

# Philosophy of Ministry: Serving the Concerns of People with Disabilities

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**Assemblies of God U.S. Missions  
Compassionate Missionary Council**

People with disabilities are the largest unreached people group in the world today, existing practically as a separate culture within every other cultural and ethnic group. Representing 58 million people in America and 1 billion worldwide, they are one of the last great missions horizons, as identified in the parable of the master's banquet table, Luke 14: 21-23 (NIV): *"Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame... ." 'Sir, what you have ordered has been done, but there is still room.'* Then the master told his servant, *'Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in (compel them to come in) so that my house will be full!'"* In this parable, the last invitation commissioned by the Master of the house to fill His banquet table was extended to the marginalized and socially disenfranchised; largely the Disability Community, as denoted by Scripture, "the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame." As our great fellowship has relentlessly served virtually every culture and ethnicity throughout the world, from a pure missional perspective, we have unwittingly missed this common thread of hurting, suffering people woven into the fabric of every culture in the world.

In keeping with the missional vision of the Assemblies of God, and in commitment to its Fourth Reason for Being, *"... To be a people who demonstrate God's love and compassion for all the world... Meeting human need through ministries of love and compassion,"* the Compassionate Missionary Council offers the expertise of trained Assemblies of God missionaries in disability ministry and specific para-church organizations existing to serve the disability population. The combined expertise, knowledge, earned respect and long term stability of these groups can ensure continuity of best practices and tried and proven methods, resourcing all Assemblies of God missionaries who encounter disability on their respective foreign and domestic fields, as well as church leaders, volunteer constituency and others committed to the relief of the residual suffering inherent in the world of "disability." This suffering is generally visited unexpectedly upon its victims, leaving them uncertain about their faith and future and grieving "what might have been" if only the disability hadn't happened! These times of tragedy, when people are the most emotionally and spiritually vulnerable, call for a compassion-driven Church committed to living out the very definition of compassion: "to suffer with."

In 1990 the Americans with Disabilities Act, (ADA)<sup>1</sup> was implemented, legislating equal access and opportunity to people with disabilities without prejudice; yet the institution of

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<sup>1</sup> "Americans with Disabilities Act" (ADA) of 1990, United States Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division , <http://www.ada.gov>

the Church was exempted from this law. Many churches saw this exemption as an opportunity to save money in reconstructing entry and access points within the physical architecture; but in so doing, silent signals were given to the disability community that the Church did not view their needs as “important.” The negligence of the Church toward its moral responsibility to compassionately serve all people placed an unintended “Keep Out” sign to people with disabilities on the front door of many churches. This lack of a “spirit of accommodation”, even if unintentional, has kept people with disabilities away from the church in droves. To correct this situation, it is imperative that the Church, every church, reconstruct its Vision to include disability ministry.

When the Church fails to exemplify best practices toward the disability community related to service, social integration, inclusion and individual rights, whether legislated or inherent, it misses a tremendous opportunity to “frame the discussion”. The Church’s lack of involvement in that discussion then creates a vacuum which is immediately filled by county, state and federal government agencies, who then dictate according to their secularist perspective of what is best for the disability community. Of course, “separation of church and state issues” dictate that perspective be void of any and all spiritual support. Additionally, funding is often subject to the constant bureaucratic siphoning of tax dollars for administrative expenses before those dollars even reach their intended cause, creating a languishing minority increasingly dependent on the goodwill of others. To fill that gap, US Missions and its missionaries are committed to living out true Compassion by working within the framework of healthy policy, leading and training others by example with commitment and accountability, and establishing **continuity of best practices**. In so doing, we will live out our fellowship’s core values and Four Reasons for Being!

One of the first steps the Church can take toward the implementation of best practices is to become familiar with the intent of the Americans with Disabilities Act, especially as it relates to the Church’s moral and Biblical responsibility to this segment of society. Understanding and voluntarily complying with the ADA will display to the disability community that the Church is seriously interested and committed to serving their concerns. The law can be reviewed at <http://www.ADA.gov>.

Another executable opportunity for a local church to establish a successful disability ministry practice is to publicly certify as a Disability Friendly Church, through the US Missions endorsed ministry, “Special Touch.” The 60-question “Disability Friendly” survey and regular communication from Special Touch enables registered churches, to become acquainted with a broader perspective of best practices and ultimately consult to the highest levels of disability friendliness. This important survey can be accessed through the US Missions Compassionate Ministries website at [www.agusmresources.ag.org](http://www.agusmresources.ag.org) or through Special Touch Ministry at [www.specialtouch.org](http://www.specialtouch.org).

The disability community will be better served as Assemblies of God world and U.S. missionaries, churches, leadership and volunteers are equipped with the knowledge

and practices to create a congruent approach, relevant to the general disability culture existing within every other culture and ethnicity in the world. In addition, a healthy Biblical view of disability is imperative if the Church is to be effective in evangelizing this unreached people group. The Assemblies of God official position paper on Disability Ministry provides a basic Biblical perspective of this crucial topic, and can be accessed through the Assemblies of God website at [http://ag.org/top/Beliefs/Position\\_Papers/pp\\_downloads/pp\\_disabilities.pdf](http://ag.org/top/Beliefs/Position_Papers/pp_downloads/pp_disabilities.pdf).

The Assemblies of God can and must establish a congruent, sustainable global evangelization plan to demonstrate the full Compassion of Christ to this marginalized and socially disenfranchised people group. Our Fellowship will be more effective in this area of compassionate ministry if we maintain continuity of best practices within our churches and ministries, utilizing the expertise of experienced missionaries and ministry organizations. Practicing tried and proven Disability Ministry methods and techniques will ensure broad ministry success, as our Fellowship brings in “the lame, the halt, the poor and the blind” to the Master’s banquet table!

**Credits:**

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