. Many people who have a disability are higher functioning and can blend in very easily with their typical peers. For example many people have only a physical disability do not have cognitive impairment, these are ideal candidates to be considered for inclusion.

Some individuals (with a mild cognitive impairment or severe physical disability) do better when a ['Buddy'](#) comes alongside of them to assist them.

Ideas for greater inclusion in the Worship Service:

- Wide aisles that permit room for wheelchairs to move and turn around
- Reserved areas in several locations in the sanctuary for people who use wheelchairs
- Reserved seating for those who are deaf or hearing impaired, with a seat and light for the interpreter
- Ushers stationed near closed doors to help open them
- Members of congregation hold Bibles/hymnals for people who don't have the use of their hands
- Hearing amplification devices for individuals who are hearing impaired
- Availability of Braille and/or large-print Bibles
- A welcome brochure designed for first-time visitors with disability inclusion opportunities.

Ideas for inclusion in Sunday School Classes

- Have class assistants (a [Buddy](#)) to help hold Bibles, make crafts, and so on
- Play some games that don't require physical ability
- During class discussions, invite those with disabilities to share their thoughts
- Let individuals with disabilities share in class responsibilities

Inclusion in Church Activities

- Provide transportation arrangements for individuals who have physical disabilities
- Provide interpreting for people who are deaf or hearing impaired
- Plan picnics and day trips at locations that are accessible
- Offer assistance with food shopping and/or preparation
- Plan activities that allow involvement of people with disabilities

Inclusion in the Disability Ministry/Outreach Team(s)

- Consider teaming a person with a disability with another to help carry out their responsibilities
- Have members with disabilities lead discussion groups, prayer and sharing time, singing
- Put members who have disabilities in charge of activities and events

"*Teaching Children with Special Needs*" –Audio workshop from the 2009 Joni and Friends Summit in Pasadena, CA - available through [Church Relations](#).

"[Helping Kids Include Kids With Disabilities](#)" by Barbara J. Newman - This book is an excellent plan for building awareness among children. It teaches them how to understand their peers who have special needs. It is packed with information about specific areas of disability, lesson plans, letters, and devotionals for families.

"[Including People with Disabilities in Faith Communities](#)" by Erik W. Carter - This book addresses how congregations, families, and service providers can work together to support the full participation of individuals with disabilities in the faith community of their choice.

"[Pocket Guide to Special Needs](#)" - Quick Tips to Reach Every Child.

"[Avoiding Inclusion Confusion](#)" A few tips for a disability friendly church

Sample [Buddy Ministry Application](#)

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Educate the team and the congregation

Start with prayer for guidance and wisdom. The team developing disability ministry, the congregation, and any of the children, youth or other classes that would have people affected by disability attending them, need some education on the subject of disabilities.

Two of the best tools you can have for teaching and training the workers and congregation are the [Special Needs Smart Pages](#) and the [Through the Roof](#) manual (see below). One of the next best things is for someone to experience working with or alongside a person affected by disability. [Family Retreats](#), [Wheels for the World](#) trips and other [international ministry](#) opportunities are great ways to experience, learn about, and learn from, those who have a disability.

- ["Special Needs Smart Pages"](#) If you only get one resource, this should be the one. It is a comprehensive resource providing churches with tools for starting and running a disability ministry for children (and adults) with special needs.
- ["Through the Roof"](#) *A Guide to Assist Churches in Developing an Effective Disability Outreach*. This manual will explain how to prepare for disability ministry and outreach. Includes a ministry worker's training course, plus a myriad of recommended resources.
- "Hearts in Motion" bible study – A four-lesson Bible study, "Hearts in Motion", will equip you with eyes that see, hands that help and hearts that care for those affected by disability. [Participant's Guide](#) and [Leader's Guide](#). (This bible study is also contained in the ["Special Needs Smart Pages"](#))
- [Joni Eareckson Tada – Her Story](#) – Be inspired by Joni as she struggles with loss and finds hope and peace through her faith in Jesus.
- Disability awareness education for elementary age children
 - ["Camp Lean on the Lord"](#) Vacation Bible School curriculum - At "Camp Lean-on-the-Lord", children learn to be compassionate friends through hands-on activities, Bible stories, songs, and crafts
 - ["On a Roll for Jesus – Mission: Unstoppable"](#) Vacation Bible School curriculum - As special agents on Mission: Unstoppable, kids learn to understand and include people with disabilities. Includes an inspiring missions project to help send wheelchairs to those in need around the world
- Link to [resource page](#) in the Joni and Friends web store
- [Survey of the congregation](#) to find out the unknown needs within the congregation
- ["Family Retreats"](#) link- How you can break through the 'fear barrier' with some "hands-on" time
- *"Flying Lessons"* DVD – contact local Joni and Friends [Field Ministry Office](#) for a presentation
- [Joni and Friends TV](#) episodes (click on "Episodes and Offerings" to preview).
- International opportunities
 - [Wheels for the World](#)
 - [Team MED](#) medical teams
 - [Total Access Teams](#)
 - [Christian Literacy](#)
 - International [Family Retreat](#)
- [Disability Ministry Tools](#) – audio workshops, PowerPoint presentations, and many PDF documents to help a church get started or expand disability ministry.
- Free [Radio offerings](#) from Joni and Friends.

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Overcoming Attitudinal Barriers

Let's take a look at attitudes and better understand the role they have in building relationships. Two of the greatest influences on our attitudes are background and knowledge.

Background includes our family, our education, our insecurities, and our religious and cultural upbringing.

In certain religious or social systems people with disabilities are shunned, viewed as cursed, an object of charity, shame, dishonor, lowest class of society. Here are some ways other religions view people with disabilities:

Hinduism-A disabled person is "bad karma." Such a person is of the lowest caste.

Islam-A disabled person is an object of charity or disgrace in a "shame and honor" culture. A disability is that person's fate.

Communism-A disabled person cannot contribute to society: he or she is of no use.

Buddhism-A disabled person should deny or ignore his or her plight.

Spiritism-A disabled person has been cursed.

Secular Humanism-A disabled person is a victim and to integrate them into society is considered a significant expense.

Fascism-A disabled person is an economic drain on society.

Religious Legalism-A disabled person is an object of charity. Her or she is the focus of ministry projects which highlight results rather than relationships. However, the real needs of disabled people are the responsibility of the government, not the religious community.

Wrong attitudes can also prevent us from building relationships with people who have disabilities. Here are a few:

- People with disabilities need more help than I can give. It's better not to get involved now or I may end up getting committed forever.
- Even if I help a person who has a disability, he or she will still have the disability. If I can't change the person's physical condition, then I may as well not get involved at all.
- I'd rather be associated with people who are bright, successful, and attractive.
- People with disabilities are being punished for their sins. If only they had enough faith, they would confess their sins and be healed.
- If I get involved with a person with disabilities, then I, or someone in my family, might end up with a disability. I'd rather not get involved.
- I'm afraid of the unknown, and because people with disabilities represent the unknown, I'm afraid of them.

The apostle Paul gives us practical suggestions for building relationships with people in Romans chapter 12. There, he talks about how we can give our life, our gift, and our love.

Begin by looking at the depth of our commitment to God. Romans 12:1-2 exhorts us, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service, And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind."(KJV)

God has gifted every Christian with a unique function, a special role, in the church. The purpose of our spiritual gifts is to build up one another. It is vital that we use our gifts to serve others and that we allow opportunity for others to use their gifts to serve us. Romans 12:6-8 tells us, "Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness."(KJV)

In Romans 12:9-21 Paul tells us we are to love others. He also lets us know how we can show love to others. "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love." (v.10a) "Honor one another above yourselves."

(v.10b) "Share with God's people who are in need." (v.13a) "Practice hospitality." (v.13b) "Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn." (v.15) "Live in harmony with one another." (v.16a) "Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position." (v.16b)

Throughout our communities we see efforts being made to ensure that people with disabilities have greater access to the world around them. We see designated parking spaces for people with disabilities as well as stores providing wider aisles and assistance for those unable to reach high shelves.

Even though progress is being made, there is still a long way to go. The barriers, both physical and attitudinal, are still many in number. What is unfortunate however, is that people with disabilities have found that churches lag far behind in the efforts to eliminate barriers. The one place anyone should feel welcome, regardless of his or her physical condition, is the church. You have an opportunity to let your church shine out to the community as a place where people with disabilities are truly welcome.

- "[Created in the Image of God](#)" pdf "Where is God when it hurts? How does God view people with disabilities? God desires that His house be filled." These topics, and so much more, are discussed in this helpful and informative booklet.
- Disability Information and Statistics. Contact [Church Relations](#) for information.
- "[Beatitudes for Friends of People with Disabilities](#)"
- "Heart's in Motion" bible study [Leader](#) and [Participant's Guide](#)
- Joni and Friends "[Christian Institute on Disability](#)"

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How Can We Serve - families affected by disability?

- “Joni and Friends Ministry Resource Catalog” – Contact [Customer Service](#) to obtain a copy.
- [Three Key Components to Launching Disability Ministry](#)- a helpful diagram illustrating components in starting disability ministry.
- Attend a [Family Retreat](#) to gain some experience working with people having disabilities
- *Disability Ministries Goes Beyond Sunday Mornings* - Audio workshop available through [Church Relations](#) - Practical ways to grow your disabilities ministry by reaching out to families living with disabilities within your church and community.
 - You will learn about:
 - “Friday Night Live” Socials
 - Respite Activities
 - Sibling Support Groups
 - Sports Programs
 - Awareness Programs
 - Retreats

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Creating Special Needs Classrooms

In some circumstances, you'll find that it is better to create a separate Sunday school class for church attendees who have disabilities. For example, you may want to create a class especially for those who have developmental disabilities. Or, if you have several people who are deaf or hearing impaired, you may want to bring them together in one class. Should you chose this option, you'll want to give some leadership roles and responsibilities to those who make up the class (thus giving them "ownership" of their Sunday school class).

It is a blessing when the space is available (or can make space available) to create dedicated room for children or adults affected by disability who do not do well in a mainstream environment. This always a safe environment for these individuals to experience the love of Jesus.

When possible it is better to try and include people with a disability with their peers, but if that is not an option, then having the dedicated special classroom is a must.

- [Building Accessibility Resources](#) Links to Joni and Friends web resources on subject
- The Americans With Disabilities (ADA) [Resource List](#)
- Copy of Sensory Room video from Debra P. (coming soon)
- *Creating Safety in Disability Ministry* - Audio workshop - Learn and explore ways in which to make disability ministry safer for the participants, volunteers, and staff. Learn tactics and ideas to minimize the risk and still have fun, engaging programs. Learn risk management, potential issues and concerns in disability ministry and areas in which volunteers and staff need to be further trained. Coming soon to the web, but for now this audio resource is available through [Church Relations](#).

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How do we assimilate those with disabilities and their families into the fabric of the church?

Your church may find that it's possible to include children with disabilities in regular Sunday school classes with their peers. The Disability Ministry/Outreach Team leader, parents of the child who has a disability, Sunday school teacher, and a pastor or elder meet together to devise a plan that ensures the inclusion experience will be positive and successful for all involved.

Some parents may prefer to place their young children with disabilities in a more protected environment. In this case you'll want to set up a class especially for these children. Then peers from other Sunday school classes are invited to participate for a short time on a rotating basis. This is inclusion done in a reverse manner.

Below are some resources to help you bring people affected by disability into the church body. The Family Retreat provides a "hands on" experience. Once you get to spend some time with people who have a disability you learn they are not that much different from you. They have needs, desires and want the option to be able to hear the word of God.

- Joni and Friends [Family Retreat](#) information
- ["Access to God"](#) by Joni Eareckson Tada
- Joni and Friends Recommended [Books on Disability Ministry Tools](#)
- [Disability Ministry Curriculum/Training Materials](#)
- Check the [Joni and Friends list of churches](#) in your area that can help with respite care.
- Sibling support: "Making Brothers and Sisters Best Friends". Audio workshop available through [Church Relations](#).
- ["Responding with Compassion"](#) – Ministry Models for Families Affected by Disability"
- *Ministering to Parents and Siblings of Special Needs Children* – Audio workshop - Parents and siblings of children with special needs are often forgotten in the special needs ministry, and yet they are every bit as important, if not more so in some ways. Available through [Church Relations](#).

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Newly injured or diagnosed

- [“Disability: When It First Touches Your Family”](#) – booklet. Those first moments seem to last forever. The ache is unbearable. As a concerned family member, you’ll be asking many questions. There are few easy answers, but this booklet will guide your search.
- [“Why”](#) tract by Joni Eareckson Tada - It’s a question we ask after every tragedy, whether it’s a terrorist attack or devastating hurricane. The world will never forget September 11th and our nation will never forget Hurricane Katrina. Even personal tragedies – whether the death of a loved one, a bad medical report, or a botched surgery – will send us on a search for answers which satisfy our sense of justice, as well as our aching hearts. After Joni Eareckson Tada broke her neck in a 1967 diving accident which left her a quadriplegic, she asked in anguish, “Why?” The following is her powerful, yet personal response to that question.
- [“When the Doctor Has Bad News”](#) by Al B. Weir, M.D. Dr. Weir guides the reader - especially the one who has received bad news - past the soul-numbing shock of a dismal medical report. He reminds us of the soothing comfort available in the Word of God and of the simple steps a family can take to promote hope and healing.
- [“Helping Those Who Hurt”](#) by H. Norman Wright. Have you ever been in the uncomfortable position of not knowing what to do when a friend is suffering a loss or enduring a crisis? It’s not a question of whether to help, but of how and when to lend a hand. Specific suggestions tell you not only what to do but what not to do.
- [“Exceptional Teaching”](#) – A Comprehensive Guide to Including Students with Disabilities.
- *How Disability Affects the Family* – Audio workshop - What are the many ways disability affects the family? How can we deal with the grief that comes from the loss of an expectation and the pressure that grief can put on marriages and family dynamics? What is the biblical perspective and the mandate it gives to churches to go out and find these families? Available through [Church Relations](#).

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Are there other opportunities for those people affected by disability to serve?

- Coaching or mentoring people affected by disability first for ministry and eventually for leadership positions.
- Leadership roles:
 - Greeters/Ushers
 - Deacons/Elders
 - Sunday School Teachers
 - And anything else they have the capacity and desire to do...
- [Family Retreats](#)
- [International Ministry Outreach](#)
- *Including Adults with Disabilities in the Life of the Church* - Audio workshop – Available through [Church Relations](#). - Easy ways in which to include adults with disabilities in the life of the church from Sunday morning, to serving, to membership.

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How can we help our Disability Ministry grow?

Take advantage of the resources listed below to learn how your disability ministry can continue to grow. Also, go to the Joni and Friends website for valuable information and resources.

- Upcoming Disability Ministry Training Events - information about your local [Field Office](#) events.
- "[Successful Models of Disability Ministry](#)" booklet - Great ideas on how to become involved in Disability Ministry.
- Contact [local Field Ministry Office](#) - They will be glad to help you analyze the resources the Lord has provided and the challenges you face in starting a disability ministry.
- [Special Delivery](#) – Partnering with churches, we provide training and inspirational materials to bring hope, encouragement, and the promise of a genuine relationship with God to those who are hospitalized, homebound, and institutionalized.
- *Responding with Compassion: How to Go Deeper into the Ministry* – Audio workshop - Embracing families affected by disabilities and how to celebrate God's compassion throughout your church. You will learn creative ways to serve individuals and their families affected by disabilities, simple outreach activities and how to spread the love of Jesus to individuals affected by disability. Available through [Church Relations](#).
- "Welcoming the Differently Abled to the Church" Power Point presentation. Available through [Church Relations](#).
- Getting others involved:
 - [Family Retreats](#) - to break past the 'fear barrier' with some "hands-on" time.
 - International opportunities
 - [Wheels for the World](#) - aiming to meet the physical and spiritual needs of the disabled around the world by providing wheelchairs and sharing the love of Jesus Christ.
 - [Team MED](#) medical outreach teams to help serve people with disabilities around the world
 - [Total Access Teams](#) – work with our international partners to help meet accessibility needs
 - [Christian Literacy](#) – teaching those who are not literate to read
 - [International Family Retreats](#) – minister to those in need worldwide.

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Where can we find continuing education?

- [Churches/Organizations with Disability Ministries INFORMATION FORM](#)
- Brochure: Serving People and Families Affected by Disability.
- Joni and Friends information getting [involved](#) on the web.
- [Wheels for the World](#) information.
- Joni and Friends Internship [Cause 4 Life](#) information.
- [TV](#) and [Radio](#) info on the website.
- [Certificate in Disability Ministry](#) and other like resources.

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Who should we contact to help us with our special needs ministry?

- Link to Joni and Friends web page, [enter zip code for Local Joni and Friends Field Ministry office](#)
- [Churches](#) doing disability ministry.
- Organizations doing disability ministry.
- Individuals doing disability ministry.
- [Family Retreat](#)
- International opportunities
 - [Wheels for the World](#)
 - [Team MED](#) medical teams
 - [Total Access Teams](#)
 - [Christian Literacy](#)
 - [International Family Retreat](#)

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Should we have a Care or Visitation ministry?

- Not only do people affected by disability or their families come to your church, there are probably many more people the Lord has placed in the vicinity around your church. Those recently injured or diagnosed at hospitals and doctor's offices, and some in long term care facilities like nursing homes, convalescent homes, intermediate care facilities and the like, that are located near the church. As the Lord provides the resources, you can reach out to these people affected by disability that may not have yet visited your fellowship and earn the right to share the Gospel.
 - [Special Delivery](#) - Partnering with your church, we provide training and inspirational materials to bring hope, encouragement, and the promise of a genuine relationship with God to those who are hospitalized, homebound, and institutionalized.
 - "[Barrier Free Friendships](#)" by Joni Eareckson Tada and Steve Jensen - Joni and Steve show you how to build mutually fulfilling relationships based on insights into how Jesus related to individuals with disabilities. She also offers stories of hope and joy of those who've crossed the barrier.

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How do we empower families whose loved ones have a disability?

- Check the [Joni and Friends list of churches](#) in your area that can help with respite care.
- ["Christianity with Sleeves Rolled up"](#) booklet.
- [Family Retreat](#) information.
- "Ministering With the Family Experiencing Disability" by Dr. Jim Pearson, CCFH Ministries.
- *How Disability Affects the Family* - Audio workshop- What are the many ways disability affects the family? How can we deal with the grief that comes from the loss of an expectation and the pressure that grief can put on marriages and family dynamics? What is the biblical perspective and the mandate the it gives to churches to go out and find these families? Available through [Church Relations](#).

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Creating Special Needs Classrooms

In some circumstances, you'll find that it is better to create a separate Sunday school class for church attendees who have disabilities. For example, you may want to create a class especially for those who have developmental disabilities. Or, if you have several people who are deaf or hearing impaired, you may want to bring them together in one class. Should you chose this option, you'll want to give some leadership roles and responsibilities to those who make up the class (thus giving them "ownership" of their Sunday school class).

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When possible, it is better to try and include people with a disability with their peers, but if that is not an option, then having the dedicated special classroom is a must.

- [Building Accessibility Resources](#) Links to Joni and Friends web resources on subject
- The Americans With Disabilities (ADA) [Resource List](#)
- Copy of Sensory Room video from Debra P. (coming soon)
- *Creating Safety in Disability Ministry* - Audio workshop - Learn and explore ways in which to make disability ministry safer for the participants, volunteers, and staff. Learn tactics and ideas to minimize the risk and still have fun, engaging programs. Learn risk management, potential issues and concerns in disability ministry and areas in which volunteers and staff need to be further trained. Coming soon to the web, but for now this audio resource is available through [Church Relations](#).

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Where can we find information on specific disabilities?

- [Information and resources](#) on the Joni and Friends web site – see the drop down lists.
- Recommended [books on specific disabilities](#) on the Joni and Friends web site.
- [Resource Listing](#)

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Adults

- *Including Adults with Disabilities in the Life of the Church* – Audio workshop- from the Joni and Friends 2009 Summit - Easy ways in which to include adults with disabilities in the life of the church from Sunday morning, to serving, to membership. Available through [Church Relations](#).
- [Employment Resource List](#) – Joni and Friends link to resources on the web. Scroll down to "Available Organizations."
- [Financial Assistance Resource List](#)
- Invisible Disabilities: Effective Tools for Churches to Minister to Those with Invisible Disabilities - With nearly one in two people having chronic illness, it impacts most families; the invisibility of it, however, often inhibits the church from realizing its prevalence and how many people are suffering silently. It's easy for hurt feelings to abound and for ill people to feel like a burden, not a blessing. Awareness and simple tools to increase your outreach to both member and non-members will make your church a shelter from life's storms.

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Seniors

- [“The Life and Death Dilemma”](#) – Families Facing Health Care Choices - Here, Joni offers practical encouragement, realistic perspective, and scriptural insights to families tackling the hard question about disability, death, or terminal illness.
- [“Compassionate Caregiving”](#) by Lois D. Knudson - Caregiving can become more meaningful as you discover ways to see your role as a calling from God. Whether caring for a family member or friend, from nearby or at distance, you’ll find in these pages workable solutions, reassurance, and confidence- building support for your particular journey.
- [Joni and Friends Recommended Books and Other Resources on Alzheimer’s](#) - Joni and Friends web resources.
- [Deaf and Hearing Impaired Resource List](#) – Joni and Friends link to other resources.
- [Joni and Friends Recommended Books on Elder Care](#) – resource list.
- [Financial Assistance Resource List](#)

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Youth

- Joni and Friends [Family Retreats](#)
- “[All God’s Children](#)” by Joni Eareckson Tada and Gene Newman.
- [Camp Resource List](#) – Joni and Friends link to resources.
- “[Cause 4 Life](#)” Disability Ministry Leadership Internship Program.
- *How to Launch a Disability Ministry for Teens and Adults* - Audio workshop – Available through [Church Relations](#)- Salvation is a gift from God that is not dependent on one's level of intelligence. People with developmental disabilities need to know God, study and apply His Word, serve others and have fellowship in a way that is meaningful to them. Here are resources and strategies needed to share God's Word with those in our church and community who have cognitive impairments.

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Children

- Links to Joni and Friends [web resources](#) on subject.
- "[Special Needs-Special Ministry](#)" – For Children's Ministry" - How can your church become a welcome place for children with special needs? Here's a practical guide from experienced mentors, complete with outlines and reproducible materials to get you started!
- "[Let All Children Come to Me](#)" a handbook of information and inspiration.
- "[Special Needs Smart Pages](#)" a great resource for providing churches with tools for reaching out to children with special needs.
- [Mission Unstoppable](#) - On a Roll for Jesus and [Camp Lean-on-the-Lord](#) – Kids learn to understand and include people with disabilities. Curriculum features an inspiring missions project to help send wheelchairs to those in need around the world or support families at Family Retreat. This can be used in Sunday School, midweek programs, any Christian classroom, or as an add-on to VBS curriculum.
- *Give Them Jesus - Evangelizing Children with Special Needs* - Audio workshop – Available through [Church Relations](#) - Why teach children with disabilities about salvation? How does faith develop in a child's heart? You will learn:
 - How to help children grow in their faith
 - About evangelizing children with various disabilities.
- *Teaching Children with Special Needs* - Audio workshop – Available through [Church Relations](#). - An overview of some of the disabilities you might see in a special needs classroom (autism, Down Syndrome, CP, etc.) and practical tools to minister to the wide variety of children who might attend your classroom. Teaching tips, behavior management strategies, creating an appropriate environment and activities, record keeping, working with parents, and helping children mainstream into "typical" classrooms through the use of a "buddy" program.
- *What You Need to Know About Autism* - Audio workshop – Available through [Church Relations](#)- One in every 150 children in the US is diagnosed with autism. The more children that are diagnosed with autism, the more likely you will minister to at least one in your church at some time. Here is what you need to know about autism in order to minister effectively and compassionately to these children.

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Families

- Joni and Friends [Family Retreat](#) information.
- List of [community resources and ideas](#).
- [Financial Assistance Resource List](#).
- "[In His Image](#)" DVD – see how one church is reaching out to families with children who have disabilities.
- *Integrating Families Affected by Disability into the Life of the Church* - Audio workshop – Available through [Church Relations](#)– This audio workshop looks at practical steps to assist you as you help to integrate families affected by disability into the life of the church.
- *How Disability Affects the Family* - Audio workshop – Available through [Church Relations](#). What are the many ways disability affects the family? How can we deal with the grief that comes from the loss of an expectation and the pressure that grief can put on marriages and family dynamics? What is the biblical perspective and the mandate that it gives to churches to go out and find these families?
- *Ministering to Parents and Siblings of Special Needs Children* - Audio workshop – Available through [Church Relations](#)- Parents and siblings of children with special needs are often forgotten in the special needs ministry, and yet they are every bit as important, if not more so in some ways. The stress of living with a special needs child can be challenging, and for some, even unbearable. Learn how to provide a comprehensive ministry to the whole family that will strengthen them not only in Christ, but in each other.

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