



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.



Disability Ministries

Where are the paths that lead to life?

What kind of road do you find yourself traveling today? How do you decide which way to go when another road crosses your path? You may choose a detour leading you to a road less traveled, or you may have the determination to take the straight and narrow, or you might travel down memory lane where you come to an intersection that causes you to pause and wonder, which way do I turn?

ELCA Disability Ministries is approaching a decisive crossroad. Several transitions have occurred in the past year, some of which include personal health, missional dollars and questions about our direction. As an administrative assistant, I have supported and been a part of the ELCA Disability Ministries team for two years. This current group of four individuals, besides myself, has worked hard hosting workshops at youth gatherings, sponsoring theological and ecumenical events and conferences, assisting in preparing leaders through education and networking, and making decisions about grant funding for congregations requesting financial assistance. I am grateful Anita Smallin, Brian Krause, Chris Ludwig and Lisa Heffernan feel called to Disability Ministries.

In February 2018, I accepted the position of ELCA Disability Ministries coordinator. So much of what we've accomplished at Disability Ministries stems from the 2013 ELCA Churchwide Assembly's vote to empower Disability Ministries by accepting Brian Krause's \$4 million challenge to raise funds through *Always Being Made New: The Campaign for ELCA*. We are grateful for the roads taken, which have brought us to today. 2018 brings us to an intersection where our work can continue in the same manner or take a turn; yet, I believe through the Holy Spirit our ministry can proceed in many bountiful directions in response to what our church has called for: **God-enabled ministries**.



Carol Josefowski
ELCA Disability
ministries coordinator

Finding ways to share the good news is vital for congregations; we'd like to ensure every congregation can practice vitality. You might ask, "What does that sharing look like to Disability Ministries?" We've witnessed members of congregations roll up their sleeves and become God's hands and feet to assist a child with learning disabilities experience communion, a youth contemplating suicide find hope amid confirmation, a veteran not only make it into the sanctuary but be able to read the bulletin and sing hymns in worship, and a person with addiction experience grace amid Bible study. We've also encountered some outdoor ministries seeking to move from charitable works to nurturing

spiritual growth and empowering independence with loved ones with varied abilities. We're seeing these awakened and independent members of our church called to ministry and believe their faith journey enriches church ministries when they are empowered and entrusted as pastor, teacher and/or deacon.

The Holy Spirit rests within each of us, waiting to be realized through our baptismal call, including our fellow church members with disabilities. We know God is able, and as we each admit with confession, "with God's help," we are able. What an awesome God we seek to serve alongside one another in this journey!

Find additional information on Disability Ministries.
To financially support this work, [click here](#) and select Disability Ministries.

Youth mental health workshop strikes a chord

Adolescence is a challenging time. It's the time when our body, perception and self-esteem are in flux, and these changes can affect an adolescent's mood, behavior and mental health. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, 22.2 percent of youth, or roughly one in five, have a severe mental health impairment that would warrant treatment, and 49.5 percent of all youth have experienced a mental health impairment of any severity. This data shows the vast need to address mental health issues among youth.



(From left) Brian Krause, Emily Schmidlin, and Hollie Holt-Woehl.

In January 2018, ELCA Disability Ministries sponsored a workshop on youth mental health at the Youth Ministry Extravaganza. Hollie Holt-Woehl, adjunct professor of pastoral care at Luther Seminary, and Emily Schmidlin, a family and youth outpatient therapist, were the presenters. Hollie shared a graceful theological understanding of mental illness based on Douglas John Hall's book, "God and Human Suffering." Emily gave workshop participants practical tools for working with youth with mental health concerns.

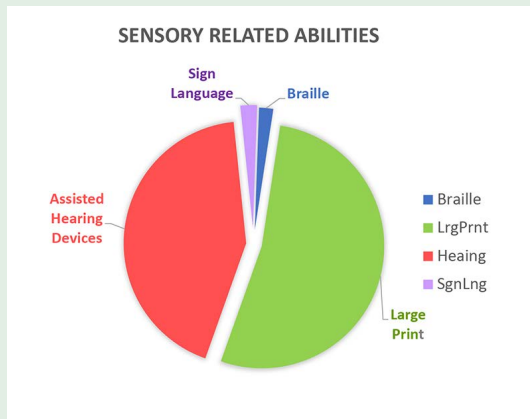
The workshop was attended by more than 50 youth workers, showing that the need for these youth-oriented mental health resources is great, so Disability Ministries will continue to engage the church on mental health by sponsoring initiatives like this workshop as we move forward. It is our mission to provide resources so that we may continue to welcome all of God's children regardless of their mental health status.

How are ELCA members with varied disabilities experiencing church life?

The ELCA Disability Ministries Program Advisory team recently requested a change to the annual Form C of ELCA congregations surveyed to include mental health as an area of ministry Disability Ministries would like to explore with synods and congregations. (For more information about mental health, please see ELCA social messages "The Body of Christ and Mental Illness" and "Suicide Prevention." Please also see ELCA Presiding

Bishop Elizabeth Eaton's compassionate [message on suicide prevention.](#))

ELCA Research & Evaluation provided statistical data based on information gathered from the most current responses to Form C (1998-2016). There are many congregations providing sensory related tools in their ministry that seek to accompany people with varying degrees of vision and/or hearing challenges and enhance their church experience.



Consistent with what we're hearing from congregations seeking resources for children with autism, cognitive or developmental disabilities and other learning disabilities, special needs programming is attempted or provided by 30 percent of ELCA congregations based on the survey responses.

ELCA Disability Ministries new approach to resourcing

In 2018, ELCA Disability Ministries is piloting a new way of resourcing by organizing localized shared wisdom gatherings. Not unlike what the disciples did when Jesus ascended into heaven following the resurrection, we are going to come together to listen to one another's faith stories, share our struggles and best practices, discern about what actions God calls for, and pray for new revelations to unfold in our presence with one another and with our advocate, the Holy Spirit.

Dates to know about

April 12-14 – Disability Intensive course at Wartburg Seminary (David deFreese and Jim Fruehling)

April 25 – ELCA Disability Ministries advisory team meeting at First Lutheran Church, Lorain, Ohio

April 25 – Varied Abilities Ministry evening gathering at Prince of Peace Church, Loveland, Ohio

June 24-27 – "You Belong" The tAble in Houston, Texas (pre-event to 2018 ELCA Youth Gathering)

June 27-July 1 – "This Changes Everything" ELCA 2018 Youth Gathering at NRG Stadium, Houston, TX

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