

# 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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## Second and Third Waves of COVID-19

Second waves of COVID in places like India and Brazil were especially dangerous for those with disabilities. In the “softer” first wave of the virus across the globe, the World Health Organization declared those with disabilities were at a higher risk, but now that we have seen a fuller picture of what this risk entails, it is beyond disheartening. In overwhelmed third-world healthcare systems where beds and oxygen tanks were already not enough, those with disabilities have been even less likely to receive the care they need. As the United Nations has expressed, COVID exacerbates inequalities among the billion people worldwide with disabilities. Likewise, even if vaccinations begin to be available in developing countries, these individuals are seldom a priority.

What is more, in areas where second waves are subsiding, many experts fear a third wave is already starting because of virus variants. Indeed, the Delta variant has been raging this summer across Tunisia, Mexico, Rwanda and Indonesia. Waves are also resurfacing in wealthier nations like America and England. Even when patients “recover” from bad cases, COVID can leave lasting effects. Those with “Long COVID” are beginning to be classified as having a disability.

Worse, among many people groups, starvation is even more threatening than COVID. Millions are starving in East Africa. The same is true for the “untouchables” in India. Those with disability have higher levels of poverty and increased vulnerability to economic downturn.

## How Then Should We Respond?

We must pray for God’s intervention. In addition, as the hands and feet of Christ, we need to be doing whatever we can to help. As Joni Eareckson Tada has indicated, these days are too dire not to.

An inspiring example of incarnational ministry is what we see modeled by Joni’s House. In addition to providing mobility devices for children with disabilities, Joni’s House Uganda is giving families food, medicine, advocacy and other basic needs so that the gospel is being given in word and deed. As Jason Holden, vice president of Joni and Friends’ Global Operations has said, “Jesus didn’t just heal people with his words. He healed them with his touch as well. He met peoples’ needs.”



But for individuals or small churches with very limited resources, what can be done to help those with disabilities? [LOP 35B](#), a Lausanne Occasional Paper from 2004, offers several ideas. At that time, Joni Eareckson Tada was leading the Disability Concerns Issue Group of disability ministry leaders from 23 different countries. Most of these leaders represented grassroots leadership from low and middle-income nations. In other words, most of these leaders had limited resources to draw from. Therefore, while the world was not dealing with COVID-19 in 2004, these disability ministry ideas are quite helpful and can be adjusted accordingly.

For instance, [LOP 35B](#) encourages churches to start small when first reaching out to those with disabilities. Literally and figuratively, ministry is one step – one person – at a time. The Disability Concerns Issue Group of 2004 provided several models of disability ministry following the design of a [“Seed Project.”](#) A Seed Project is a useful, practical way to develop an incarnational evangelism outreach to people with disabilities in the community. Giving small “seeds” requires sacrifice from local church members, but these acts of ministry should produce a lasting harvest.

Also, there are many ways to be proactive with technology. Though secular, a grassroots [volunteer group](#) sprung up almost overnight in India during the worst of the second wave to help assist families affected by disabilities. These volunteers themselves had physical disabilities like blindness. They used WhatsApp to communicate messages such as “SOS – The patient has Down syndrome and needs an oxygen cylinder urgently. He is being cared for by his single mother who is not well herself.” In addition to encouraging and refreshing others, such proactive support can literally save lives.

## **Disability Ministry Training**

In addition to informing our readers of key issues in global disability ministry, these quarterly newsletters share links to train and inspire individuals involved with disability ministry. Whether just getting started or serving as a disability veteran, education and training is vital. 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. We also want to learn how best to care for ourselves, helping us avoid compassion fatigue. After all, loving our neighbor as ourselves falls short when we are neglecting our own needs. For this issue, we want to emphasize the following links:

- Joni and Friends offers a disability ministry [training series](#) that explores 12 aspects of serving families affected by disability. The series includes a book, supplemental resources and training tools, which are all downloadable for free.
- Ability Ministry offers many helpful resources and videos for pastors and volunteers in areas of disability ministry. In addition, Ability Ministry discusses issues like compassion fatigue during days of COVID-19. Follow this link to its free [training videos](#).
- Johns Hopkins University provides great [information](#). Arranged alphabetically according to the different types of disabilities, this website provides terminologies, characteristics, considerations, and thoughtful accommodations

for each disability. A few adjustments will be necessary when using this information in contexts of ministry, but otherwise, this site is quite helpful.

- Dr. Jeff McNair, a prominent speaker, writer and professor of disability studies and disability ministry, offers insights, articles and blog posts. See articles about Christian models of disability and about different aspects of disability ministry [here](#).
- The community of L'Arche (The Ark) began in 1964 to give adults with intellectual disabilities a place to belong and to be celebrated as they find emotional and spiritual healing. Today, more than 50 years later, this loving and creative model of [ministry](#) inspires intellectual disability ministry as it shapes L'Arche communities around the world. Learning together is always a deeper, fuller experience.
- On August 26, 9:00 – 11:45 AM (PST), Global Access is offering the third virtual community event of 2021. This time, plenary speakers are addressing the biblical view on disability and healing. Visit the [Global Access website](#) for details.
- Also on August 26, 11:00 AM (EST), the coordinator of the Summer Institute on Theology and Disability, Bill Gaventa, is teaching about grief among those with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Especially in these days of COVID, such discussions are needed. Follow this [link](#) to register.
- Compassion fatigue can impact anyone who serves others, but those serving in disability ministry can be particularly vulnerable. The website [pastoralcareinc.com](#) provides a solid look at what such fatigue looks like and how to lessen its effects. A PDF copy is available if desired.

## Disability in Mission

- The [Disability in Mission](#) blog intentionally rotates through a range of different geographic locations, disabilities, ages, genders, and missional callings. But we are all one in Christ Jesus, and the Lord is pleased when we join hands together in prayer and mission. If you do not already visit this *Disability in Mission* blog on a regular basis, we encourage you to do so. Also, there are many archived narratives, which provide much insight and inspiration.
- We hope you have been able to read the refreshing and insightful [book](#) *Disability in Mission: The Church's Hidden Treasure*, edited by Dave Deuel and Nathan John. God works powerfully through disability and not in spite of it.

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## Calls to Action for the Disability Community



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[Refute](#) [Speak](#) [Train](#) [Heed](#)  
[Stigmas](#) [Truth](#) [Leaders](#) [Insights](#)

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