



# Disability Ministries

**Christmas ornaments** are available from the ELCA that include the beloved expression “You Belong” in four different languages, in braille, in sign language, and accompanied by the LGBTQ symbol. Your purchase supports grants being paid to congregations and synods as they work toward greater engagement of members living with disabilities. Visit our online store to order the [star](#) or [round ornament](#).



**“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God”** (Matthew 5:9).

The beginning of Advent in the lectionary year sets the tone for a time of peacemaking. How apropos this is when our country appears to be at odds and divisive with one another — even our international relations are feeling stressed rather than at peace with our nation currently.

Isaiah 2 tells us that nations shall not raise their weapons against other nations. In today's context perhaps we might reflect upon relations not only outside of us but also within and between us — political parties; local, state, federal and judicial entities; the interests of residents of urban, suburban and rural communities; and citizens and international guests, visitors and immigrants. Personally, I believe there are times when it is not only the One who has ultimate power, but in our own actions we need to yield and become more informed of what actions we seek to do in justice that could harm the neighbor, whether they are a perceived threat or merely an innocent bystander.

I'm so very thankful for our church's ongoing recognition and affirmation of diverse leaders — those of word and service and word and sacrament, women, women of color and our LGBTQ+ leaders, but also our lay leaders. To be transparent, Disability Ministries has had some awkward splintering years in the past decade; some members of the body expressed concerns about their interests not being tended to, perhaps some benefiting more than others. We've worked hard as a ministry to spend time reflecting on this together and growing our awareness of and trust in one another since February 2019. We determined we all belong.

This fall, the Lutheran Center in Chicago (where I work) spent intentional time expressing words of appreciation for one another between our ministries, our units and even between floors within the same building. I'm noticing that there are times when harm is not intended, yet lack of communications, attention and appreciation for others and their work can distract and even be harmful to the work of all. If we're honest, I suspect we all can benefit from taking some time to acknowledge, listen to, care for and respond to one another as parts of the very same body — a body present in the world for the purpose of doing what God is

calling for. There isn't any one part of the body that is unneeded or that God cannot use; none can do all things well and no member comes without some ability to participate and contribute.

When we think about being the body of Christ, we don't think of ourselves as achy, stiff, ill or perhaps carrying too much weight; we seem to see power as our only chance to make a difference, usually based on our own presumptions. I believe God created the body with many members to help us turn toward one another and not only to God. We don't need to be adversarial as we face one another, though there is vulnerability and defenses may rise.

Imagine a person walking; the body benefits from a strong core — the organs, large muscles and the heart provide balance and stability. The walker's arms and legs move in synchronized ways to support the body; the mind and head give it direction. Likewise, when someone speaks, the eyes, ears and other senses help them be attentive to how what is said is experienced by those present — this is meaningful for the whole body and for whoever and whatever surrounds it.

When we pray, we need to listen to every member of the body so that we are attentive not only to our own interests and visible needs but also to what the soul says God asks us to be about, together, for the sake of the world. If one part of the body sees itself as superior, another as weak and another as an enemy, our core will be compromised. It's not enough for the various parts of the body to take turns in exhibiting its strength, because if one limb is carrying too heavy a weight, it may break or at least will become sore, overworked and weakened by the lack of support of the other parts of the body. Hating a part of the body will also create imbalance, distraction and a lack of consciousness, cohesion and cooperation.

Our greatest strength is in our collective body and its work; our parts are imperfect, and though there are exercises for strengthening specific parts of the body, these parts also require exercises of flexibility to maintain stability and adaptation to the strengths of the other parts. There is not a single part of the body that works better when the other parts are disengaged or disconnected.


Isaiah 2:1-5 tells us we shall not fight against one another, but more importantly it recognizes that there is a sharpness about us; it is not wrong to be sharp or to have power — it's purposeful. What is wrong is that such power may be uninformed, its sharp edges and sturdy blades wielding power rather than cooperatively releasing power in prayerful ways for a common cause.

The answer, I think, is measured and mutually agreed-upon actions that serve all in ways that have integrity; we turn our blades downward because there needs to be a spirit of humility as we discern and do God's work together. It's God's work, not our own. We are simply the hands, feet, mouths, eyes, ears, etc. If we disregard or exclude others, we are ignoring part of God's own creative design and will for us. God sent us, all of us, to be the body of Christ for the sake of the world.

In January, Disability Ministries is gathering with various other members of the body to reflect upon our works in ministry and our deeply held interests so that we might reflect upon and co-operate as the body of Christ in the world. We look forward to sharing this pilot project with you in 2020. We will gather to listen to the voices of members and visitors of a variety of sexual orientations and their allies at the Q Conference in Florida. We hope also to find time to gather again for spiritual reflection later in 2020 to ensure we are being attentive to and honoring both persons and works of ministry that are so very critical to our well-being as a church body.

I invite you to take some time this Advent to recognize the importance of those around you as we all wait for the one who comes to show us how to relate and cooperate in life-giving, rather than death-dealing, ways of being the body of Christ, brought to the world for the sake of the world.

Carol A. Johnson, ELCA Disability Ministries Coordinator



We're excited to share that the ELCA has established a new vendor relationship with AudioEye for purposes of making more accessible ELCA resources available

online as well as for navigating ELCA websites. *Living Lutheran* and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America now have tools to assist ELCA members and visitors with low or partial vision. Readers needing large print will soon have simple ways to improve their access to ELCA information online!



Whether you can benefit from larger print, better color contrast, audio access or even the ability to connect to a device for braille conversion, AudioEye guides you through an accessible, easy-to-use icon and menu. Look for the man in the blue bubble on the lower-right section of the webpage to activate the features of AudioEye. As we phase in this new service, we anticipate full accessibility being available by early February 2020. Read about the new accessibility certification here. (<https://www.livinglutheran.org/accessibility-statement/>) We will track user activity to assess whether such improvements can be made on a longer-term basis in late 2020.



The ELCA is committed to learning how to better engage our members and their families living with visual impairments so that you can speak to the needs and interests of the church from your own unique perspectives. We thank the ELCA donors and development staff for their wonderful work in raising funds that make this service possible while we work toward developing our own methods of enhancing accessibility to our websites over the coming year. Meanwhile, we have also added a new resource on our webpage (<https://elca.org/disability>) on the

resource tab for Visual Impairment. ELCA members can find selected ELCA worship prayers and cultural rites important to ministry across the ELCA. Email Carol at [Disability.Ministry@elca.org](mailto:Disability.Ministry@elca.org) for the protected password code for free access by members with low, no or partial vision.

### Dates to know about:

Visit our webpage at <https://elca.org/disability> to see our monthly conference call schedule where members gather to discuss ways to start their own disability or mental-health-related ministry. Would you like to help us grow the ministry and its impact throughout the ELCA? Disability Ministries needs persons to help develop and/or recommend Christian education materials suitable for members with learning disabilities preparing for confirmation and/or ordination, as well as persons to review grant applications for award decisioning. Email Carol about your interests at [Disability.Ministry@elca.org](mailto:Disability.Ministry@elca.org).

- **Dec. 1, 2019** “You Belong” star and round ornaments are available at ELCA e-Store
- **Dec. 2, 2019** 2019 New online worship resource (members with vision impairment)
- **Dec. 5, 2019** Faith Formation and Resources team call (3:30 p.m. Central Time)
- **Dec. 12, 2019** Localized Active Ministries team call (4 p.m. Central Time)
- **Dec. 19, 2019** Grant Review team call (3 p.m. Central Time)
- **Jan. 2-6, 2020** Q conference in Ft. Lauderdale, Fla. — intersectionality
- **Jan. 30–Feb. 4, 2020** Youth Extravaganza in Anaheim, Calif.

**Find additional information on Disability Ministries or contact us.**  
To financially support this work, **click here** and select Disability Ministries.

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