

BUILDING A DISABILITY MINISTRY STRATEGY

Guidelines for Congregations.

CONTENTS

- 1. Why develop a ministry strategy for and by people with a disability?**
- 2. How can we develop a ministry for and by people with a disability?**
 - a. Raising awareness**
 - b. Information gathering**
 - c. Developing and implementing an Action Plan**
 - d. Evaluation**
- 3. Resources.**
- 4. Appendix.**

Christian Disability Partnership in Australia
Post - PO Box 120, Thornleigh, NSW 2120
Web - www.pastornet.net.au/crossrds/cdp
Email - xroads@pastornet.net.au
Phone - 02 9980 8911
Fax - 02 9875 4002

**This First Edition was prepared for the Christian Disability Partnership by
Athena Pavlis-Goard, Amy Butler and Amanda Hughes.
December 2001**

1. Why develop a ministry strategy for and by people with a disability?

It is the day and age of strategic ministry. Sports ministry has been strategic over the last few years in Sydney because of Olympic-mania. TAFE ministry is presented as the strategic new way of reaching the working-class with the gospel. In this environment, how can we possibly justify a specialist ministry to people with disabilities?

In almost every respect, people with disabilities are manifestly *unstrategic*. As a group, we are poor, uneducated, without influence in the community and difficult to access! And yet, there are very many *Christian* reasons why we must be involved in such a ministry.

For a start, people with disabilities are *people*. Like all human beings we are sinful and desperately need to be restored to a right relationship with God and other people. Like everybody else, salvation has been won for us by the Lord Jesus in his death and resurrection. It is by responding to that gospel message in repentance and faith that we too can enter into fullness of life for all eternity. The Christian message is tremendously exciting for we who have a disability because in Christ we have every spiritual blessing now and the sure hope of new bodies and new minds in heaven to come!

The second reason why such a ministry is needed is because people with a disability are *disabled*. Clear gospel communication and rich Christian fellowship will require special thought and effort by the Christian community as a whole. The pattern of the strong gladly caring for the weak is firmly established in the Scriptures. The attitude of both Old and New Testament towards the widow, the stranger and the orphan testifies to this. Most clearly we see God himself, stooping so tenderly in the person of Jesus to rescue helpless and vile creatures like us. As you will read in the pages of this manual, ministry to those with disabilities requires sometimes great effort and sacrifice - but remember how God has served us. We were made for this very reason - to sacrificially serve others, and to live this way is to be like God.

Finally, we must not forget the apostle Paul's teaching about the nature of Christian gathering as a body. God, in His grace, gives spiritual gifts to every believer - able-bodied and disabled. Furthermore, no-one is so capable or gifted that they can thrive as a Christian alone. God has deliberately set up his church in such a way that we need one-another to grow to maturity. Those who engage in ministry to people with disabilities will find that ministry is not all one-way. We who have a disability will both benefit greatly from the care we receive and be a blessing to the church in the exercise of our own spiritual gifts.

So let me encourage you, in the light of the gospel, to be like God and gladly give yourself to this unstrategic and yet important ministry. There is very little personal glory to be gained through such involvement, for the glory will go elsewhere - to our great God and Saviour Jesus, who makes such ministry possible. All thanks and praise to Him!

Darren Box, Gladesville, July 2001.

2. How can we develop a ministry strategy for and by people with a disability?

a. Raising Awareness

Almost twenty percent of Australians live with some kind of disability. Of this twenty percent, over one million are severely or profoundly restricted in the everyday activities of self-care, mobility and communication. According to the ABS survey, one in five Australians have some kind of disability. In a parish of 120, you could expect at least 20 people to have a disability.

To raise awareness about disability ministry, a starting point is to ask, are there people with disabilities in our congregations or is this group of people a group we are failing to reach?

Churches are generally busy places. Ministers have more than enough work to do and church members do their best to be committed to church activities and personal ministry in the midst of busy working and family lives. The lack of disability ministry in our churches is not necessarily because of unwillingness but rather a lack of awareness and many other competing priorities and demands.

However, if people aren't even aware of the issue, they are hardly going to think of the many simple steps which can be taken to make their church disability friendly. It leaves the onus on people with disabilities to voice their needs and to initiate their involvement in a church. This takes a lot of self confidence and a strong Christian conviction. Where then does this leave those who aren't yet Christians? In light of this, our outreach programs also need to be Disability friendly.

Raising awareness of the needs of people with disabilities and how the Bible directs us to act is the first step towards making your church a welcoming place for people with disabilities.

Here are some ideas about how this can be done.

Join the Inclusive Congregations Program

Adopt these guidelines and introduce them through the following events.

Invite a person with a disability who is a Christian to come and speak to your congregation about their testimony and how having a disability affects the way they relate to others and the way they relate to God.

Run a Creating Christian Community workshop at your church (see Resources)

Show the Joni video (see Resources) at your Youth Group and conduct a discussion with the young people about how we are all broken people when compared to Jesus and how this affects our understanding of salvation and its implications for the way we treat each other.

Take a week out of your regular Bible study series to focus on what we can learn from God's word about disabilities and how this applies to us.

Organise an event or a visit with a service provider for people with disabilities in your community. E.g. Crossroads, Respite services etc

Run an activity in your church or bible study or youth group where each individual draws a disability out of a hat and has to spend the rest of the session acting out that disability.

These are just a few of the many things you could do to raise awareness about disability ministry issues. This will be an ongoing process and can be revisited by church leaders. Involving members of the congregation in the process will be enough to raise their awareness of the issue.

b. Information Gathering.

i. Community Surveys

To help inform the development of an action plan it would be helpful to find out some information about your community. The following information would be helpful.

1. How many people have a disability in your area and what types of disability they might have.
2. What type of services are available in the area. This is helpful as it provides ideas on referring a family of a child with a disability or an individual to an appropriate service.

This information may also give you some helpful ideas about how your church can meet needs where there is a gap. For example, in one particular community where there is a high percentage of people with disabilities, although many services are available, there is a need for a respite/leisure program. A church might be able to run a program that would help meet this need and tell people the good news of Jesus at the same time.

Local Councils and the Australian Bureau of Statistics would be a good place to start in obtaining this information. (see Resources)

ii. Professional Audits of Church Buildings and Venues

Professional audits that look specifically at disability access issues are a good way to find out if your church buildings and other venues that you use are accessible to people with different disabilities. This ensures that these buildings feel friendly and communicate a clear consideration of the needs of those with disabilities. These professionals can also ensure that "Australian Standards" building codes are being implemented during the process of any building or renovation taking place at your church.

iii. Congregational Survey.

A survey of the present congregation and any needs that they perceive need to be met can also be a part of this stage – this has the added advantage of raising their awareness of the issue and also making them a part of the decision making process. If your congregation is representative of your community then this is obviously a good place to start. A sample survey is included in the Appendix for your reference.

c. Developing and Implementing An Action Plan.

The church leader, having gathered the information, can begin developing the Action Plan (a sample is included in the Appendix). Initially the community survey, audit and congregational survey can be used to identify any obvious areas of need or gaps in services. Those involved in any of the Church's ministries can be contacted to discover any problems that they perceive and this information can be built into the Plan. The Action Plan should complement the church's current mission statement and strategies and not be a separate entity. The Action Plan can be both visionary and practical and may include visions for evangelism alongside plans for physical facilities. The plan can then be shown to the congregation for comment – again raising awareness – and refining of the plan can occur. A committee of interested people may want to be involved in the process of developing and implementing the Action Plan.

The time frame developed should be realistic and take into account the congregation's finances and available personnel. Frequent monitoring and changing can occur as the process of implementation takes place.

Whilst every person with a disability has his or her own unique set of needs, here are some ideas of how a church can begin to cater for some of these needs in order to facilitate the full participation of a person with a disability in the body of Christ. These are just some ideas to get you thinking about your own Action Plan.

Making sure that your church is accessible throughout the church building by using a Professional Auditor or communicating with a person with a disability.

Transport Ministry, either by your own car or an accessible wheelchair van.

Giving the person with a disability a choice as to where they sit in the service.

Providing large print and Braille Bibles.

Providing large print song sheets, hymns and bulletins.

Providing a sign language interpreter or run training for your congregation for anyone wanting to learn to interpret.

Running a Bible study for people with intellectual disabilities.

Providing a Bible study on your own or as a group for someone with a disability if they can't go to church themselves.

Reaching out to families and/or carers of people with disabilities providing them with support and friendship.

Inviting people with disabilities over to your house, providing them with support and friendship and encouraging them to use their gifts to build up the Body of Christ.

Providing Respite for a family.

Participating in existing services - e.g Anglicare's Children's Respite Services (see Resources)

d) Evaluation

To evaluate your progress you can use the Action Plan that you developed in the beginning. The time frame that you decided on will remind you when it is time to conduct your evaluation. When you review your achievement indicators you will be able to identify those areas that were difficult to achieve and possible solutions to problems encountered. You can also identify some areas that might need some more work.

An important part of evaluation is to write a report of your activities which details what was achieved as well as difficulties encountered. This could be presented to the congregation. Again this raises awareness of the issues. From the evaluation a new Action Plan can be drawn up with new goals and strategies for the ongoing process.

3. Resources.

- (a) **Creating Christian Community** is a seminar for Church leaders and members to assist them in identifying and dealing with, the barriers that inhibit the development of a ministry to, and alongside, people with disabilities. It is run by a team of Christians committed to educating churches to be more inclusive of people with disabilities. CCC is committed to seeing the gospel and Christian fellowship available to all people, including people with disabilities. To find out more about CCC you can E-mail Martin Butcher on m butcher@lanecove.nsw.gov.au
- (b) **Crossroads NSW** is a Christian organisation which is committed to improving the quality of life of people with disabilities. The Organisation aims to function in a manner that enhances the self-esteem of people with disabilities and facilitates their integration into the Christian church and wider community. Crossroads was founded in 1961 in Newcastle and is now an Australia wide organisation. There are over 25 branches across NSW and about 100 branches across Australia.
Crossroads NSW Inc
www.pastornet.net.au/crossrds
Suite 2
265-271 Pennant Hills Rd,
Thornleigh NSW 2120
(02) 9980 8911
- (c) **ANGLICARE** Rooty Hill Office provides a variety of services to assist carers or people with a disability. They can be contacted on 9832 2300.
- (d) **Joni** 1976
Joni Eareckson with Joe Musser,
Marshall Pickering Zondervan
- (e) **Barrier-Free Friendships. Bridging the Distance between you and your friends with disabilities.** 1997
Joni Eareckson Tada and Steve Jensen
Zondervan Publishing House
- (f) **All God s Children. Ministry to the Disabled** 1981
Gene Newman and Joni Eareckson Tada
Zondervan Publishing House
- (g) **Hearts in Motion: A Four lesson Bible Study for Disability Awareness** with tape or video.
JAF Ministries

(h) Full Access Bible Studies. How to start a Bible Study in a Residential facility for people with disabilities 1993

JAF Ministries

The Disability Outreach of Joni Earekson Tada

(i) Resources for Australian Standards

www.standards.org.au

www.hreoc.gov.au/disability

www.ilcnsw.asn.au

Local libraries would also have a copy of ABS Carers Survey: abs.gov.au

ABS statistic Ref No. 4443.1 Disability in NSW 2001

<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/0/BB6FF31E6B10D110CA256AD10080D4CA>

[http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/0/F59FA8V95AE20D62CA256AD500063440?](http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/0/F59FA8V95AE20D62CA256AD500063440?Open&Highlight)

[Open&Highlight](#)

(j) For information on Christian Disability Partnership or the Inclusive Congregations Program

www.pastornet.net.au/crossrds/cdp or

phone 02 9980 8911.

(k) Commonwealth Carelink Centres

1800 052 222

4. Appendix

Appendix 1 Congregational Survey

Pre-amble

We are looking at the environment of the church and its activities NOT the content. We are looking at not only the church service but cell groups, Mens breakfast, Friendship Club etc. An accessible church for people with a disability is an accessible church for everyone. We cannot change everything but we can work towards improving the environment.

The questions are answered anonymously.

The information you supply will assist in developing a strategy for a Disability Ministry. We have a committee that is already working on a number of issues.

Thank you for your participation.

Access for Everyone

1) Please describe anything that restricts your participation in the church service and other church activities:

2) Please describe any thing that you know of that restricts or prevents people from attending and participating in church or church activities:

3) What assistance do you think we could provide to encourage people with a disability to attend and participate at this church:

4) What improvements do you think we could do to make this church more comfortable/accessible for yourself and other people:

5) Other Comments:

Thank you for your co-operation.
