



“Encouraging Equal Concern for People with Disabilities and their Families”

Introduction

A quick survey of the gospel accounts reminds us that Jesus’ ministry was clearly characterized by active and intentional involvement with people touched by disability. Paul’s Epistles succinctly state the value of *all* the different parts that contribute meaningfully to the Body of Christ. According to the Scriptures, justice, mercy and faithfulness in human relationships are very near to the heart of God. Yet, somehow, the Church has repeatedly missed the opportunity to reach out to and embrace those whose lives are so evidently of value to our Heavenly Father—those with disabilities. The Presbyterian Church in America’s experience has typically been similar to the Church-at-large in this regard. Too often, we have absorbed the prevailing cultural views about people with special needs and neglected to evaluate those views through a biblical lens. Not only that, even when we have *seen* with a biblical perspective, often, we have still failed to *respond* as the Scriptures call us to: with respect, with grace, with the restorative power of the Gospel, with genuine hospitality, and with a sense of belonging and appreciation. Experience shows us that people touched by disability—if involved in congregational life at all—usually tend to live on the fringes of its existence.

The Seriousness of the Situation

The danger of the Church continuing on in its current state of “paralysis” with regard to relating to those affected by disability is three-fold:

- The Church will continue to fail to respond, thereby ensuring that the Body of Christ itself will remain essentially disabled—attempting to operate without all of its parts—and that the world’s largest un-reached people group will remain not only on the edges of congregational life but, in most cases, outside of the influence of the Gospel entirely.
- One of the most powerful opportunities to genuinely share the Gospel in word and deed to the world around us—through demonstrated justice, mercy and faithfulness towards people with special needs—will continue to be lost. As a result, we will become increasingly powerless to speak with integrity to sanctity of human life issues in our culture—issues that are becoming paramount in importance.
- When/if the Church does finally respond, it will likely once again simply absorb the newest secular/cultural constructs of disability and bring those perspectives into the Church.

The Tremendous Opportunity

Every serious situation, however, also affords a tremendous opportunity. That’s why the vision of MNA Special Needs Ministries is ***“to see the Body of Christ made more complete through***

evangelizing and authentically integrating people with disabilities and their families into the life and mission of the Presbyterian Church in America.” This type of transformation requires engagement, education, equipping, and encouragement for a sustained period of time and through a variety of means. We are very much in the initial stages of exploring how to best pursue this mission. Here is how we hope, by God’s grace, to accomplish it:

- **Implement Parallel Pathways to Change.** As Romans 12 reminds us, we need to be transformed through the renewing of our minds. Learning to think biblically about disability—and therefore, more accurately about ourselves—is essential to meaningful change. There are a wide variety of barriers to the involvement of people with disabilities in the local church. Writing on the “blank page” (church plants) versus transforming the “engraved slate” (established congregations) requires two parallel paths to change for the denomination. We hope to pursue both in tandem.
- **Follow a Spirit-led Grassroots Approach.** Our approach is not to strategize a top-down denominational mandate on the subject of disability. Law doesn’t change people’s hearts—but grace does. And when transforming grace is present, it manifests itself in amazing and noticeable ways. Our approach to ministry is to find out where the Holy Spirit is already evidently at work in the PCA in touching lives affected by disability—and to get behind that work and support it.
- **Partner Wherever Possible.** Part of what characterizes disability is that it knows no socio-economic boundaries. The subject of disability has a way of gathering people from the most eclectic groups to relate to each other around a common theme. There is an immense amount of information related to the vast expanse of various disabilities that exist. No one person can possibly know everything about every special need or how to address all aspects of it. Our goal is to point PCA congregations to existing resources (via our website), to find ways to put into place additional Christian resources that may be lacking (including a web-based networking site for PCA churches, in addition to written resources) and to work with existing organizations to strengthen our collective influence on the PCA and the Church.

Summary

Special needs ministry—at its heart—is simply a three dimensional picture of the Gospel. Remember: without Christ’s active engagement on our behalf, we have no access to the Father—due to the profoundly disabled condition of our hearts. When we truly understand that, then developing church plants and becoming healthy, established churches that embrace people with disability is simply a practical and very visible expression of our understanding of the Gospel—not just as it applies to others but as it applies to *us*.

This is an exciting time in the life of the PCA. Through MNA Special Needs Ministries, we have a tremendous opportunity to offer our collective gifts, desire, and experience to the Lord to be used to partner with others and multiply the advancement of the kingdom of God in ways that will benefit not only individuals and families touched by disability—but also the entire Church.

For further information, please contact:

Stephanie O. Hubach, MNA Special Needs Ministries Director

shubach@pcanet.org

717-951-0051

www.pca-mna.org/specialneeds/index.php