



Special Needs Ministry: First Steps

- 1) ***Pray!*** Jesus so evidently loved those touched by disability when he walked this earth. Pray for your congregation, that they will capture *His heart* for people who share our common need for the power of the Gospel to touch every area of our lives.
- 2) ***Get Your Theological Perspective.*** Take the time to read the following and ask the Holy Spirit to give you the fresh perspective of a biblical view of disability:
 - Survey the Gospels and reflect on how Jesus engaged people with disabilities in His life and ministry.
 - Read Isaiah 61 and reflect on why Jesus chose this passage to inaugurate His ministry as recorded in Luke 4.
 - Read through Paul's discourses on the Body of Christ (Romans 12, I Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4) and consider his emphasis on valuing all of its parts.
 - Read *Same Lake, Different Boat: Coming Alongside People Touched by Disability* by Stephanie O. Hubach. Available at the Christian Education and Publications bookstore, or at www.joniandfriends.org.
 - Read *All Things Possible: Calling Your Church Leadership to Embrace Disability Ministry* by Stephanie O. Hubach. Available only through www.joniandfriends.org
- 3) ***Engage Your Session.*** In order for your local congregation to be transformed, it is essential that your Session embrace the vision for this type of ministry as a practical expression of the Gospel: in word and deed.
- 4) ***Establish a Special Needs Committee.*** Special needs ministry is most effective when it is something that works *across* all of the other ministries of the church. Each ministry needs to know how disability-related issues affect what they do, and how to be equipped. Ask your Session to establish a Special Needs Committee for the church—a small team that can operate as a resource group to the rest of the congregation. Over time, the group can educate the congregation on issues of disability as they relate to ministry. Education is an ongoing process for congregations—and is best done when there is a group that is focused on providing it in gracious, timely, and effective ways. They can also provide practical ideas and assistance on how to facilitate outreach to

and the inclusion of people with disabilities. The MNA Special Needs Ministries website lists resources that will be useful to a group like this. Check out the website regularly at: www.pca-mna.org/specialneeds/index.php.

- 5) **Identify an Area of Focus.** It doesn't take very long to realize that disability ministry encompasses a broad spectrum of possibilities. Since you can't focus on everything, pick a place to start, start there, and do it well. Then grow into additional areas over time. Start with the needs that are right in front of you.
- 6) **Identify the Needs and Gifts of Your Individuals and Families Affected by Disability.** Take time to meet with individuals and families. Try to make the relationship with the individual and the family primary—the gathering of information is important but secondary. Set aside a time to interview the family about ways that the church can help and support—and to understand how the church and the family can work together to create a win-win situation for everyone involved. Emphasize what can be done—*not* what *cannot* be done. Even things that look difficult at first can often be addressed with some creativity and flexibility.
- 7) **Train your volunteers.** Volunteers will be happiest and last longest when they feel well-equipped. When serving families with children, the parents are usually the “experts” on how to best communicate with their children and on how to best redirect specific behaviors. It is often effective for the parents to participate in a training session with the volunteers prior to beginning a new initiative.
- 8) **Intentionally Educate Your Congregation.** Education is an *on-going* process in congregational life. Create opportunities to educate and equip your congregation to have a biblical perspective of disability that overflows into both caring for and respectful relationships with people touched by disability.
- 9) **Hold the Steering Wheel with a Light Touch.** Special needs ministry requires flexibility and openness to the leading of the Holy Spirit. “Hold the steering wheel with a light touch” and be amazed at how God blesses your congregation as you demonstrate justice, mercy and faithfulness to people with disabilities in your midst and in your community.
- 10) **Contact MNA Special Needs Ministries Anytime!** If you need assistance or encouragement at any point along the way, please don't hesitate to contact MNA Special Needs Ministries. If we do not know the answer to your question, we will help you find it! For further information contact:

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