



**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**  
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# Disability Ministries

## **Thank you for taking the time to read the summer edition of the ELCA Disability Ministries Newsletter!**

I'm Chris, editor of the newsletter and member of the Disability Ministries team, here to share what we're part of this summer. Summer is a time to strengthen the bonds of community and fellowship by spending time with our neighbors, friends and family as we enjoy the fresh air and sunshine that defines this season. Disability Ministries has recently collaborated with Peace Lutheran Church of Las Cruces, N.M., in partnership with Beloved Community and Border Servant Corps. The accomplishments of this collaboration—including increased church accessibility, community engagement, social participation and advocacy—are highlighted in the feature articles for this newsletter, written by Carol Josefowski and the Rev. Brian Krause of Disability Ministries.

This edition includes a statement of accountability, breaking down the priorities of the campaign for Disability Ministries and sharing its impact. Inside you'll read about activities and events associated with the ministry this summer. Finally, we've provided a summary of the grant funding awarded thus far in 2018, including a list of the recipients and the focus areas they'll work on with the funds. Disability Ministries is committed to welcoming all people of all ability levels into full church participation as baptized members of the body of Christ.

Thanks again for taking the time to read this newsletter. Your interest, attention, care, support and feedback allow Disability Ministries to flourish! I hope you have an opportunity to enjoy time with your neighbors, friends and family this summer.

Chris Ludwig  
Editor, Disability Ministries Newsletter



We are “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psalm 139:14).  
We belong in the world, created and recreated, and with one another, as called for by  
Christ.

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### **A beloved community**

By Brian Krause

Growing up with a disability is challenging. For some, the challenge is increased by oppressive, exclusive government policies. Many disability services offered for children are facilitated through the school system, which can be a helpful advocate acting in concert with the student seeking services. When a child transitions into adulthood, however, they must navigate the world of services without this support network. In many cases, people with severe disabilities will lose services when they age out of the school system, typically at 21.



When this happens, they must apply for government-funded services through their state Department of Human Services office. This process often takes years and can result in a limbo of waiting lists, appeals and paperwork, with no guarantee that the services will be provided.

Beloved Community in Las Cruces, N.M., works with these young adults to assist in organizing, advocating for and confirming necessary disability services. Peace Lutheran Church in Las Cruces allies with Beloved Community in its efforts to serve this often-overlooked population of people with disabilities. Beloved Community empowers young adults with disabilities to advocate for their rights, to better understand the implications of local and state governance affecting people with disabilities, and organizes community initiatives to raise awareness of, and defend against, potentially oppressive, exclusive politics.

Along with advocacy, Beloved Community provides avenues for social participation and connection through events like a program at Peace that involves making cards to send to people in the hospital, for their birthday, for anniversaries or to support those who are mourning the loss of a loved one. The young adults from Beloved Community worked with members of Peace to make the cards.

Recently, Disability Ministries provided a grant to Peace to continue its collaborative programming with Beloved Community and complete two emergency exits from its sanctuary. This grant will ensure safe exit and entry from both sides of the building. Disability Ministries is proud to partner with Peace in its work, and we will continue to seek more cooperating partners so that all are welcome, and each can find their place in God's beloved community.

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### **Peace Lutheran Church practices "loving neighbor and self"**

By Carol Josefowski



In June, Brian Krause and I visited a new Disability Ministries grant recipient, Peace Lutheran Church, in Las Cruces, N.M. Disability Ministries awarded Peace a grant in May to help the congregation develop their new faith engagement and accessibility initiatives.

Manuel Seja and Carol Blaschka, members of Peace, partnered with Megan, a Border Servant Corps intern, to engage the participants of Beloved Community, a direct service organization composed of advocates for and participants with developmental disabilities, to explore their faith through fellowship and service projects with friends and church members. One of the community-wide projects (The Great Conversation or GC) that seeks to promote the success of Beloved Community is facilitated by Randy Harris, GC executive director. The founder and director of Beloved Community, Kay Lilly, introduced "Loving our neighbor" as the topic at the June 4 gathering. The conversation was thought-provoking, communal and enlightening as community members (young and old, student and professional, residents and visitors) discussed how loving self and others includes neighbors we encounter next door and across the border.

During Sunday worship on June 3, I was able to witness the many ways in which Peace makes worship accessible. Seats include plaque seating areas for wheelchair users and their companions or family, as well as two rows of upholstered chairs, rather than pews, in



front of the sanctuary which allow adaptive seating. Most anyone at Peace can sing in the choir, lead worship, and serve as bell choir, piano or organ instrumentalists. During this service, Karen Billings, the visiting pianist/organist, received accommodation that enabled her to accompany music throughout worship. Wheelchair and walker users can also access the prayer and choir robe room via a ramp, then enter two of the three levels of the designated choir area. In addition to the sanctuary, parking spaces, walkways, doorways, hallways, restrooms, meeting rooms, and both the secretary's and pastor's offices are accessible. Organizations that the congregation shares its space with, such as Singing Out, a group of LGBTQ vocal performers, and NAMI support groups, Alcoholics Anonymous and Hearing Voices, also benefit from the congregation's focus on accessibility and welcome to all.

Peace is deeply engaged in outreach and spiritual growth ministries and is now a welcoming congregation in the ELCA immigration strategy, AMMPARO (Accompanying Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities). Peace has also conducted congregational meetings with the ELCA Foundation and ELCA Research and Evaluation staff about gifts and endowments through a fearless generosity stewardship theme. Some of the congregation's other outreach ministries include refugee hospitality, a mobile food pantry, Walk to End Alzheimer's, and vacation Bible school.



ELCA Disability Ministries is excited about the many ways in which members of the congregation, Beloved Community participants and Border Servant Corps volunteers are revitalizing and embodying full church participation and engagement with one another as neighbors and friends.

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## Summer 2018 Activities

**The tAble event, "You Belong":** We are thankful to have participated in and supported the tAble, a pre-event to the 2018 ELCA Youth Gathering in Houston in June. Carol met about 100 attendees and joined in celebrating the lives of youth living with disabilities by claiming how they are "fearfully and wonderfully made." She also learned how friends, family and caregivers can live into what the event described as "the resurrected lives God desires for us all" and hopes to find ways in which ELCA congregations can join together more frequently locally and regionally as we all grow into "belonging and witnessing together."



**SIMBA/SIMSA (Safe In My Brothers' Arms/Safe In My Sisters' Arms) camps:** We are excited to support and learn more about SIMBA and SIMSA camps this

summer. The camps are planned and led by Rescue, Release, and Restore, a nonprofit ministry affiliate of the ELCA, currently consisting of five chapters in Illinois, Indianapolis and Ohio. SIMBA, SIMSA and, most years, MYLA (Multicultural Youth Leadership Academy)



meet annually through an immersive outdoor camping experience and throughout the year build upon their ongoing relationship with one another to encourage faith formation and leadership development with campers through shared monthly activities that follow the camping experience.

As coordinator for Disability Ministries, Carol was able to spend a day with SIMBA campers on July 2 to enjoy the sun, food and fellowship. An amazing biblical reflection was shared and discussed relating movie characters of “Black Panther” to the exchange between Peter and Jesus in Mark 8. Campers also learned about the Lakota tribe's spiritual practices of confession and honoring of creation.



Finally, campers were engaged in small nation builder groups in a conflict resolution game and exercise led by Elder Shed that allowed each young man to feel valued, respected, and at ease with himself and others in powerful ways. Praise God for this transformational ministry that has over 25 years of success and continues to both flourish and be relevant for today's youth!

**Ministry site visits:** Carol also attended worship at Central Lutheran Church in Mondovi, Wis. on July 1 and learned about its growing “Kylynn’s Hope Ministry” whereby wheelchair users utilize safe access to upper and lower rooms of the church via a stair-climbing chair lift. Vacation Bible school and Christian education for children with special needs is part of the congregation's focus this summer as it grows into the many ways in which congregations can be more inclusive and engaging of all people — from the faith development of toddlers, communion and confirmation age members, to the maturing growth in faith of parents, grandparents, and members of all ages of the community.



**Future directions:** We are committed to being forthright and intentional about stressing the importance of cultural competency. This is reflected in discussions with multiple ELCA ministries. The discussions aim to identify and understand the alike and unique aspects of the intersectionality of discrimination and exclusion (albeit unintentional at times) based on disability, race and sexual orientation. This justice-oriented work is essential to our calling

as church members, expressing and confirming the Future Directions 2025 goals shared by ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton. ELCA Disability Ministries is interested in an ongoing collaboration in this work. Please contact Carol at [Disability.Ministry@elca.org](mailto:Disability.Ministry@elca.org) to learn more or to become involved.

**Ecumenism:** We continue to strengthen our ecumenical relationships with partner ministries, three of which we will be working with this summer: Lutheran Suicide Prevention, Lutheran Outdoor Ministries and Pathways to Promise.

- Lutheran Suicide Prevention and ELCA Disability Ministries met in Chicago on July 13.
- Lutheran Outdoor Ministries and ELCA Disability Ministries are working on a collaborative funding project throughout the month of July.
- Carol will attend the Pathways to Promise annual board meeting in San Antonio in August. Pathways provides ecumenical congregational materials for a variety of mental health ministries, and the board meeting will follow the collaborative hope conference that includes NAMI San Antonio, Alamo Area Teen Suicide Prevention, First Presbyterian Church, Methodist Healthcare Ministries of South Texas, Catholic Charities of San Antonio, Antioch Missionary Baptist Church, Baptist Health Foundation, the Episcopal Diocese of West Texas and The Ecumenical Center.

### Grants awarded

A total of \$47,611.20 has been awarded for 12 grants in 2018 through the gracious generosity of donors to the ELCA Disability Ministries campaign. We give thanks for the opportunity to contribute to the following new, improved or expanded ministries this year for varied abilities in cognitive, developmental, physical, psychological, and sensory programs and facilities of nine congregations, two outdoor ministries, and one national youth event.

tAble (Totally Able)	Houston, Texas	Event accessibility and programming, cognitive, developmental, physical, psychological, and sensory
Bread of Life Deaf Lutheran Church	Minneapolis	Accessibility and programming, sensory
New Hope Lutheran Church	Dayton, Ohio	Accessibility, physical
Rescue, Release, and Restore (SIMBA and SIMSA)	Chicago, DeKalb and Rockford, Ill.; Indianapolis, Ind.; Columbus, Ohio; Hatley, Wis.	Outdoor camp programming and accessibility
Immanuel Lutheran Church	Princeton, Minn.	Accessibility, sensory
Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd	Olympia, Wash.	Accessibility and programming
Red Willow Ministries	Binford, N.D.	Outdoor camp programming, developmental
St. Peter Lutheran Church	Greene, Iowa	Accessibility, physical
Peace Lutheran Church	Las Cruces, N.M.	Accessibility and programming, physical and developmental
Central Lutheran Church	Mondovi, Wis.	Accessibility and programming, physical
Our Savior Lutheran Church	Durham, N.C.	Accessibility, physical
Grace Lutheran Church	Sioux Falls, S.D.	Accessibility, physical

**Find additional information on Disability Ministries or [contact us](#).**  
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Editor: Chris Ludwig

This email was sent to members and friends of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

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