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# The Resource Page

... creative and practical ideas

Brought to you this month  
by Cathy Humphrey



## Making your church a caring place for families with special needs

Is your church missing the opportunity to minister to a population in your community that is growing at three times the rate of the “normal” population? Ten to 20 percent of your community includes people who have:

- Physical disabilities
- Intellectual disabilities, or mental retardation
- Visual impairment
- Learning disabilities
- Hearing impairment
- Behavior disorders
- Emotional disturbance

Fifty-four million men, women and children in the United States have disabilities. When you add their family members, you are talking about one-half of the nation’s population. Regardless of ability, people need the Lord.

The latest statistics indicate that:

- Eighty percent of marriages that either produce a child with a disability or include a spouse or child who becomes disabled will end in divorce.
- People with disabilities are the group in our society with the highest incidence of poverty, homelessness, unemployment and suicide.
- Autism is more common than previously thought in the United States, affecting one in 150 children.
- About 3-7 percent of children in the United States have Attention Deficit Disorder, and about one child in five has a learning disability.

- Less than 14 percent of the disabled population claim to be Christians, and more than one-half of all families experiencing disability are outside of any organized religion.

About 20 percent of your church should be people with disabilities. If not, what is keeping them from coming? Remember that often their family members do not attend church because there is nothing provided for their children, siblings or parents.

Families of people with special needs are under a tremendous strain — usually financially, socially, physically and emotionally

### RESOURCES

[www.ccfh.org](http://www.ccfh.org)

“Exceptional Teaching Online,” an interactive program for the successful implementation of a disability ministry

[www.zachariahsway.com](http://www.zachariahsway.com)

Information, resource materials and networking services for helping people with special needs and their families

[www.joniandfriends.org](http://www.joniandfriends.org)

Encouragement and resources for churches starting a disability ministry

[www.nod.org](http://www.nod.org)

Resources to help churches provide a welcoming faith community to all

exhausted. Some have tried to find a church home but have been turned away because of barriers. These barriers can be physical but are often attitudinal.

Jesus spent much of his time ministering to those shunned by society. In Luke 14:12-14, Jesus says to his host: “When you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed...” Everyone should be included at Jesus’ table.

Following are some steps you can take to make your church a caring and inclusive place for people with disabilities:

- Pray about it.
- Talk with the pastor and church leaders. They must be on board or the ministry will not get off the ground.
- Form a committee of interested people, including key church leaders.
- Inspect your church buildings to determine their accessibility. A useful experiment would be to provide wheelchairs and crutches at the first committee meeting for each member of the group and let them find out first-hand how easy it is to maneuver around the church.
- Survey the church membership, the community and local agencies to decide on needs, starting with the greatest one. It could be a special-needs Sunday school class, Vacation Bible School, summer camp or choir; respite care; a parent or sibling support group; or transportation.

The church can be a tremendous blessing to those who desperately need spiritual and other support, and the congregation will be blessed in return by the presence and contributions of people with disabilities. **BT**

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