

Talking to Church Leadership

4 Steps to Gaining Support for Disability Ministry



Top Down vs. Bottom Up Ministry

There are two ways a ministry starts. “Top down” ministry is when church leadership decides to create a ministry and comes to the congregation seeking volunteers. “Bottom up” ministry is the exact opposite—a member of the congregation sees a need and seeks support from their leadership. The goal of this sheet is to help prepare you to talk to your church leadership about your dream for serving individuals and families affected by disability.

1. Pray!

Psalm 127 tells us that “Unless the Lord builds the house, those who built it labor in vain.” The best laid plans will fail unless God is in it. Pray for wisdom for both you and your church leadership. Repeat step one often.

2. Define the Mission

Your church leadership has probably carefully crafted a church mission statement. This statement guides everything your leadership pursues, allows, and supports. Before going to your leadership, ask yourself: “How do all people, with different needs and abilities, already fit into our mission?” Tying your church’s mission statement into your proposed ministry’s mission statement will help gain the support of leadership and help make your ministry last! A clearly defined mission sets your ministry up for success. Without knowing the goal, it’s impossible to know whether or not your ministry is succeeding! Make sure your leadership knows what you’re trying to do. You’ll find an example of a good mission statement below.

Start Small

Many churches are stuck wanting everything but not knowing how to accomplish their lofty goals! It’s better to do one thing well for ten years than ten things poorly for one year. Start with modest goals, and trust that God will grow your ministry! Remember that spiritual growth is more important than numeric growth.

Get Others Involved

Assemble a team! Begin with a group of people who are committing to pray alongside you will make a huge difference. “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.”

An Example:

The example below is the mission statement from a church in Southern California. Their metric of success is how well individuals and families are welcomed and included in what’s already happening at their church. It’s a flexible mission that can scale as the church grows and changes and always keeps their mission central. Whether they are serving one or one thousand, their mission is clear!

“It is Calvary's desire to come alongside *individuals and families* impacted by disability so that they are *welcomed and included* in the **services, programs and events** at Calvary.”

3. Make a Plan

Before simply coming to your church leadership with a problem, suggest a solution. Hold this plan loosely and understand it may change based on input from leadership, but make sure you know who in your church would benefit from your ministry. Perhaps a child with special needs requires the support of a buddy. Perhaps an adult living in a group home finds it difficult to get to church or connect with their peers. Identify those you want to serve and start asking questions! Before making plans for a disability ministry, make sure you ask those with disabilities to share the biggest hurdles they face to engaging in the life of your church.

4. Go to Your Leadership

After praying and defining your mission, go to your leadership. Use the proper channels and honor the processes already in place.

Describe the Need

Point to specific people in the church that would benefit from a concerted disability ministry. If you are one of those people, don't be afraid to share your experiences. You are not a burden! Highlight elements of your church's service that may be challenging for people with particular disabilities to navigate, helping church leadership to see the need is crucial!

Explain the Benefit

Anyone who is filled with the Holy Spirit has at least one spiritual gift given to them for the benefit of the church. A church that lacks believers with disabilities is—in a very real sense—incomplete. 1 Corinthians 12:12-26 provides a great biblical basis for this.

What if It's Just Me?

If your leadership is not ready to embrace your vision just yet, don't be discouraged! Be patient, gracious, and submissive. Include your leadership in opportunities to grow in relationship with families affected by disability:

Meet and Greet

Introduce them to families impacted by disability. Stories are powerful! Look for local parachurch ministries such as a *Friendship Ministries* or *YoungLife Capernaum* club. These types of clubs can be great places for leadership to gain exposure to people with disabilities and become aware of the need in the community for accessible and welcoming churches! *Joni and Friends Family Retreats* typically happen during the summer across the United States, and are also an opportunity to encounter and serve families affected by disability.

Connect with Local, Like-Minded People

It can be discouraging to feel like you're the only one with a vision for building churches with inclusive communities. Find local disability ministry leaders and reach out! Or contact your nearest *Joni and Friends* office. Odds are, there's someone nearby who can help, even if only to pray with you!