



## European Disability Network

The disability network is unique in a sense that there is no group of people on this earth which is not affected by disability. In truth, there is no area of life that is free from disability. There are children with disabilities, women with disabilities, refugees with disabilities, servicemen and women leave deployment with disabilities. Through illness or accident, it can affect anyone at any time."

Our vision is that in all areas, in church congregations and at events, the proportion of disabled people present reflects that of the population as a whole. EDN, the European Disability Network, is a resource available to advise and assist churches, Christian organizations and events in being accessible to all.



## Extend an invitation

People with disabilities are the largest people group in Europe\* and worldwide and yet they are the least reached by the Gospel. When we read the Gospels, we realize that Jesus paid special attention to people with disabilities. God created humans for community. He wants everyone to be part of his body, the church.

God extends a special invitation to disabled people. Why? Because he looks past their weaknesses and limitations and sees their strengths, abilities and gifts. Society sees only their disabilities, blinded to their gifting and potential. Many churches have that same blind-spot.

The church is missing something if disabled people are not represented in our congregations; they are an indispensable part of the church of the resurrected Jesus. A church without

	Over 1 billion ( <b>15%</b> ) of the world's population live with some form of disability.
	80 to <b>85%</b> of churches <b>don't</b> have any level of special needs ministry.
	Only 5-10% of the world's population with disability is effectively reached with the gospel, making disability community one of the largest <b>unreached</b> or hidden people groups in the world.
	More than 90% of church-going special needs parents cited the most helpful to be a " <b>welcoming attitude</b> " toward people with disabilities". Meanwhile, only about 80% of those parents said that welcoming attitude wasn't present at their church.

disabled members is incomplete; in fact, it is itself disabled and impoverished. It is not about helping the "poor" disabled, but rather about giving support to empower and include people, breaking down barriers in buildings and attitudes.

We want to see churches and congregations with space for all people, with the willingness to include people with disabilities in the leadership and ministries, and to involve them in the congregational life as full members. What are our priorities? Shouldn't they be to follow Christ's example and make a way first for those who are unable to overcome obstacles on their own?



Not recognising the needs of people with disability leads to exclusion, because only when every person makes a way for their fellow humans with disabilities will they be enabled to participate. Removing barriers will make churches and communities better places for everyone.

Wherever a congregation, a conference or any kind of event has consciously taken the step of actively including people with disability we hear that everybody has been enriched and blessed by learning from the different life experiences and different viewpoints of people living with disability. There is a need for awareness in this regard in churches and congregations.

Leaders need to stir up, encourage and teach their members to actively remove barriers and reach out to include those missing people, because nothing starts in communities and churches if responsible people do not speak openly and lead by example.

If we live into old age, we will all experience disability. Does this thought ever appear in our teaching? It's good to know that weakness is normal and no one has to stay strong when in reality they are not.

Sound theological and practical teaching on this subject is desperately needed. Let us pray and work towards our churches becoming places where everyone is noticed, taken seriously, accepted and valued regardless of any limitations. Together, let us fulfil Jesus' command to share our lives with one another in brotherly love. We all need each other.



#### Contact

Thérèse Swinters

[therese.swinters@telenet.be](mailto:therese.swinters@telenet.be)