



DISABILITY AWARENESS SUNDAY IDEAS



Contents

History of DAS	page 3
Why Observe DAS	page 4
Host an ELEVATE or CFFD Team	page 4
A Few Considerations	page 5
Testimonies and Speakers	page 6
Possible Scriptures	page 8
Songs and Hymns	page 9
Interactive Activities	page 10
Dramas	page 12
Presentations	page 13
Readings	page 13
Movies and Video Clips	page 14
Other Ideas and Considerations	page 16
A Version of the Beatitudes	page 17
Other Resources Available	page 18

History of Disability Awareness Sunday

In New Zealand, Disability Awareness Sunday (DAS) is observed on the third Sunday in June. The idea of a Sunday service being set aside for disability awareness originally came from Joni Eareckson-Tada, founder of Joni and Friends in the USA (shown below with her husband Ken Tada).

In 1994 ELEVATE approached the Anglican Church in New Zealand about having a Sunday declared “Disability Awareness Sunday”. This led to such a service being held that year in the Cathedral of The Holy Trinity. The next year the Anglicans designated DAS throughout all their congregations, and many denominations have since similarly recognised this day.



In 1967 Joni Eareckson Tada was injured in a diving accident at 17 years old, leaving her in a quadriplegic state with minimal use of her hands. After two years of rehabilitation, Joni re-entered the community with new skills and a fresh determination to help others in similar situations.

Why Observe DAS?

People with disability have just as great a need of Jesus Christ as anyone else. Many with disabilities who are Christians also have talents and a richness in their walk with Christ which would greatly bless those in the church.

DAS is an opportunity to be intentional about disability awareness and is a great way to educate the congregation together as a whole. It is about raising awareness, celebrating and encouraging people with disabilities in their gifts and ministries. It can also be a chance to encourage people in the church to be involved in the work with those with disabilities.

Host an ELEVATE or CFFD Team

Did you know what CFFD teams have taken many services in churches in NZ? Since 1980, CFFD teams have been going into churches throughout NZ, hosting disability awareness services. They are often asked to share testimonies, perform a drama, or simply share about what it is like being a person with a disability.

If you would like a team to come along and share for a short time or perhaps take a full service, please contact us at info@ELEVATEcdt.org.nz or phone 09 636 4763.

A Few Initial Considerations

When?

Some churches choose to celebrate DAS on a different Sunday of the year. One church that is involved in our National Camp every year holds a DAS leading up to the camp and encourages people to volunteer as helpers. Another church has included it as part of a one off series on diversity.

How Long?

Your church may prefer to allocate time for a short or long slot of the service, or they may like to set aside the whole service for DAS. If there is an ELEVATE branch or ministry group in your area you may like to invite them to be involved in the service or even run the whole service for you.

Who?

Whenever possible include people with disabilities in the service, particularly people from your church. This may be greeting, distributing bulletins, singing or playing an instrument, sharing a testimony, running the data projection – whatever is appropriate to their skills and abilities.

If the children will be in the service it is always good to include something specifically for them. If they are in a separate programme, consider how they can incorporate DAS into their programme as well. Children's Bible Ministries is another organisation you might like to contact for story ideas or activities for children.

Testimonies and Speakers

- Find an experienced speaker with a disability to give their testimony or the sermon.
- Ask the parents of a child with a disability to share about how they cope with their daily demands.
- Get someone to speak about those who have intellectual disabilities, the homes in which they live in your district, and how people in your church can help. If you know a suitable person with intellectual disability they could share themselves or be interviewed.
- Ask someone with a disability to speak on “mobility” or “access”. You could have a person who uses a wheelchair to tell about the problems they have had to overcome or someone with a walking disability to relate what day to day living is like for them.
- Get someone whose spouse has a disability to share about the difficulties they have had to overcome, and the ways people can help them.
- Find someone who is Deaf to speak about being Deaf, with a NZSL interpreter. If they have become Deaf later in life they may be able to speak with just the use of a slide presentation.
- The minister or a person in the congregation could preach on the one of the biblical truths or Spiritual principles regarding disabilities.



- Ask someone with a hidden disability to describe the difficulties they have had to overcome.
- Tell the story or testimony of someone with a disability such as Joni Eareckson Tada or Nick Vujicic – this is very effective with pictures and video clips.
- Have someone with a disability prepare his or her testimony. If that person has difficulty speaking, it could be written out before hand then shown with a slide presentation, read out by someone else or if they use a communicator with a text-to-speech ability it could be used.

Possible Scriptures

1 Sam 16:7 - Man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart.

2 Cor 4:16 - Through the outward man perish the inward man is renewed day by day.

1 Cor 1:27 - God has chosen the weak of this world to confound the wise.

2 Cor 12:19 - My Grace is sufficient for thee and my strengths made perfect in weakness.

Luke 14:21 - Go into the streets and lanes and bring in the poor, the disabled, and the blind.

Rom 8:28 - All things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

- Created in Gods image (Genesis 1:27)
- Mephibosheth (2 Sam 9)
- The body of Christ and different gifts (1 Cor 12)
- God created us and knew us before we were born (Ps 139)
- God made each of us (Ex 4:10-11)
- The great banquet (Luke 14)
- The healing of the paralysed man (Matt 9:1-8)
- The healing of the man born blind (John 9:1-12)

Songs and Hymns

- Ask someone with a disability to sing and/or play an instrument. If possible have them join the worship team for the service.
- Include a song signed by an NZSL interpreter or if you have Deaf or hearing impaired in the service aim to have the whole service interpreted.
- Work with the worship leader to be sure that the scriptures, hymns and choruses chosen for this day complement the theme.
- Include one of the over 8000 hymns written by the exceptional blind lady, Fanny Crosby. Such as 'Blessed Assurance' or 'My Saviour First of All'.



Interactive Activities

(You will need someone who is a good facilitator)

- Have a panel made up of people with disabilities, parents of those who have a disability and/or medical professionals. Have the congregation to ask questions but make sure you prepare a few beforehand in case the questions are not readily forthcoming.
- Before the service get several in the congregation to be “blind”/“Deaf”/use a wheelchair for the time before and during the service, and then to talk about this experience.



- Break into groups to discuss how the church could more effectively minister to those with disabilities with regard to transport, access, inclusion, gifts, etc.
- Have someone talk on communication and get the whole congregation to do a little exercise. See our Communication booklet for examples.

- Put the question to your congregation, “What could people with disabilities do as a ministry in your church?” You could use a white board to record the key words of the answers. The conclusion should be “anything and everything”! Their gifts are the same as those of so called “able-bodied people”.
- Lead a discussion, “How could YOU help a person with a disability reach their full potential?” Hopefully the discussion will draw out that YOU could be the hands, feet, ears, eyes, etc. but - are YOU prepared to do this? (It might be better to break into groups to discuss and then report back)

A Few Highly Active Activities

(possibly for a youth or children's programme)

- Borrow or hire a couple of wheelchairs and run an obstacle course. In pairs, have one person in a wheelchair and the other person pushing. Time them going backward up a curb, around cones, etc. As an alternative you could have the person in the wheelchair holding a cup of water above their head with the aim of not spilling any water. You could discuss why someone might need a wheelchair and the various disabilities that might cause this.
- Assign a variety of physical limitations to people in a group (blindfold, ear plugs, one arm in a sling, both arms in slings) Have the group construct the tallest structure or the longest off the end of a table, using straws and tape.

Dramas

- Perform a short educational skit. You could use one from our Skits and Drama booklet, many of which have come from real life scenarios.
- Perform a dramas based on a bible story, such as “The Parable of the Talents” and “Who should be invited to the Banquet?” in our Skits and Dramas booklet.
- Alternatively you could write your own, from other Bible references or real life scenarios.



Presentations

- You could arrange for someone from one of our ministry groups to talk about what they do.
- Give a slide presentation on achievements of people with disabilities.
- Get someone to tell about the overseas work with people with disabilities. ELEVATE has initiated a work in Fiji and the Philippines. Other organisations you might like to share about are CBM, Joni and Friends, or Through the Roof.
- Do a presentation majoring in one disability. For instance if you were featuring blindness, you could get a blind person to give a testimony, explain about Braille and other devices people use, have a Braille Bible reading, and act out a skit (such as the one about 'bringing the volumes of the Braille Bible to church' which is in our Skits and Dramas booklet).

Readings

- Read the alternative version of the Beatitudes on page 17.
- Get someone who is blind to read a scripture in Braille.
- Read out a poem written by someone with a disability (it could possibly be acted out or danced.)
- Read a testimony or story out of a previous Encourager magazine or from a similar source to inspire others.

Movies and Video Clips

There are various Christian movies, testimonies and short video clips online that are great for disability awareness. Only a few are listed here. Joni and Friends also produce a TV programme, available on their website or youtube account.

A Couple of Movies...

Joni (110 Minutes)

The true-life story that has captivated millions! Based on Joni Eareckson's autobiography. She becomes paralyzed after breaking her neck in a swimming accident at age 17. Trying to cope with her new life, she learns to paint using her mouth and finds strength in her new Christian faith.

Butterfly Circus (23 Minutes)

At the height of the Great Depression a circus travels through the devastated American landscape, lifting the spirits of audiences along the way. They discover Will (Nick Vujicic), a man without limbs at a carnival sideshow and after an intriguing encounter with the showman Will begins to hope against everything he has ever believed.

Soul Surfer (106 Minutes)

Soul Surfer is the inspiring true story of teen surfer Bethany Hamilton, who lost her arm in a shark attack and overcame all odds to become a champion again, through her sheer determination and unwavering faith.

[Video Clips on Vimeo - click on the title to go to the video](#)

[Psalm 139](#) (2 Minutes)

A reading of Psalm 139 by various people who have disabilities.

[Ryan's Story of Hope](#) (5:45 Minutes)

God used Ryan's Pittman's ability (rather than his disability) to bring hope to those he encountered on a trip to Peru.

[Video Clips on Youtube - click on the title to go to the video](#)

[My Broken Dreams](#) (4 Minutes)

Sarah was born with spina bifida but dreamed of being a dancer. This short video is of her testimony and learning to focus on God's love for her.

[Weird Glasses People](#) (4:25 Minutes)

This humorous sketch explores many of the issues that confront people with disabilities in church. It was written by Jeff McNair, a strong advocate for inclusion.

[Something More](#) (6 Minutes)

A music video of Nick Vujicic's song 'Something More' that includes part of his testimony.

[Rock's - Stevie Wills](#) (5:09 Minutes)

A poem written and read by Stevie Wills, a young Australian lady who has cerebral palsy.

[Joni Eareckson Tada's Story](#) (7:39 Minutes)

Joni Eareckson Tada is a mouth-painter, singer, writer, disability activist, and a quadriplegic. In this video, Joni opens up to share with you her life testimony—from her childhood, to her diving accident, to her faith in Jesus and His plans.

Other Ideas and Considerations

- Ask someone to pray for different areas of need in the disability world. If you get hold of a person who can sign you could suggest the congregation prays with their eyes open to appreciate how the Deaf have to pray.
- Be sure the bulletin design is in keeping with the day's theme. Consider designing the bulletin with those with visual impairment in mind. Perhaps a larger font, contrasting colour, etc.
- Include a questionnaire in the bulletin, to help determine the needs of people with disabilities in the congregation, as well as to identify your church members' relatives and neighbours who may have a disability.

A Version of the Beatitudes

(by a person with a disability)

Blessed are you, who take time to listen to difficult speech, for you help us to know that if we persevere, we can be understood.

Blessed are you who walk with us in public places and ignore the stares of strangers, for in your companionship we find havens of relaxation.

Blessed are you who never bid us to “hurry up”, and more blessed are you who do not snatch our tasks from our hands to do them for us, for often we need time rather than help.

Blessed are you who stand behind us as we enter new and untried ventures, for our failures will be outweighed by the times when we surprise you and ourselves.

Blessed are you who ask for our help, for our greatest need is to be needed.

Blessed are you when by all these things you ensure that the thing that makes us individuals is not our peculiar muscles, nor our wounded nervous system, nor our difficulties in learning, but in the God-given self which no infirmity can confine.

Other Resources Available from ELEVATE

Beyond Disability: The unique role of the Church

This is an introductory resource to disability and the church. It is a collection of testimonies that show how people with disabilities and their families have been blessed by their church and how people who have a disability have blessed their church. Each section includes some key considerations and a few recommended resources.

Everybody Welcome? A guide on how to make your church disability friendly

A church that is friendly towards people with disabilities is a church that is friendly towards all people. This resource addresses the questions: what is disability; why should I make my church disability friendly; and is your church friendly towards people with disabilities. It includes information on how to be inclusive, hints and common barriers for different disabilities, a church audit and information on accessibility specifications.

On the Knife Edge of Faith: Stories behind the ministry

This book is a collection of stories and events from the first 30 years of our ministry written by Hugh Willis. It is available for purchase through the ELEVATE National Support Office.

We also have a variety of booklets you can download from our website and are also available in print copy on request. These include:

- Skits and Dramas
- The Blessing of Including People with Disabilities in Your Church
- Supporting People with Disabilities
- Working with People with Intellectual Disabilities
- Communication
- Personal Cares
- Helping People with a Disability
- How to Start a Disability Ministry
- What about Healing?

This booklet is a resource to be used over the years and is not complete. Do feel free to let us know any new ideas you have, and what you included in your “Disability Awareness” service. If you have any questions do contact us.

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