

Ministry Focus and Philosophy

Crossing Bridges has a clear focus on equipping churches and parachurch ministries to work effectively with, and on behalf of, persons with disabilities. In developing nations, people who are disabled are often locked in poverty and shunned by others. To say they are marginalized does not truly capture the difficulties people who are disabled typically face, including lack of opportunity for education, inadequate housing, unemployment, rejection or exploitation by others. Infants and children with obvious disabilities are often abandoned by their parents. Seldom do they feel acceptance and love. Disabled persons are generally hidden from public view but, sadly, they also tend to be “hidden” from the purview of the church, making Jesus’ comment applicable: “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few” (Matthew 9:37).

In announcing his mission at the synagogue of Nazareth, Jesus read from Isaiah:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has anointed me to preach Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, and that the time of the Lord’s favor has come.” (Luke 4: 18-19, *New Living Translation*)

These words speak of restoration and reconciliation as the full meaning of the good news of the Gospel. Jesus’ ministry was one of restoring people to God and to the community. Crossing Bridges seeks to open Christians’ minds and hearts to the needs of persons who are disabled – their physical, social-emotional, cognitive, and spiritual needs as individuals created in the image of God, yet assigned to the status of “the least of these” (Matthew 25:40).

The vision of Crossing Bridges is expressed well in the words of Donald English:

“The model for believers today, as we engage in God’s mission to his world, points to ways in which we, like Jesus, should be his instruments today for taking on and defeating those forces which terrify, oppress and imprison human beings. They extend from those forces which deliberately aim to destroy moral standards based on God’s laws, through all that cheapens, demeans and warps human life, to those who through the structures at their disposal assign individuals and groups to subhuman existence. . . . Our Lord’s pattern is one of bringing the power of love to bear on all such situations and relationships, loosening the grip of evil, and setting people free.”¹

This is particularly relevant to our call to promote disability awareness and ministry. Words like *oppress*, *imprison*, *cheapens*, *demeans*, and *assign to subhuman existence* aptly describe the life of persons who are disabled in the society and culture of most underdeveloped nations.

We work with indigenous ministries and theological colleges and seminaries to promote disability awareness and ministry, but also to help in more general ways the development of church leaders.

¹English, D. (1992). *The message of Mark: The mystery of faith*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press (page 118).