



Disability and Giftedness: One Body, Many Members

Introduction to This Issue

“How far you go in life depends on your being tender with the young, compassionate with the aged, sympathetic with the striving, and tolerant of the weak and the strong. Because someday in life you will have been all of these.”
—George Washington Carver

Given the multitude of individual and systemic variables that are operating, any discussion of disability in the Church requires deep listening and heroic humility. Even brief experience informs us of disabilities that are easily perceived, and disabilities that would be unnoticed by those passing by. As a discussion moves forward, environments need renovation, attitudes need revision, hearts need renewal, and collective initiatives and individual agency require support.

These supports from communities must occur on every scale. Constant, vigilant advocacy is required from individuals and from our institutions in order that our systems do not oppress and demean, rather than facilitate one’s personal agency and individual choice. One assertion, which cannot be challenged, is that all our communities require the presence and participation of all our members in order to be most vital and effective. Our faith compels us to make sure every voice is heard. “The love of Christ constrains us.”

No one resource can attempt to be truly comprehensive, but the contributors to this issue include a variety of perspectives.

Erik W. Carter explores how too many congregations still struggle to become communities of belonging for Christians with intellectual disability and their families. This article addresses pre-

vailing models of ministry and their implications for how people with and without disabilities live together as one body. The author contends that the ways of exclusion and separation must give way to inclusion and belonging if we are to be faithful and flourishing faith communities.

Bill Gaventa reflects upon how inclusive ministries for and with people with disabilities and their families have grown exponentially in the past two decades. As faith communities creatively work on being fully inclusive, they can adopt a variety of strategies used in nonreligious settings, but also discover and develop their own strategies that can be used elsewhere. Congregations have the potential of being models of community inclusion, in ways that witness to their faithfulness while also serendipitously discovering that their initiatives benefit many others in the congregation, as well as the whole of its life together.

John Gosswein contends that being faithful in proclamation is far more important than propriety. In speaking the Gospel across the chasm of disabilities, the preacher may need to learn new “languages” to articulate the message of God’s care. Consider Jesus utilizing sign and “sigh” language when encountering a man with speech and hearing impairments; proclamation is more than words, even reflecting the “all creation groans” of Romans 8. The author’s experience in an American Sign Language telling of Mark 7:31-37 created an appreciation for all we can learn from communications with individuals who are “differently-abled.” “Sign” encourages us to participate in the story in present tense, and to “speak” in physical and sensory ways.

Matt Hackworth notes that the international relief and development marketplace is competitive, with a mix of for-profit and nonprofit actors. The work is expensive and the resources finite. While faith-based development organizations offer competitive and effective programs, those working in the name of Christ have the added responsibility of following his model. Faith-based aid groups have the imperative and opportunity to lead in pursuing inclusion for people living with disabilities. The article builds on the author's personal experience of working for relief and development organizations, and his extensive time spent in post-colonial countries among those who are living with disabilities and who are remaining out of reach of critical services.

Cyndi Jones interprets the employment issues of people with disabilities through the lens of the Laborers in the Vineyard parable in Matthew 20:1-16. "Because no one has hired us" is such a frequent comment among people with disabilities, it appears that these same employment issues were around during Jesus' time on earth and are critical to the understanding of this parable.

Twila Schock demonstrates that by moving from "object of our mission" to partners in ministry, all God's people are called to think about the why and how of mission. Using Scripture, life's experiences, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Global Mission "Accompaniment" model, she advocates for mutual interdependence and mutuality for all.

We offer all these considerations knowing that those with disabilities constitute a cohort in which many of us already live and to which many of us will eventually be joined. In the spirit of "one body, many contributions," and Jesus' timeless question, "What is it that you want me to do for you?" this edition is offered.

The **Currents Focus** section includes two fine contributions. **Victor I. Vieth** discusses that when a parishioner informs a pastor of a sexual attraction to children but denies abusing a child, the church is confronted with complex issues of law, theology, child safety, and pastoral care. Since few clergy are trained on this topic, the article provides a literature review of relevant studies. Utilizing this research, and applying lessons from scripture, the article proposes guidelines for pastoral and mental health care for individuals sexually attracted to children. Although child protection must always be the pastor's priority, there are pathways for addressing the spiritual needs of a person sexually attracted to children without compromising child safety. When properly done, pastoral care may reduce the risk an individual sexually attracted to children will act on these thoughts.

George R. Hunsberger engages the contributions of three people who are especially notable as twentieth century innovators in the practice of mission. Lamin Sanneh, a scholar of religions and of mission history, innovated the notion of Christianity's essential translatability into all the world's cultures, neither absolutizing any nor stigmatizing any. Lesslie Newbigin, upon retiring from decades of missionary experience in India, challenged the churches of the West to engage in a missionary encounter of the gospel with their own modern Western culture. Dorothy Day pioneered the Catholic Worker movement in the U.S.A., and for almost

fifty years produced the monthly Catholic Worker newspaper, which grounded the movement in a Catholic spirituality and commitment to peace and justice.

The July issue also includes a fine selection of **Book Reviews** and the next installment of **Preaching Helps**, July 3–September 25, 2022: Fourth Sunday after Pentecost through Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost.

We are extremely grateful to our guest editors who have been devoted to education and advocacy in the field of disabilities for decades. The **Rev. Dr. James K. Fruehling** studied on a Fulbright at the Free University of Berlin, is a licensed psychologist in Arizona and Nebraska, and ordained ELCA clergy, graduating from Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary in Berkeley, California. He has worked in twenty-one states as consultant for people with disabilities, and on behalf of Mosaic, in the U.K., Latvia, and Romania. The **Rev. Dr. David deFreese** served as Bishop of the Nebraska Synod–ELCA for two terms following service in three parishes. With a degree in special education and various working opportunities with people living with disabilities, he also served as an exchange pastor living in Tanzania. He currently serves Mosaic in church relations and international programs. Together they have taught courses at ELCA seminaries on "Ministry with and among People with Disabilities," including at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago and Wartburg Theological Seminary. We pray this issue will further our shared work of teaching and advocacy.

*James K. Fruehling and David deFreese, Guest Editors
Craig L. Nesson, Issue Co-Editor*

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