

By Faith

Beginning a Disability Ministry



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This booklet is designed for use with module 1 of *Exceptional Teaching Online*. Use it for individual study or as a workbook in a classroom setting.

When using this booklet in a class setting, project or have available for all to view *Exceptional Teaching Online*.

Use the interactives and additional resources to amplify the learning experience

Christian Horizons is pleased to partner with CCFH to bring you the Canadian version of this great resource. Christian Horizons seeks to work with churches and families as they seek to support and minister to those with exceptional needs. For further information on disability ministry, please contact us at our office:

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Introduction

The Lord Jesus Himself, in His ministry on earth, advocated and modeled inclusion. No one, regardless of the type or severity of his disability, was ever rejected or neglected by Jesus. He poured out His abundant compassion unreservedly, without fear of contamination, without resentment, without judgment, and without conditions.

Our acceptance and inclusion of persons with disabilities should be pure and unselfish. We must embrace the high priority Jesus put on inclusion and recognize, as He did, that His church is incomplete without the inclusion of persons with disabilities.

We begin this study with faith and prayer.

Faith

Our inspiration scripture will be the 11th chapter of Hebrews. It begins:

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good testimony.

By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.

Hebrews 11:1-3 NKJV

Use these verses for encouragement as you begin your study and plan and implement your disability ministry.

Prayer

Prayer and the power it unleashes are essential to your efforts. Constantly bathe the development of your church's disability ministry in prayer. Develop committed prayer groups. Set aside one evening a month to pray for the disability ministry. Gather together the task force, volunteers, and willing prayer warriors and join in a concert of prayer.

Hebrews 11 details the many wonders and great works that were accomplished by many of the faithful. It lists not only the accomplishments but the trials and tribulations endured. Your faith will sustain you as you witness the blessings generated through disability ministry.

Lesson One – Review the Mission

*But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.
Hebrews 11:6 NKJV*

How do we diligently seek Him? We do so through prayer, supplication, study, loving others as God commands, helping everyone to know Jesus, and including all in fellowship with believers.

In this lesson we will:

- Consider some of the possible reasons for starting a disability ministry
- Look at various statistics related to disability
- Review several driving forces behind the upsurge in disability awareness

Some possible reasons for starting a disability ministry

The primary reasons for considering a disability ministry in your congregation are God's love and inclusion. The specific impetus may vary:

- A couple has just joined your congregation, and their ten-year-old daughter has Down syndrome.
- One of the young couples in your church has just had their first child, a little boy born with cerebral palsy.
- A teenager in your youth group has just been involved in a head-on collision, sustaining a severe spinal cord injury. He is now a quadriplegic.
- One of the young mothers in your congregation has just been informed that she has a rapidly progressing form of multiple sclerosis.
- One of the senior citizens in your church has just been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease.
- A member of your congregation is being led to minister with families experiencing disability.
- A child or spouse of one of your members has a disability.

Whatever your reason for studying this material, we pray that it will provide you with a firm foundation for beginning an outreach ministry focused on persons with disabilities and their families.

Various statistics related to disability

Disabilities may be more pervasive than you think. Nearly 4.4 million people (14.3 percent) have at least one disability¹.

The symptoms of some disabilities may be discernible only to the person affected. However, there is an impact on how they perform activities or roles.

Those with disabilities and their families disproportionately face more difficulties than their typical counterparts. The church, while seeking to bring all into a right relationship with our Creator and Saviour, must extend a special hand of fellowship.

Consider the following statistics from the Participation and Activity Limitation Survey 2006:²

- Of the total Canadian population , 14.3% or 4.4 million people had some type of long-lasting condition or disability
- The employment rate for people with disabilities is 50.5% compared to 75.5% for people without disabilities.
- 45.7% of employed adults with disabilities earn less than \$19,000 per year. The average income of employed adults with disabilities is \$31,668 compared to \$39,951 for employed adults without a disability.
- About 40% of children with autism spectrum disorder do not talk at all (CDC 2004).

This information validates the need for inclusive, far-reaching, and life-changing ministry with people who have disabilities in *every* community!

Your efforts to make certain that God's love shines through in *your* community will be a blessing to all.

¹ Statistics Canada Participation and Activity Limitation Survey, December 3, 2007.

² Statistics Canada Participation and Activity Limitation Survey. December 3, 2007.

Some of the driving forces behind the upsurge in disability awareness

In recent years, several factors have changed public attitude toward and influenced the care of people with disabilities.

“It is important for a church who wants to be more inclusive of people with disabilities to be aware of the history of disability issues in Canada. Without having some knowledge of the past we are likely to hold unknown prejudices or repeat mistakes of the past.

Throughout history having a disability was usually considered tragic. In many societies it meant that a person could not support themselves or their family, or that they were a burden to the society. They were viewed as an object of pity without any ability to make their own decisions.

In the 1960s due to the advocacy of parents and others in the social service field, a new attitude began to emerge. The disability culture today is working towards creating pride in a person’s disability and creating positive self-images. Instead of just acceptance into the wider community, the aim is to become a part of the wider community offering their own diverse backgrounds and legacies.”³

With this new climate, the church must be aware of the changes and offer programs that reflect these trends. The laws enacted do not apply to the church. However, Christians are governed by a higher law and a stronger example, that of Jesus Christ. We have the command to “...Go into all the world and preach the news to all creation. (Mark 16:15 NIV)”

A few years ago the basic unit of disability ministry was a Sunday school class for children or adults with a cognitive disability. These students were taught in a self-contained classroom. Seasonal and other occasional activities were provided but usually not with their age mates or other members of the Sunday school program. Mainstreaming has taught us that interacting with typical students has a positive influence on students with cognitive disabilities. For example, they model more socially acceptable behaviors and not the behaviours that create negative reactions. The new approach for Sunday school, as in public school, is inclusion.

However, meeting the spiritual needs of people with disabilities is more important than adhering to the philosophy of inclusion. The purpose of Sunday school is to convey to learners the wonderful good news that Jesus loves them.

The field of disability ministry is changing and growing. The church should offer its services to members just as do other community organizations. There is no law that says, “The church must serve persons with disabilities.” On the other hand, there is a royal law that says, “Love your neighbor.”

³ Peterson, Ashley. Disability Resource Manual: A Practical Guide for Churches and Church Leaders.

Gene Wigginton, former vice-president of Standard Publishing, suggests a theme for future ministry for persons with disabilities:

"It is not the law; it is love."

Now that you have recognized the need for an inclusive ministry for persons with disabilities in your congregation and in your community, and you have determined to meet the need, you are ready to share your vision with the rest of the congregation!

Lesson Two – Involve church leadership and focus on teaching people about The Lord

By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

Hebrews 11:7 NKJV

We too seek to become heirs of righteousness through our acts of faith. We gather people to enter our ark of inclusion. Not two by two as Noah was commanded, but our charge is to search for as many as will come.

In this lesson we will:

- Review the role of church leadership
- Review the benefits of inclusion
- Center our focus on teaching people about the Lord

Review the role of church leadership

Remember, it is quite likely that there was no coursework in Bible college or seminary to prepare your minister for this type of ministry. Unless he has had experience on a personal level with a disabled family member, he may be unaware of the unique challenges families face.

Put yourself in the role of an educator. Help your minister learn what he needs to know in order to respond compassionately to persons with disabilities and their families.

Here are some simple suggestions.

- Share disability-related facts in Lesson One.
- Invite the leadership of your church to your home and view one or more of the *Exceptional Teaching* video modules.
- Arrange for the leadership to meet a family experiencing a disability in an informal setting. It is important for leaders to learn firsthand about the struggles and joys of living with an individual with disabilities. This will help your leadership staff learn on a tangible level what the benefits of such a ministry could be.
- Share brief excerpts from books or articles that are related to disability ministry.

Be organized and well prepared when you meet with your minister. Present clear concise written information so that it can be reviewed more thoroughly after your meeting. Let him know that you are prepared to spearhead the initiative under his leadership.

Encourage your minister to speak with ministers of congregations where this type of ministry is taking place.

Encourage your minister in his role as an advocate/equiper. Assist him in defining his role in the disability ministry program as someone who listens with compassion and concern, models Christ-likeness by setting a positive tone of acceptance, gives solid answers to "why" questions, prays with and for families, encourages elder support, encourages members of the body at large to get involved, and becomes aware of community resources.

A change that is occurring in churches is in staffing. Through the years of staffing programs in the church, staff members have been added as needs arose. We have seen the addition of youth ministers, ministers to the elderly, ministers to children, etc. With people with disabilities being mainstreamed, the disability minister will become a part of the church staff. This change will call on institutions of higher learning to develop training programs. Churches will be asked to provide training internships. Textbooks will be written and curriculum developed. A new Christian vocation is emerging.

Address theoretical barriers

As the need manifests itself, more churches will start ministries to people with disabilities. People who are blind, deaf, learning impaired, emotionally disturbed, physically disabled, or have health problems should be a part of the church. Our approach should reflect our Lord's instruction to go into the highways and hedges and compel them to come.

Inclusion means people of all abilities are welcomed as vital and valued parts of the body of Christ and given the opportunity to experience and participate in all areas of congregational life. Inclusion benefits every member of the church.

Benefits of Inclusion	
For the person with a disability, inclusion	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides an opportunity to develop peer relationships. • Gives exposure to models of appropriate behaviour, speech, and interaction. • Builds self-esteem. 	
For the person's family, inclusion	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows them to participate in their own Sunday school class and worship service. • Lessens their feelings of isolation. • Provides opportunities for fellowship. 	
For typical students in a Sunday school class, inclusion	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides the opportunity to develop Christ-like compassion and sensitivity. • Helps them understand the challenges faced daily by a person with disabilities. • Teaches acceptance and tolerance. 	
For the church as a whole, inclusion	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deepens the faith and conviction of the entire church. • Is an excellent witness to non-Christians. • Fulfills the promise of Isaiah 58:10 "Feed the hungry and help those in trouble. Then your light will shine out from the darkness, and the darkness around you will be as bright as day" (<i>New Living Translation</i>). 	

Centre our focus on teaching people about the Lord

Follow Jesus' Example		
<p><i>Jesus involved the person with the disability in the ministry process.</i> <i>He did not consult a committee;</i> <i>He asked the person what he wanted.</i> <i>Matthew 20:29-34</i></p>	<p><i>Jesus offered a quick, personal and thorough response to the need.</i> <i>Mark 5:1-20;</i> <i>Matthew 9:18-26</i></p>	<p><i>Jesus was sensitive to the family of the person with the disability. He talked to them about their child.</i> <i>He took time to listen to them.</i> <i>Mark 9:14-32</i></p>

Obviously, Jesus can do more for people than we can. Not only can He heal bodies, He can forgive sins and renew spirits. Edward Spencer conducts a ministry to homebound people with disabilities and their caregivers in Washington, North Carolina. He suggests that Christians today *can* participate in at least one aspect of Jesus' healing ministry. Mr. Spencer suggests that when we show people that we love them and accept them, we are giving new life to their spirits—renewing their will to

live and their joy in life. Recent science backs up Mr. Spencer's idea. Medical researchers tell us that a person's will to live has a great deal of influence on their ability to heal and, in fact, to continue living. Scientific studies have also shown that the human touch, even the human voice, can ease a rapid heartbeat and promote healing. Until we get to Heaven, we have no way of knowing how far-reaching and life-changing a simple act of kindness may be. But knowing as much as we do today should renew our desire to reach out to those most in need among us.

Lesson Three – Appoint a steering committee, conduct a survey of the congregation, study the data, and determine the nature of your program.

*By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.
Hebrews 11:8 NKJV*

As we heed our call, we step out on faith. Sometimes we may not feel certain of our pathway, but we know we are being led by God and we follow obediently.

In this lesson we will:

- Discuss our steering committee
- Study the survey approach and determine the nature of our overall program
- Address attitudinal and theoretical barriers

Steering committee

Use a formal committee to put together your plan. The committee should be made up of people with disabilities, parents or caregivers, industry professionals, church leaders and members, and any other parties that can effectively contribute to the process.

What each can bring to the table:

- ✓ People with disabilities – what they are looking for to enhance their worship and church participation experience.
- ✓ Parents/caregivers – what accommodations and assistance the church can provide.
- ✓ Professionals – special education teachers, medical professionals, social service workers, attorneys, architects, and other professionals can all bring the benefits of their areas of expertise.
- ✓ Church leaders and members – help with providing support structure from the church.

Assign tasks to sub-committees. One could work with physical space. Others can plan outreach; administer and tabulate survey results; investigate curriculum and educational materials. Try to distribute the load evenly so that no one is overburdened.

Establish clear written time lines and goals for each sub-committee. Recruit individuals who can devote the time necessary to study, implement and execute the plan.

Survey approach

You cannot begin to plan a meaningful ministry unless you know the needs of your congregation and your community. To assess the needs of your church, a survey approach is helpful. Sample surveys are in the Additional Resources. We recom-

mend that the survey be included in the Sunday morning bulletin for two consecutive Sundays with encouragement from the pulpit to return it.

Never underestimate the power of the pulpit. A one or two minute announcement made by the minister from the pulpit is more effective than a thousand words written in the church newsletter or spoken by a lay leader.

Once you have decided that inclusion is the right step for your congregation, there are some steps of preparation to take.

1. Survey the congregation to find out what needs exist within the church family. See sample survey in Additional Resources.
2. Survey the community to find out who might come to church if they knew you were prepared for them and would accept them. You might do this with postcards, a newspaper ad, a telephone survey, or with flyers delivered door-to-door.
3. Report the findings of the previous two surveys to the congregation and survey them again to find out who might be willing to participate in this ministry and in what capacity.
4. Assess the results. When all surveys have been collected, tabulate the findings.
 - Acknowledge all needs and concerns. Discuss them prayerfully and carefully. Look not just at spiritual needs but at the needs of the whole person or family (church relationships, day-to-day needs, support systems, socialization, etc.).
 - Prioritize the needs.
 - Review church facilities. Evaluate the level of accessibility in every part of the building. This is important before you begin strategizing. You do not want to invest time and money into a program that persons with disabilities cannot benefit from because they cannot navigate your building.
 - List all possible strategies for meeting the needs to be addressed; then choose the most appropriate, practical and doable.

Determine the nature of our overall plan

- ✓ We will include the student in the class for his age group.
- ✓ We will provide the family members with a support system.
- ✓ We will provide the student with a buddy until he is able to manage alone.
- ✓ If the student is too severely disabled for a regular class, we will provide a setting that permits him to be with his age mates some of the time.
- ✓ We will determine the student's mental age in order to assess his ability or readiness to embrace faith.

Set up a timeline for steps towards completion of strategy.

Regularly evaluate, modify, and update strategy.

Address attitudinal and theoretical barriers

Most often, when people think of barriers to beginning a disability ministry, they think in terms of architectural barriers: doors that are not wide enough, stairways, and no elevators. Granted, these accessibility issues can be major barriers to the development of a disability ministry. They certainly are the most obvious barriers. But the real barriers are the ones that are hidden in the hearts and minds of people; the barriers that are reflected in their attitudes towards persons with disabilities and their families.

Apathy

"We do not have anyone with a disability in our church, so why should we begin a disability ministry?"

Challenge anyone who makes a statement like this to consider the question of *why* there is no one in the church with a disability.

When parents, siblings, spouses, and extended family members are considered, disability affects 35 percent of the population. Disability affects your community in the same proportion. People with disabilities are a segment of our society that is largely overlooked by our churches.

Christ said in Mark 16:15 to "go in to all the world and preach the good news to all creation." This all-encompassing label certainly includes people who have disabilities. Christians must do everything possible and necessary to open the doors of the church - and our hearts - to people who have disabilities.

Excuses

"We do not have anymore room."

You should not need any. The best way to serve most people with disabilities is to include them in the already-existing classes. You may need to provide a buddy for students who have disabilities, to help them understand and participate in classroom activities, but you do not need a separate classroom.

If you do have one or a few students with severe disabilities, consider meeting in one of the staff offices.

You might also consider offering a Bible-study class that takes place away from the church campus—in an individual's home or in residential facilities.

"We can not afford another ministry."

It is a common misconception that disability ministry is more costly than other ministries in which a church is typically involved. Maintaining a disability ministry should be no more expensive than any other ministry the church provides.

For more extensive programs, seek donations from philanthropic organizations for specific programs such as respite care or a camp. A disability ministry can be quite cost efficient if planned and prepared wisely.

Ignorance

"These people can not learn anything. Why bother?"

A disabled body does not necessarily mean a disabled mind. Even among those with a cognitive disability, 85 percent reach a mental age of at least twelve. This is the age at which many people become Christians. People with a cognitive disability are capable of grasping spiritual truths on some level.

"Our minister will not support this ministry."

The needs of persons with disabilities and their families and other disability-related issues are not generally a part of the coursework offered in Bible colleges and seminaries.

Offer educational material on disability ministry to your pastor. Give him articles to read. Arrange for him to meet with a family experiencing disability to learn first-hand what their lives are like. Find creative ways to get your pastor excited about disability ministry.

Pride

"But they are not like us."

Who did Jesus spend the most time with? Certainly not those "in His class." By that criterion, no one on earth would ever be worthy of Jesus' time! Yet He was and is a friend to sinners, outcasts, and those considered to be undesirables.

In the Gospel accounts of Jesus' encounters with people with disabilities, He repeatedly affirmed through His actions and words the unquestionable value and worth of each individual.

Jesus never rejected or ignored anyone, regardless of severe or frightening disabilities. His abundant compassion and love were poured out unreservedly without fear of contamination and without resentment or conditions or judgment. Our acceptance of persons with disabilities should be as pure.

Pity

"I feel so sorry for these people. They need us to help them."

The Old Testament is filled with references to God's compassion for His people, His response to us, and provision for us because of His compassion. The New Testament records time after time when Jesus was filled with compassion, and we see that His response was one of action. Jesus did something in response to the need He saw before Him.

The word "pity" is often used interchangeably with "compassion" but in fact, "pity" refers more to a feeling of sorrow rather than a feeling that leads to action. In the

past, the word pity suggested a sense of superiority. "I feel pity for you because I live in a bigger house, or I have more money, or I have a better education, or I have held this position longer than you"— any such comparison. Such a feeling of superiority leads us far away from the compassionate interaction that Jesus modeled and calls for.

People with disabilities usually work very hard to compensate for their limitations. Their families often feel very protective toward them and do not want others coming into their lives that will make them feel inferior in any way. Christians who want to help must examine their own motives and their own attitudes. Is your goal to minister alongside the person with a disability, to become his or her friend, and to form a give and take relationship? If not, you may need to pray about your attitude before offering to help. We need to make sure that our feeling is one of compassion that will lead us to action and not pity that may lead us to a feeling of superiority.

Helplessness

"We do not have any special training."

Most people are aware of the many medical and educational professionals who are involved in the life of a person with a disability. They then assume that some training is necessary in order to work with that person. However, to minister to a person with a disability and their family you need a heart that strives for Christ-likeness, flexibility, tenderness, a positive but realistic attitude, motivation based on compassion not pity, and a genuine desire to serve. Anything you need to know about the person's adaptive equipment or medical needs will come as you work with him and get to know him.

Insensitivity

"We can ask the family of the person with the disability to lead this ministry."

The last thing families experiencing disability need is another responsibility. The day-to-day stress is already probably taking its toll in ways you are not able to see. After reading the disability-related statistics in lesson one, you will think twice before asking families to take on an additional job.

Ask for input and advice, but avoid giving families any of the class responsibilities. Allow them to bask in the warmth of a loving, caring church family. This is a much-needed and much-appreciated aspect of disability ministry.

Fear

"I know I am going to say something stupid or offensive. I do not know how to act."

Be a friend. Be genuine. Be transparent.

Ask questions. Often, persons with disabilities and their families are eager to talk and will be pleased that you demonstrated your care and concern by asking. If your question concerns something they would rather not discuss, they will let you know.

Treat persons with disabilities as you want to be treated.

With the emphasis on inclusion in our public school systems, most parents and students are quite comfortable with the concept of inclusion — and expect it. Give parents who are concerned the appropriate information. Give them the opportunity to ask questions. In an informal setting, arrange for them to meet the student who will be in the learner's class and to meet his or her family.

Learning should take place in the best setting to accomplish this purpose. The Sunday school program can be designed to maximize the opportunity for every person with a disability to learn, not just to be enrolled in a program with the "correct philosophy." A good way to accomplish this approach is with a period of transition called "the special needs room."

Lesson Four – Write a mission statement and develop a ministry plan

By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

Hebrews 11:9-10

Here we build the foundation for our disability ministry. It is not a task we take lightly. We know that through God's grace our study and effort will bring the reward of a ministry that will be a blessing to all.

In this lesson we will:

- Write a mission statement
- Develop a ministry plan

Write a mission statement

Writing a mission statement will insure the focus of your disability ministry. A good mission statement should express the following concepts:

1. The church will welcome and value people with disabilities.
2. The church will teach following the mandate of the Great Commission.
3. We serve on behalf of God and His Son.
4. The church will minister with the family experiencing disability.
5. The church will use the gifts and talents of people with disabilities in the life of the church.

Consider those concepts in the following mission statement:

This ministry is dedicated to serving children, youth, and adults with disabilities and their families. We believe that individuals with disabilities are precious gifts from God and are here specifically to teach us lessons that we might never learn by ourselves. We consider it a privilege and a direct call from God to reach out to those who are disabled because this ministry represents the very heart of God. We are committed, not just to serving these individuals, but to empowering them to become vital members of the body of Christ.

This statement concisely conveys our love and inclusion for all people in the service of God.

See *Exceptional Teaching On-Line* for an interactive exercise in writing a mission statement.

In preparing the statement the following concept should be considered. The value of every person is the mandate of the Great Commission.

Recognize the value of every person regardless of disability. People with disabilities have value. They matter. God loves them. They have souls. They need salvation. If this philosophy does not motivate our service, we will be operating from the standpoint of service because parents ask us to do it, we feel sorry for the kids, or it might be to increase the overall attendance.

The Great Commission is clear. Psalm 139:13 does not have a footnote: "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb." People with Fragile X syndrome, Down syndrome, and autism are a part of God's creativity. Mark 16:15 does not have a footnote either: "He said to them, "Go into all of the world and preach the good news to all creation." People with Fragile X syndrome, Down syndrome, and autism are a part of the Church's responsibility to share the message with everyone regardless of ability.

Jim Pierson writes:

A children's minister asked me to visit his church to observe a child with serious emotional problems. When I arrived in the children's department on Sunday morning, I did not have to be told where to go. I followed the screaming.

As I entered the classroom for second graders, the teacher with her back to the door was holding a screaming, kicking child. The other children were sitting quietly at the table. The teacher said, "You are hurting me, but I am going to hold you until you calm down. Then, I will put you in your chair and I will tell you how much Jesus loves you." My job to tell her what to do had been done. She had told the other students to be calm and she would take care of the situation.

The teacher understood the boy's problems and valued him as a human being. She worked to get the care and education he needed. Today he is a wonderful family man, productive citizen, and faithful member of his church.

Develop a ministry plan

The ideal ministry with persons with disabilities and their families would not be a special program, but rather a plan for including persons with disabilities and their families in programs that already exist, devising supplementary strategies to meet exceptional needs.

The goal should be ministry in action to meet the diverse needs of diverse people. Do not limit your ability to meet needs by being rigid or by lack of information: be creative!

Consider a congregation that has mid-week Bible studies in the homes of the church elders. Fred, a quadriplegic, Missy, a young woman who is deaf, Sidney, a middle-aged man who has a cognitive disability, and Tim and Marianne, the parents of a nine-month-old infant with multiple disabilities, would all like to be involved in the mid-week studies. In the past, the congregation's response would have been to design a special study just for them, or to simply exclude them from participation.

However, in today's era of inclusion, the congregation's response will be to make already existing studies accessible to Fred, Missy, Sidney, Tim, and Marianne.

Fred, who lives on the west end of town, will attend Dave and Cindy's study. They also live on the west end of town. Fred's attendant will drive him and will sit with him to care for his needs during the study. (This is a great way to evangelize the attendant!) The church will pay to have a portable ramp constructed so that Fred can negotiate steps into Dave and Cindy's home. Dave and Cindy will be certain that the room where the study group meets has ample space for Fred to maneuver his electric wheelchair. The bathrooms in Dave and Cindy's home are inaccessible, but since all Fred needs is a place of privacy where his attendant can empty his leg bag, Dave and Cindy will be sure one of the bedrooms is available. Fred wants to carry out the same responsibilities as the rest of the group (he does not want to feel "special"), so he expects to be included on the refreshment list and to sometimes be called on to offer the opening or closing prayer.

Missy is independent as far as driving is concerned, so she can get herself to and from the study that meets across town. Missy chose this study because several men and women who attend are single and in their thirties as she is. There are no accessibility issues as far as Missy is concerned, but the church will pay for a licensed sign language interpreter to attend the study and interpret for Missy. (As a side-light, the church will sponsor sign language classes so that Missy's hearing friends can learn how to communicate with her more effectively and so that the church can begin to train its own team of interpreters.) Like Fred, Missy does not want to be considered "special" and expects to carry out the same responsibilities as any other group member would.

Sidney would like to attend the Bible study that meets near his group home. Church members who attend this study will share in picking up Sidney and taking him home. They will also take turns sitting next to Sidney during the study, assisting him in locating passages in his Bible and helping him to feel welcome and accepted. Just like all the other members who attend this study, Sidney will take his turn at bringing refreshments. When it is his turn, a member of the group will take Sidney shopping so that he may choose what he would like to bring. Sidney will also be asked on a regular basis to offer the opening or closing prayer, like everyone else in the group.

Tim and Marianne would like to attend a Bible study where they can meet with other couples with young children. They have been afraid to get involved with other groups and activities in the church because of the individual attention their infant son requires. But the church has taken volunteers from the youth group, singles group, and senior citizens' groups, and trained them specifically to care for baby Timmy's needs. A team of two will care for Timmy in another room in the home where the Bible study meets so that Tim and Marianne will be close by in case of an emergency.

As you can see, it is not always necessary to create a new program to meet the needs of persons with disabilities and their families. All you need is to allow flexibil-

ity and creativity. There may be some instances where designing and implementing a new program is the best way to meet needs. For example, parents who are caring for adult children with developmental disabilities may need to have an evening once a month when their adult children will be cared for at the church. Allowing the parents to go out to dinner, see a movie, or visit with friends would be a welcomed relief. Designing and implementing a specialized plan to meet this need would be tremendous!

But even when you do implement a plan like this, be careful not to develop a mindset that allows you to pigeonhole all families with disabled children into the program. For example, Tim and Marianne would benefit greatly from having an evening out every once in a while as well, but a program designed to care for adults with developmental disabilities is not going to be appropriate for their infant son. Using the teams of care providers that were trained to care for Timmy during the mid-week Bible study to give Tim and Marianne relief on a weekend evening every once in a while would be a better solution. For other parents of young children with disabilities, providing care in their home so that they can go out on a "date" would be a welcomed and greatly appreciated ministry. So, it is important to note that even when you have a specialized program in place, you still must maintain the flexibility and creativity to plan for exceptional circumstances.

Twelve Steps for Implementing Your Inclusive Ministry

STEP ONE: Determine your approach. Survey the congregation to locate persons and families who are dealing with disability and people who are willing to serve. (Sample surveys may be found in the back of this booklet.) Study the results and write a mission statement.

STEP TWO: Involve the entire congregation and the leadership. Host a disability awareness Sunday or weekend. You will find material in this booklet to use for your event.

STEP THREE: Inform the congregation and community of your plan. Advertise your efforts in church literature and in the local newspaper.

STEP FOUR: Train the staff and recruit volunteer helpers. Provide teachers with assurance of prayer, materials, information on disabilities, and plenty of assistance.

STEP FIVE: Survey your classrooms. The classroom should be attractive as well as safe and accessible for students of all abilities.

STEP SIX: Adapt curricula and select good methods for teaching. Be creative, bearing in mind the student's needs and abilities. Whatever the material or the method, it is important to stress to your students that the lessons you are teaching are from God's Word.

STEP SEVEN: Prepare the students for the inclusion experience. The overall goal is to make everyone feel comfortable. Be open and honest about the situation.

STEP EIGHT: Learn about the student to be included. Learn as much as you can about the student's spiritual, emotional, and physical needs.

STEP NINE: Interview the family. Get all the information you need to make the student's placement in the classroom a positive experience.

STEP TEN: Maintain open communication with the student's family. Use the information from these meetings to set goals and evaluate a student's progress.

STEP ELEVEN: Anticipate the person's future in the congregation. Plan to continue spiritual nurturing through adolescence and adulthood.

STEP TWELVE: Enjoy knowing that you are making an eternal difference. Whatever the situation, help the person to know that he or she is surrounded by God's love and mercy.

Lesson Five – Communicate the nature of your ministry and recruit and train volunteers.

By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born as many as the stars of the sky in multitude—innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.

Hebrews 11:11-12 NKJV

And so shall the fruits of our labor multiply. We may not see the results in our lifetime but we rejoice in knowing that only what we do for Christ will last. Our efforts will not go unnoticed. If not by man, our reward is eternal.

In this lesson we will:

- Discuss communicating the nature of your ministry
- Study recruiting and training volunteers

Communicate the nature of your ministry

Publish and post a list of classes and activities.

The special needs room will serve as home base for all students with disabilities. Their individual spiritual needs will be the prime concern of the inclusion staff. A lead staff member, with as many assistants as needed, will coordinate the activities. If the student needs a time of orientation to Sunday school and church life, he/she will be trained by the teachers in the special needs room. After a student feels at home in the new surroundings, he can be included in an age-appropriate class. The teacher and the students in the typical class will be trained to help with the process. Until the student is comfortable in the mainstreamed class, a staff member or “buddy” should accompany him. If the student can be taught in a self-contained classroom, the staff should provide the opportunity as a regular part of the “inclusion unit.”

The unit lends itself to variations of the mainstreaming approach. An option would be to have students from a typical Sunday school class come to the unit to do peer tutoring. Learning Biblical truths that are difficult for learners with cognitive delays will be easier when done with an age mate. If this approach is used, the peer tutor should be thoroughly trained by the inclusion staff.

Further, there may be students whose needs are best met on a part time basis in a self-contained setting. In this case the students should be included in as many programs with their age peers as possible. To illustrate, children could attend a puppet show being presented by a traveling group. Adults could attend a special music program for all adults in the auditorium.

Other programs will be accessible to learners with disabilities. The popular youth meeting will include youngsters with all levels of ability. Teaching Christian social graces, learning to evangelize friends, and experiencing fellowship are all as important to a person who is blind, deaf, or has a cognitive disability as to a person with-

out a disability. Music departments will be available to all singers. Camps—weekday, week long, and day camps—will offer spiritual nurture to campers with special needs. Creating support groups for families and students is a valid goal.

As the special needs staff works with people with disabilities and their families, they will discover many needs that can be met by the church. Respite care, housing, recreation programs, support groups, and counseling are common ones. Congregations are beginning to offer these services to persons in the community. As we return to a simpler, more personalized approach to ministry, these services will find many appreciative recipients.

Recruiting and training volunteers

Your most valuable tool is the congregational survey that identified people who are willing to work with this ministry. However, you do not want to accept someone for this work just because they volunteered. People with disabilities have had to face rejection and ridicule all their lives. They should *never* have to face unloving or indifferent treatment in the church. Furthermore, volunteers who are not serious about their commitment and responsibilities are of no use and, in fact, can be detrimental to the development of your ministry. As you train volunteers for ministry, it is imperative that you impress upon them the absolute seriousness of the task they have undertaken. Evaluate your volunteers carefully.

What qualities should you look for in a volunteer?

- Strives to be like Christ
- Is motivated by compassion, not pity
- Reflects a positive but realistic attitude
- Is flexible
- Is tender and gentle, not harsh and abrasive
- Genuinely desires to serve persons with disabilities and their families
- Is able to make quick decisions under pressure.

Where do you find those who might be willing to serve?

- Mature members of your youth group (can be good peer buddies)
- Singles
- Senior citizens
- Whole families willing to minister as a unit
- Anyone who is not already over-committed

Training volunteers

Once you have determined those who are best equipped for this ministry, you need to help them understand and be sensitive to the daily struggles that persons with disabilities and their families face. You will also want to acquaint them with disability related issues, and characteristics of types of disabilities.

Awareness Training

Simulation activities will help your volunteers understand a little of what it is like to have a disability. The experience of participating in a group activity in a wheelchair, with earplugs, or with their arms tied to their sides can have a big impact and help develop patience and humility.

Encourage the appropriate use of language. Remind volunteers to refer to the person first, then the disability. For example, "the girl has Down syndrome" *not* "the Down syndrome girl." The two exceptions to this rule are "blind" and "deaf." It is acceptable to refer to "the blind man" or to say: "There is a deaf girl in our class." Of course, it is still kinder to say, "We have a girl named Sarah in our class who is deaf." Avoid terms like "afflicted," "victim," and "wheelchair bound." Remind volunteers that good communication skills include visual directness, touching (unless you are dealing with a person with autism), and not pretending to understand when you really do not. Acquaint volunteers with communication devices or other technology the persons they minister with might use.

Emphasize confidentiality. Nothing that is said to a volunteer in confidence should be repeated under any circumstance unless the volunteer fears for the physical, emotional, or sexual well being of the confidant. The chain of command in your ministry should be clearly defined so the volunteers know exactly to whom they should go if any type of abuse is suspected.

Familiarize volunteers with wheelchair etiquette as well as guide/service dog etiquette. For instance, a volunteer should never walk up behind a person in a wheelchair and begin pushing—he must first ask if the person wants to be pushed and then how to proceed. In the case of guide and service dogs, volunteers must not pet them or distract them while they are on duty (in harness or with their backpacks on).

Other rules of disability etiquette may be found in the CCFH Ministries' brochure, *Disability Etiquette*.

Create a procedure for what to do if someone has a seizure or chokes, or any other type of medical situation, and teach the procedures to your volunteers.

Give volunteers basic definitions for the disabilities they will be dealing with. Detailed medical jargon and technical information is confusing and unnecessary. Keep it brief and simple. Encourage volunteers to ask the person they are ministering with, or a family member, to explain the disability.

Make volunteers aware of the particular stresses and strains that families facing disability experience. Emphasize the marital discord that can arise and the struggles that siblings encounter.

Encourage each volunteer to *simply be a friend*.

Promoting Commitment

Pray for and with the volunteers. Encourage them to pray for their personal commitment and for the individuals with whom they will be ministering.

Encourage volunteers to study scripture that relates to ministry with people who have disabilities. Some good examples of passages to study are Matthew 25:31-46; Psalm 139; Luke 14:7-24; I Corinthians 12:12-31; Isaiah 35:3-6, 58:10-11, 61:1; Jeremiah 1:5, 22:16, and the many accounts of Jesus' encounters with persons with disabilities found in the New Testament.

Provide job descriptions for volunteer positions that clearly detail expectations and responsibilities. People function better when they understand what is expected of them.

Provide specific training in behaviour management techniques, practical teaching principles, and the effective use of curriculum and materials. (Resources are available through www.ccfh.org.)

Remind each volunteer how much his/her relationship will mean to the individual, as well as to that individual's family. Tell them that if they make a promise, they must keep it.

Conclude volunteer training sessions with a commissioning service, setting the volunteers apart for ministry with persons with disabilities and their families.

Initially, ask volunteers to commit to three months of service. At the end of three months, sit down together and evaluate the experience and determine if the volunteer is ready and willing to commit a year of service to the disabilities ministry. Re-evaluate at the end of that year.

Once you have recruited, how do you keep volunteers refreshed, renewed and committed?

- Give adequate training and supervision.
- Meet as a group on a monthly basis to evaluate, plan, and prepare.
- Provide continuous opportunities for training and education by sharing articles, newsletters, websites, and videos. Provide means for volunteers to attend seminars and workshops.
- Explore networking possibilities where individuals and groups engaged in disability ministry meet together to share ideas and resources.
- If volunteers incur expenses, reimburse them in a timely manner.
- Regularly send thank-you notes and postcards to thank every volunteer.
- Plan an annual appreciation luncheon or banquet.

Preparing Volunteers — and Class Members

Before a student with a disability is included into your Bible school program, schedule a meeting with the parents, the pastor, the Bible school teacher, Christian edu-

cation director, and parents of students without disabilities. Develop a detailed plan that will make everyone's experience more beneficial.

Prepare both the student with the disability and the students currently in the class for the experience. Allow the student with the disability to visit the classroom. Explain who will be in the class and explain the routine. Explain to the other students what to expect when the student with a disability comes into the class. Define the disability in simple terms and allow them to ask questions.

The more you know about a certain disability, the more comfortable you will be meeting a person who has that disability. The more comfortable you are, the more comfortable the new class member will be. Prepare volunteers and current class members for the arrival of the new class member, discuss the basic suggestions below that pertain to your new student.

Students with Physical Disabilities

- Familiarize yourself with any equipment the student uses.
- Explain to other students in the class how to treat equipment with respect.
- Make sure that all facilities are physically accessible.
- Train a peer assistant to help the student with tasks that are beyond his physical capabilities.

Students with Speech Problems

- Practice good listening skills
- Never pretend you understand something if you do not. Ask the student to repeat comments or questions. If you still have problems understanding, ask the student to draw a picture or gesture.

Students with Emotional Problems

- Be loving, but firm.
- Plan for success. (Accentuate the positive, praise little victories.)
- Ask for advice from parents and professionals that work with this student.
- Do not make a commitment to the person you cannot keep.

Students with a Cognitive Disability

- Routine is important.
- Avoid abstract concepts and ideas.
- Allow more time for learning.
- Use repetition to aid retention.
- Be patient and unhurried in teaching.
- Give only one or two directions at a time.
- Make the lesson meaningful and applicable to their lives.

Students with Autism

- Avoid giving the child a choice about participating in a particular activity.
- Ask the parents if the child likes to be touched. Follow their advice.
- Provide one-on-one assistance (a buddy) for each child with autism.

- If the child’s behavior becomes disruptive, ask his buddy to remove him from the room and help him calm down by taking a walk or getting a drink of water. After the child is calm, return to class.
- Routine is extremely important.
- Be calm and patient in dealing with the child.

Students with Learning Disabilities

- Provide for needed breaks in concentration.
- Do not lecture for long periods of time.
- Continually refocus the student’s attention.
- Cut down on distracting noise and limit the visual environment.
- Use active learning strategies.
- Use all five senses (hearing, sight, smell, taste, and touch) in each lesson.

Students with Hearing Impairments

- Do not shout.
- If the child lip-reads, make sure he has a good view of your mouth.
- If the child wears hearing aids, keep extra batteries on hand.
- Provide a sign language interpreter if necessary.

Students with Visual Impairments

- Use clear, uncluttered visual aids.
- Address the student by name.
- Give explanations each time movement in the room is necessary.
- Familiarize yourself with sighted guide techniques.
- Explain guide dog etiquette (never pet a dog while he is working).
- Provide Braille or large print materials.

Beginning a disability ministry is a daunting task. The purpose of these lessons is to give you some guidance for the process. Factors will vary depending on your congregation, location and resources. There may be circumstances we have not considered that will be important to you. Use the lessons as a guide.

To keep your ministry healthy and growing:	
<i>Pray Pray Pray</i>	
Network	Avoid burnout
Emphasize creativity	Constantly evaluate
Stay focused on the goals	Train and nurture volunteers regularly
Rest	

Sample Survey of Disability Needs

(For congregation and for community)

1. Do you have a disability or do you frequently interact with any person who has a disability?
 Yes No

2. Who is that person?
 friend relative neighbour
 co-worker my child's friend my friend's child

3. What is the age of the individual who has a disability?
 under 18 18-25 26-29 30s
 40s 50s 60s 70 & over

4. Does that person regularly attend church? Yes No

5. What is the nature of the disability?
 deaf or hard of hearing Down syndrome stroke
 physical disability traumatic head injury autism
 mental illness visual impairment cerebral palsy
 cognitive disability learning disability ADHD
 behaviour disorder other _____

(Please explain)

6. Do you, your friend, or relative need:

- assistance with weekly shopping
- transportation for appointments
- sign language interpretation
- Braille Bible study materials
- amplification equipment
- medical equipment (specify) _____
- other needs (explain) _____
- counseling
- respite care
- support group
- large print Bible

7. If you were to receive respite care, how often would you want help?

- weekly
 - monthly
 - overnight
 - weekend
- _____

8. What can we do to help include you, your friend, or relative in the fellowship of our church?

- provide transportation
- provide a specialized Sunday school class
- provide better accessibility
- other (explain) _____

8. What else can we do to provide support and encouragement for you, your friend, or relative? (explain)

Name _____

Address _____

City/Prov/PC _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Sample Survey of Congregational Participation

How Will You Reach Out?

- I am interested in learning more about this ministry.
- I will attend an informational meeting on_____.
(meeting date)
- I am unable to attend the meeting, but would like to be a member of the team.
- I would like the Disability Ministry team to contact me.
- I would like to be trained as a volunteer in the following areas:
(Please check all that apply.)
 - Education
 - Respite care programs
 - Sunday School teacher
 - Mother's Day Out
 - Sunday School assistant
 - Friday Night Live
 - Bi-weekly Bible studies leader
 - Saturday morning
 - Transportation
 - Prayer Partners
 - Driver (Sunday mornings or mid-week activities)
 - Pray for ministry
 - Pray with people who have disabilities
 - Carpool
 - Invite the family to my home
 - Adopt-A-Friend
 - Buddy with a person who has disabilities in Sunday school and worship
 - Take person out, invite to my home, send cards and notes

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____ Email _____