

## The Top Ten Things You Need to Know

1. Why Start a Disability Ministry?
  - a. We serve a God that is the Great Includer, and all are welcome in His House; we are to have an inclusionary culture
    - i. Luke 14: 21-23
  - b. We are all fearfully and wonderfully made
    - i. Psalm 139:14
    - ii. Our church should represent all diversity and ability levels – different is normal
  - c. Our churches need to reflect God’s love for all His people and welcome and fully embrace them, not just tolerate or put up with them
2. How Accessible is Your Church
  - a. Architecturally
    - i. Handicap-accessible bathrooms, water fountains, adequate parking, and seating
    - ii. Ramps and curb cuts
    - iii. Elevators and not just stairs to multi-floored buildings
    - iv. Automatic doors
    - v. 36” or wider to accommodate wheelchair users
  - b. Modes of Communication
    - i. Sign language interpreters available for the deaf or hard of hearing
    - ii. Large print materials or Bibles
    - iii. Braille for the blind or persons with low vision
    - iv. Attitudinally – Are we a church that is ready to embrace all people regardless of ability level or disability, whether physical, emotional, or intellectual?
      1. Are we ready to intentionally reach out to persons God has created?
      2. We must then train staff and volunteers on disability etiquette
        - a. How to speak to persons with disabilities
        - b. “People first” language
3. What is Your Church’s Existing Need?
  - a. Survey to gather information on attendees and their family needs
    - i. Bulletin insert
    - ii. Online
      1. What questions to ask
        - a. Do you or anyone in your family have a disability?
        - b. If so what is the disability and age of the person?
        - c. Are you a professional in the field of disability, and would you be willing to serve on a planning committee or task force?
        - d. Do you have a passion to serve in our new disability ministry (no training necessary; we will train)?
  - b. Schedule an interest meeting or town hall meeting for all interested parties

- c. Letter from the church into neighborhoods or advertisements about the start up of new ministry and outreach
- 4. Where to Begin (Getting Started)
  - a. Organizationally, where does the ministry fall?
    - i. Is it under children's ministry, outreach, missions, or caring?
  - b. Create a prayer team....bathe the new ministry initiative in prayer
    - i. Asking for God's wisdom and provision
  - c. Identify point person and team
    - i. Create a diverse planning team
      - 1. Parents
      - 2. Persons with disabilities
      - 3. Professionals in the field: OT, PT, RT, special educators, medical professionals
      - 4. Church staff
  - d. Plan the plan, then work the plan
    - i. Based on assessment, create first steps and start up programming
- 5. The Plan
  - a. Let church's needs drive initial programming
    - i. What is the most pressing need?
      - 1. Children or adults?
      - 2. Type of program?
        - a. Sunday morning options
        - b. Supporting parents/caregivers
          - i. Support group
          - ii. Respite options
  - b. Seat at the table – creates a church-wide focus on being inclusive, not program specific
  - c. Point person
    - i. Paid or unpaid position
  - d. Facilities – how much space or building usage?
    - i. Geographic location convenient to bathrooms and handicapped parking
    - ii. Is it accessible space?
  - e. Resources and projected costs
    - i. Supplies
    - ii. FFE – furniture, fixtures, and equipment
    - iii. Curriculum
  - f. Start small, dream big – do one program well, and then add on
- 6. How to Fund or Support
  - a. The budget process – line-item budget
  - b. Other options if no budget money

- i. One-time special offering during services
- ii. Create a wish list or in-kind donations
  - 1. Toys/games
  - 2. Snacks
  - 3. Craft
  - 4. Therapy mats or balls
  - 5. Mini trampolines
- c. Grant seeking and writing
- d. Private donors
- e. Fundraising events
  - i. Golf tourneys
  - ii. 5K race/walk
  - iii. Dance or dinner

7. What Model of Programming is Best?

- a. There is not one model that fits all.... Key words in disability ministry: be flexible
- b. Models – there are benefits and challenges to each
  - i. Full Inclusion – Least restrictive environment; welcoming individuals into all programs, regardless of ability level. This format ensures persons with disabilities will participate and interact with able-bodied peers
    - 1. Benefits
      - a. Increased awareness and sensitivity
      - b. Inclusive friendships
      - c. Modeling of appropriate behaviors and social skills
    - 2. Challenges
      - a. May need additional classroom supports and staffing
      - b. Programmatic design needs to accommodate a wide range of cognitive ability
      - c. Existing staff and volunteers will need additional training on inclusionary strategies and disability awareness
  - ii. Partial Inclusion – The model in which the student or individual with disability is included for a portion of the programming and in a specialized setting for the remainder of the time
    - 1. Benefits
      - a. Allows for some flexibility for person with disability
      - b. Some interaction with typical peers
      - c. Additional supports in specialized classroom or program
    - 2. Challenges
      - a. May have transitional issues if student not properly prepared
      - b. Possible disruption in program flow
  - iii. Specialized or Self-Contained Program – This model creates special programs or classrooms for persons with disabilities; typically they are smaller classrooms

sizes, higher staff-to-student ratios, and taught by professionals, such as special educators or ones with experience working with the disability community

1. Benefits
    - a. More classroom support
    - b. Smaller classroom size
    - c. Program and materials adapted to cognitive ability
  2. Challenges
    - a. Limited exposure to able-bodied peers (unless a reserve inclusion model is implemented)
    - b. Volunteer recruiting may be a challenge without proper training in place
8. Volunteer Recruiting and Training – Should have a thorough process in place. NOTE: this population is four times more likely to be taken advantage of or abused; screen all applicants thoroughly
- a. Completed application with character references
  - b. Federal background check required on all volunteers over the age of 18
  - c. Equip volunteers to do the job you have asked them to do by providing necessary skills and knowledge
    - i. Disability awareness
    - ii. Policies and procedures for medical and safety guidelines
    - iii. Behavior management
    - iv. Non-verbal communication strategies
      1. Basic sign language
      2. How to use visual and picture symbols
      3. Low-tech communication devices
    - v. How to adapt materials and lesson plans
9. Creating Community Partnerships and Networks – have an outward focus to bring in those with the community, who are currently not in your churches
- a. Community Mapping – know what other disability services and programs exist via disability agencies and local churches
    - i. What gaps exist in services?
      1. Respite
      2. Parent support
      3. Social or recreation opportunities
      4. Sibling supports
    - ii. Be visible at community disability conference or resource fairs; be out in the community
    - iii. Connect with associations, such as Easter Seals, UCP, Autism Society of America
    - iv. Professional offices – medical or therapist
    - v. School systems, especially Special education departments

- vi. BE OUT IN THE COMMUNITY having Kingdom Impact – do not have an undercover/secret disability ministry

#### 10. Keeping It Safe

- a. Risk Management Assessment – what is the worst that could happen, and how do I plan for that not to happen? Or, in the event it does, what will our response be?
  - i. Liability insurance
  - ii. Draft policy, disseminate, and educate
    - 1. Emergency or evacuation plan
    - 2. Medical guidelines
    - 3. Medicine administration
    - 4. Behavioral plan
    - 5. Sickness plan
    - 6. Parent notification
  - iii. Develop program policies
    - 1. For whom is the program appropriate?
    - 2. Intake process or registration
    - 3. Expectations regarding level of independence and staffing ratios
  - iv. What to do in case of a failure
    - 1. Documentation
    - 2. Notification
    - 3. Debrief and education

CLOSE:

Disability Ministry is not rocket science, and every church regardless of size can and should be welcoming to persons of all ability levels. How that looks for each church may be slightly different depending on:

- a. Attendee needs
- b. Church's mission or vision statement
- c. Facilities and budget size

As long as you have an individual and a team committed to serving, a willingness to learn, partners with parents, and a calling from GOD, disability ministry can happen.

With our God, nothing is impossible, and he often calls the least qualified. Look at the men and women He used to carry out HIS plans in the Bible: fishermen, shepherds, prostitutes, and tax collectors.

He can use You.

For more information or training, please contact me at 703-770-2942 or [jackie.millsferald@mcleanbible.org](mailto:jackie.millsferald@mcleanbible.org).