

Disability Ministry Task Force Report (DRAFT)

January 2026

Motion 10 from Benjamin Hankin of New Jersey: “On behalf of the 1.3 billion (with a B) individuals with special needs and disabilities in the US and around the world, I make a motion that the executive committee create a task force or study group that will be charged to study these three items: 1) the current availability and accessibility of resources for special needs ministries across the SBC churches 2) how SBC churches are presently engaging in ministry to individuals and their families affected by special needs, including best practices, challenges, and models of care, 3) how the SBC and its churches can better come alongside and support families who have loved ones that are special needs or disabled. Further I move that the findings of this study be compiled into a report with recommendations and be presented to the messengers of the Southern Baptist Convention at the next annual meeting in 2026 in Orlando along with suggestions for equipping churches and encouraging greater inclusion, outreach, and discipleship among those with disabilities and especially their families.”

A 2020 study by Lifeway Research reported that 99 percent of evangelical pastors believe individuals with disabilities would feel welcome in their churches. However, many people with disabilities and their families have expressed surprise and skepticism at this finding, citing the persistent physical, social, and relational barriers they encounter when visiting congregations. Recent census data indicate that approximately two in seven U.S. families include a member with a disability, yet this proportion is not reflected in church participation. This disparity suggests that barriers to inclusion remain significant, as evidenced by estimates that only 15-20 percent of evangelical churches in the United States have any form of disability ministry.

How are SBC churches responding to the need for more accessibility for people with disabilities and their families? Many SBC churches across the country have thriving special-needs ministries that focus on evangelism and discipleship. The churches most likely to offer accommodations and specific programming for people with disabilities are large churches in metro and suburban areas. Because of the vast need, an increasing number of churches, of all sizes, are making progress toward accessibility for families impacted by disability in their communities with the hope of the gospel.

These churches are supported by resources provided by convention entities. The SBC has a rich history of providing training resources in disability ministry and discipleship material for people with disabilities. Lifeway began publishing dated Sunday school materials for special-needs ministry in 1979. They now offer curriculum for adults and children with disabilities, including adaptations for their yearly VBS theme. They have employed four disability ministry consultants, beginning in 1967. NAMB also had a disability ministry consultant, as did state conventions including Tennessee and Virginia. Currently, neither Lifeway nor NAMB has a specific person on their team as a disability ministry consultant. Two state conventions do have independent contractors who serve as disability ministry consultants—the SBTC and BCMD.

Although we can be thankful for the resources available and the churches using these resources, the need is still great in order to reach special-needs families with the gospel and include them in our local church families. In order to meet the goals in Motion 10 at the 2025 SBC annual meeting, the Disability Ministry Task Force appointed by the EC and chaired by Tom Stolle makes the following requests to our SBC entities:

Lifeway

- Add a disability ministry specialist to the team
- Increase the disability ministry resources and training material offered and actively promote these resources
- Make the special-needs ministry resource page on the Lifeway website easier to find and navigate
- Assess the most utilized curriculum in SBC churches and add accessibility options and modifications to the most popular options
- Create resources for churches for Disability Ministry Sunday

State Conventions

- Identify or establish a disability ministry consultant or catalyst
- Build network partnerships within the state convention or with neighboring state conventions to minister to the disability community
- Provide an up-to-date list of trusted parachurch organizations and consultants that churches and local associations can contact (the task force will provide an initial list of organizations and consultants)
- Offer grants for churches who want to start or expand special-needs ministries (for example, to create a sensory room or purchase a universal-sized changing table)
- Provide training opportunities for churches at state convention conferences and through video options

Seminaries

- Offer certificate programs, classes, and degrees in disability ministry
- Add disability-related content to courses in each field of study to prepare pastors and ministry leaders to care for special-needs families and include people with disabilities in worship, discipleship, fellowship, and service opportunities within the church

NAMB

- Develop and provide evangelism tools to reach people with intellectual and developmental disabilities
- Expand the reach of current training tools on caring for adoptive and foster care families impacted by trauma
- Develop and provide special-needs ministry resources tailored to church plants and replants

IMB

- Review and assess “Team Member Qualifications and Preclusions,” specifically the current exclusion of families that have a member diagnosed with autism
- Develop and deliver training material on sharing the gospel with people with intellectual and developmental disabilities
- Evaluate the care and counseling families on the field receive following a child’s diagnosis

ERLC

- Produce resources to help churches navigate disability-related ethical issues, including gene editing, physician-assisted suicide, and the high correlation between autism and transgender identification.

Guidestone

- Expand financial assistance or grant opportunities for Mission: Dignity applicants who serve as caregivers

WMU

- Continue to produce resources to teach children with special needs and disabilities about missions, expanding on the All in for Kids suggested adaptations in the Mission Journey Kids curriculum.

SBC Churches and Church Leadership

- Understand that 15-20% of the population has a disability, but they are underrepresented in our churches, making this an opportunity to reach families with the hope of the gospel.
- Identify key church leaders and families in the congregation impacted by disability to help address potential physical and social barriers that may be preventing special-needs families from attending church.
- With help from SBC entities and/or parachurch organizations, develop a plan for inclusion for children, teens, and adults with disabilities that includes evangelism, discipleship, fellowship, and service opportunities.

Build trust within your communities to reach families affected by disability by meeting practical needs and pointing them to Jesus, who meets their deepest need.

We recommend adding Disability Ministry Sunday to our convention calendar for the 2nd Sunday in July. This meets the request made in Motion 22 at the 2025 SBC annual meeting. Lifeway will provide resources for churches to celebrate this focus Sunday.

In addition, we recommend keeping the task force committee together as an advisory team that is available as a resource to our SBC entities and state conventions through December of 2027.

Task Force Members: Tom Stolle (chair, DE), Marci Campbell (OR), Shannon Deihl (MD), Amy Meekins (VA), Gus Pacheco (NC), Sandra Peoples (TX), Christa Smith (FL), Cody Watson (FL), and entity representatives Jana Magruder (Lifeway), Ray Clark (NAMB), John Brady (IMB), RaShan Frost (ERLC).