



Singapore Disability Ministry Survey 2023



KOINONIA
INCLUSION
NETWORK



CENTRE FOR DISABILITY MINISTRY IN ASIA

The background is a dense, colorful collage of abstract shapes representing a city. Buildings are depicted in various colors like blue, green, orange, pink, and grey, with some having small square or rectangular windows. In the foreground, a large grey building is prominent, featuring four thick, vertical yellow stripes that run from the bottom to the top. The overall style is painterly and expressive, with visible brushstrokes and a rich, saturated color palette.

SDMS 2023

For just as the body is one and has many members,
and all the members of the body, though many, are one body,
so it is with Christ.

1 Corinthians 12.12

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**On behalf of the Koinonia
Inclusion Network (KIN),
it is my pleasure to present
to you the findings of
KIN's inaugural
Singapore Disability
Ministry Survey
(SDMS 2023)!**

KIN is a disability mission organisation that enables the Church to welcome and disciple people of all abilities. To fulfil this mandate, KIN produced the SDMS 2023 to enable the Church by providing a holistic snapshot of the disability ministry sector in Singapore. This will allow church and disability ministry leaders to make more informed choices about how they develop their disability ministries moving ahead, in order to better include persons with disability in the Church and her mission.

The SDMS 2023 also serves to inform the ministry strategy of KIN. Along this line, in Chapter 4 of this report, we have articulated three strategic areas that KIN will focus on in the years ahead: (i) supporting churches to establish new disability ministries, (ii) developing disability ministry leaders, and (iii) helping churches raise more disability ministry volunteers.

Welcome Message from the Executive Director

We hope these strategies will allow KIN to better support the Church in her ministry.

The data collection for SDMS 2023 was conducted in 2022, with the data analysis and report writing taking place over the latter half of 2022 and the first quarter of 2023. The research work was undertaken by the Centre for Disability Ministry in Asia (CDMA), KIN's in-house research unit, and supported by other members of the KIN staff team. I would like to express my thanks to them for this labour of love. I would also like to acknowledge Mr Aaron James Yap, KIN's Artist-in-Residence, for granting us permission to use his artwork in the report.

A big 'thank-you' as well to the churches, church leaders, and disability ministry leaders who generously gave of their time to complete our questionnaires and to take part in our interviews. SDMS 2023 would not have been possible without you.

While SDMS 2023 is a small-scale study, its findings provide a substantial foundation for informing a strategy for Singapore's disability ministry landscape for the next five years. KIN looks forward to partnering churches from across the denominations in order to better include and disciple people with disability. We pray that God will allow His gospel to shape the hearts of more and more churches, to allow them to see that His salvation is not just for the able-bodied, but for all peoples!

Ms Jesselyn Ng Siyu
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



1. Introduction to the Survey

1.1 Rationale for the survey

On 17 August 2022, the Singapore government released the Enabling Masterplan 2030 (EMP2030),¹ a comprehensive report that outlined the vision for developing Singapore as a disability-inclusive society over the period of 2023–2030. EMP2030 offered numerous recommendations for improving inclusion across a broad range of areas, including schooling, employment, living, transportation, communications, healthcare, sports, art and more. The report, the fourth in a series of masterplans since 2007, has the goal of facilitating the “nation’s journey towards building a more caring and inclusive Singapore.”²

Such a masterplan is much needed, not least because disability is an increasingly common phenomenon in Singapore,³ especially due to Singapore’s ageing population. While 3.4% of Singapore’s resident population aged 18–49 years has a disability, the number rises significantly to 13.3% for those aged 50 years and above.⁴ By 2030, 40% of adults with disability will be 65 years or older.⁵ However, this rise is not just associated with ageing. As EMP2030 states, “in line with international trends, there continues to be an increase in the number of children diagnosed with autism in Singapore” and “the number of students reported with Special Education Needs (SEN) has risen by about 5% in the last 3 years”.⁶

These data points from Singapore reflect global trends. As a 2011 World Health Organisation report states:

*More than one billion in the world live with some form of disability, of whom nearly 200 million experience considerable difficulties in functioning. In the years ahead, disability will be an even greater concern because its prevalence is on the rise. This is due to ageing populations and the higher risk of disability in older people as well as the global increase in chronic health conditions such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancer and mental health disorders.*⁷

Given this growing reality, and given that the Church is called to “go therefore and make disciples of all nations” (Matt 28.1) which surely must include people with disability, churches that overlook people with disability will become increasingly more unfaithful to the mission that they are called to. (See Annex A for a comprehensive list of reasons for why churches should include people with disability.)

¹ Ministry of Social and Family Development, *Enabling Masterplan 2030* (Singapore: Ministry of Social and Family Development, 2022), <https://www.msf.gov.sg/what-we-do/enabling-masterplan/enabling-masterplan-2030/what-is-emp2030>. Accessed 3 Apr 2023.

² Ministry of Social and Family Development, *Enabling Masterplan 2030*, 5.

³ For a more comprehensive discussion of the broader disability landscape in Singapore, see Timothy Teoh, “The Social Landscape for Disability in Singapore,” in *Enabling Hearts: A Primer for Disability-Inclusive Churches*, ed. Wen Pin Leow (Singapore: Graceworks, 2021), 25–34.

⁴ This data dates to 2015 and was offered in a 2018 response by the Ministry of Social and Family Development to a parliamentary question. See <https://www.msf.gov.sg/media-room/article/Total-number-of-persons-with-disabilities-in-Singapore>. Accessed 3 Apr 2023.

^{5,6} Ministry of Social and Family Development, *Enabling Masterplan 2030*, 20.

⁷ World Health Organisation, *World Report on Disability* (Malta: World Health Organisation, 2011), xi.

The Koinonia Inclusion Network (“KIN”) is a disability mission organisation that enables the Church to welcome and disciple people of all abilities. In order to support the Church in Singapore for this purpose, KIN commissioned its Centre for Disability Ministry in Asia (CDMA) to conduct the inaugural Singapore Disability Ministry Survey (SDMS 2023). The SDMS 2023’s goal was to **obtain a clearer understanding of the state of Christian ministry for people with disability among Protestant churches in Singapore** (henceforth referred to as “churches”). The data provided by the SDMS 2023 are intended to support the Church in Singapore in her missional efforts to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to people with disability – a precious group of individuals made in God’s image.

1.2 Nomenclature

“People with disability”. While we recognise that there are variations and debates over nomenclature, even within individual disability communities, this report follows standard Singapore conventions reflected in EMP2030. Hence, the term “disability” and person-first language (e.g., “people with disability”) is adopted throughout this report.

“Disability ministry”. For the purposes of this report, the term “disability ministry” is defined as any ministry that makes deliberate plans to include people with disability and/or their family members. For example, the term might include any of the following ministries which are present in our sample:

- i. An inclusive Sunday worship service with adaptations for persons with disability to worship with the rest of the congregation;
- ii. A specialised worship service catering solely to adults with disability;
- iii. An inclusive Sunday school class where children with intellectual disability learn together alongside neurotypical children;
- iv. A specialised Sunday school class which focuses exclusively on children with disability;
- v. A sports-based evangelistic ministry to engage with pre-believing families with members with disability;
- vi. A cell group that specifically reaches out to people with disability;
- vii. A parent’s support group which caters to the well-being of caregivers of people with disability;
- viii. Programmes for elderly with dementia and wheelchair-users;
- ix. A ministry that helps other ministries become inclusive of people with disability.

In contrast, a worship service that only incidentally has people with disability in attendance would not be considered a “disability ministry” despite the ministry being of benefit to people with disability.

1.3 Goals of SDMS 2023

Given that the survey was being commissioned for the first time, a limited scope was planned for the SDMS 2023, comprising three main research questions (“RQs”):

RQ1. Which Protestant churches in Singapore had disability ministries?

RQ2. What was the nature of the disability ministries in churches?

RQ3. What were the challenges that churches faced in establishing and sustaining disability ministries?

Through these three basic RQs, the inaugural SDMS 2023 sought to establish a preliminary portrait of the disability ministry landscape in Singapore that could be subsequently built upon in future studies.

1.4 Research method

Data gathering for the SDMS 2023 was undertaken in three steps:

1.4.1 STEP 1. CONFIRMATION OF LIST OF DISABILITY MINISTRIES THROUGH INTERNET SURVEY

To address RQ1: Due to KIN’s ministry among churches in Singapore with disability ministries, KIN already had a comprehensive list of churches with disability ministries in Singapore (compiled since 2017). This list only includes Protestant churches, and not parachurch organisations, or church-initiated social services, or Catholic parishes with disability ministries. A survey was conducted using the Internet to (i) verify the completeness of the list, (ii) provide a summary of each church’s ministry/ies, and to (iii) gather contact details of each church’s disability ministry leaders.

1.4.2 STEP 2. ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRES

First, a detailed online questionnaire (“OQ”) was developed to obtain a broad understanding of the disability ministries of churches that had such ministries (focusing on RQs 2 and 3). This OQ focused on understanding:

- i. The disability ministry leader who completed the OQ;
- ii. The nature of their church (e.g. size of congregation, denomination);
- iii. The demographics of people with disability in their church;
- iv. How disability ministry is conducted in their church;
- v. What goals were intended from their church’s disability ministry
- vi. The needs and challenges of their church’s disability ministry.

A second complementary online questionnaire was also developed to study churches that did not have disability ministries (focusing on RQ 3). This OQ sought to understand why a church did not have a disability ministry and how the church nonetheless sought to include people with disability in their midst.

1.4.3 STEP 3. SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

In order to explore further the implications of the OQ data provided by churches with disability ministries, semi-structured interviews (“SSIs”) were conducted to follow up with the disability ministry leaders. These SSIs would allow the research team to explore in greater richness the viewpoints of disability ministry leaders, thus complementing the broader but shallower data emerging from the OQ.

The SSIs were conducted over online teleconferencing software for safe distancing and for the convenience of the participants. All participants were asked a fixed set of open-ended questions in sequential order but supplemented with probing questions to allow richer and thicker data collection. Key themes explored, focusing again on RQs 2 and 3, include:

- i. Why and how the disability ministry started;
- ii. How the ministry leader understands disability and inclusion;
- iii. The current state of the disability ministry in their church;
- iv. The needs and challenges faced by their church’s disability ministry;

Anonymised excerpts from the SSIs have also been inserted into the later sections of this report to provide additional context to the discussion.⁸

1.4.4 DATA ANALYSIS

Data from the OQ were analysed using common quantitative and qualitative methods. In particular, longer textual responses to the OQ were studied alongside the interview transcripts of the SSIs. (These transcripts were transcribed verbatim from the audio recordings of the SSIs with the aid of transcription software.) Both the OQ textual responses and the SSI transcripts were analysed using a grounded theory approach,⁹ with key themes identified through open coding.¹⁰ Some generalisations were then developed from the analysis of the data.

1.4.5 ETHICS APPROVAL AND RESEARCH INSTRUMENT VALIDATION

Prior to the start of data gathering, the research proposal for SDMS 2023 was submitted to an independently-chaired Research Ethics Review Board for approval. Approval was granted with no serious concerns registered. Thereafter, the OQs and SSI protocol were both piloted first at a small scale and then refined based on participant feedback. This ensured the robustness of each research instrument prior to wide scale use.

⁸ These excerpts have been lightly edited for clarity’s sake.

⁹ Martyn Denscombe, *The Good Research Guide for Small-Scale Social Research Projects*, 2nd ed. (Berkshire: Open University Press, 2003), 109–28.

¹⁰ Denscombe, *The Good Research Guide*, 271–72.

1.5 Respondent selection and denominational profile

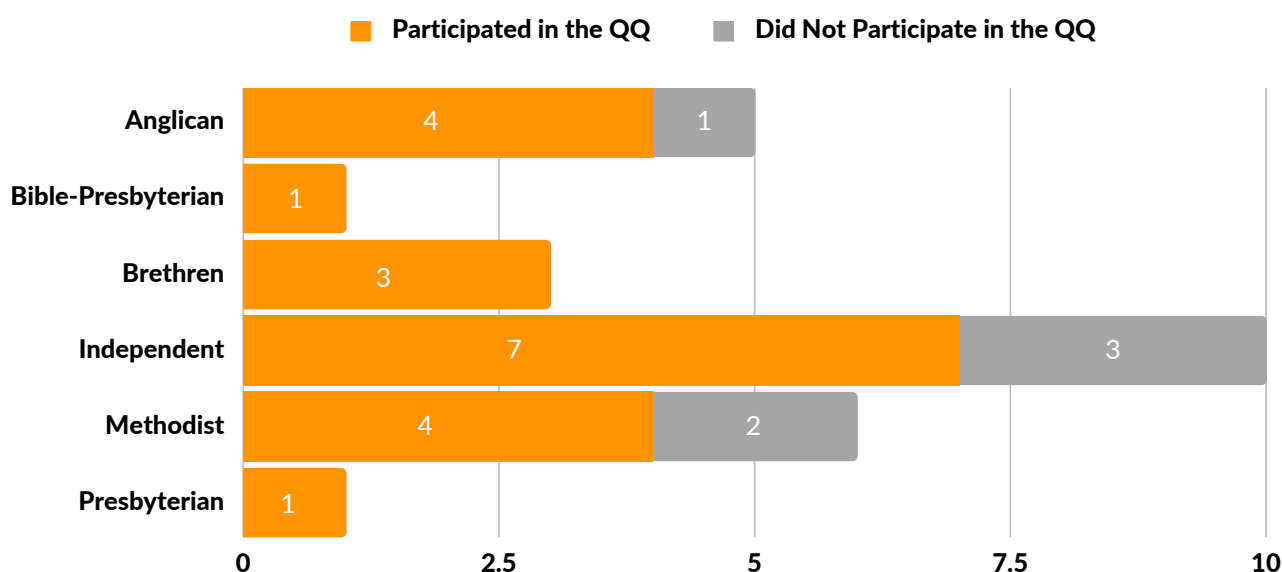
Due to the smaller scale nature of this study, it was decided that the **SDMS 2023 would focus exclusively on church leadership**, either disability ministry leaders (in the case of churches with disability ministries) or church leaders (in the case of churches without disability ministries). While such a focus is certainly not ideal (especially in not being able to engage directly with people with disability in the disability ministries), the small scale of this study required such trade-offs. Church leaders were chosen since they would most likely (1) have an in-depth understanding of their ministry/church, (2) exercise a major influence on their church's/ministry's culture and practices, and (3) have the most interactions with people with disability and their caregivers.¹¹

1.5.1 ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRES RESPONDENTS

Twenty-six churches with disability ministries were identified from the aforementioned Step 1. All twenty-six churches were invited to participate in completing the OQ through an email invitation. Twenty churches (77% response rate) agreed to complete the OQ,¹² with all denominations represented by more than 50% of their churches with disability ministries. See Figure 1.5.1a. The overall response rate of 77% and the individual denominational representation are sufficient to allow the aggregated OQ data to provide a meaningful picture of the disability ministry landscape.

Figure 1.5.1a

Number of OQ responses by churches with disability ministries¹³ (alphabetical by denomination)



¹¹ Erik W. Carter, "Research on Disability and Congregational Inclusion: What We Know and Where We Might Go," *Journal of Disability & Religion* (2022): 19 (Ahead-of-print version).

¹² The remaining six churches either did not respond to communication to them or declined to participate.

¹³ Churches deemed "independent" were churches that did not participate in a specific denomination (such as Assembly of God, Presbyterian). Non-denominationally affiliated churches that were part of a larger representation group, say, the National Council of Churches of Singapore (NCCS), The Alliance of Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches of Singapore (APCCS), or Love Singapore were still considered "independent" for analysis purposes. Note that this approach to categorisation was always corroborated by the churches' own self-designations when they were asked for their denominational affiliation in the OQ (this statement, of course, only applies to those churches which participated in the OQ).

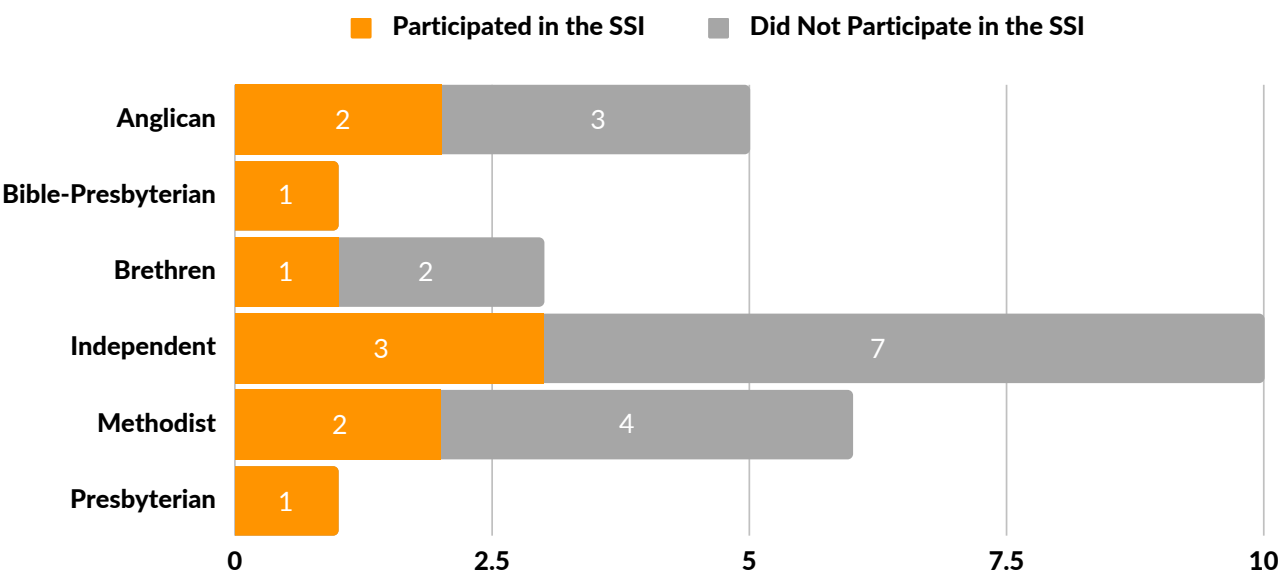
In addition to churches with disability ministries, eleven more churches agreed to complete the complementary OQ designed for churches without disability ministries. These eleven churches were selected to ensure denominational spread with the following denominations represented (ordered alphabetically): Anglican (two churches), Baptist (one church), Bible-Presbyterian (one church), Brethren (one church), Evangelical Free Church (two churches), Independent (two churches), Methodist (one church), and Presbyterian (one church).¹⁴

1.5.2 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW RESPONDENTS

In order to keep the SSI data at a manageable size, the research team did not seek to conduct SSIs with every church with a disability ministry. Instead, the research team sought a 50% response rate from the twenty churches that had completed the OQ, while ensuring a spread of respondents across all denominations. In addition, denominations that had more churches with disability ministries received more invitations to participate in the SSI. In the end, as intended, ten churches participated in the SSI (50% response rate) with the spread shown in Figure 1.5.2a.¹⁵

Figure 1.5.2a

Number of SSI respondents by churches with disability ministries (alphabetical by denomination)



¹⁴ Unfortunately, despite the research team's best efforts, no Lutheran church or Salvation Army Corps responded to our invitation to participate. This non-response should not be interpreted as disinterest in disability ministry since there are multiple possible reasons why a non-response was given.

¹⁵ Assessed to be adequately representative by the research team. Note that Figure 1.5.2a does not appear to reflect 50% response from the OQ churches as it also includes those churches that did not respond to the OQ in the first place.

Summary

This section of the SDMS 2023 report has outlined its rationale, goals, research methods, the respondent selection criteria, and the denominational profile of the respondents to the survey. Overall, despite the SDMS 2023 being a new initiative, the high response rate (77%) allows the findings in the following section to be meaningfully representative of the disability ministry landscape of Singapore.¹⁶

¹⁶ The SDMS 2023 has a small invitation pool (26 churches) which made it possible for the research team to make personal appeals via other communication modes (e.g., phone calls) when churches were initially non-responsive to the email invitations.



2. Findings from the Survey

2.1 Introduction

This section presents the findings from the OQ/SSI conducted with the thirty-one churches sampled in the SDMS 2023. The findings are divided into four main sections corresponding to three RQs that guided the survey, as follows:

Research Question	Section Name
RQ1. Which Protestant churches in Singapore had disability ministries?	2.2 Description of respondent churches with disability ministries 2.2.1 Size of congregations with disability ministries 2.2.2 Number of disability ministries 2.2.3 Perceived needs of people with disabilities 2.2.4 Reasons for establishing a disability ministry 2.2.5 Self-perception of congregational inclusivity
RQ2. What was the nature of the disability ministries in churches?	2.3 Description of disability ministries 2.3.1 Goals of ministry 2.3.2 Nature of disability ministry 2.3.3 Age groups served by disability ministries 2.3.4 Scale and frequency of disability ministries 2.3.5 Disability ministry leaders: Gender, age, and training profile 2.3.6 Disability ministry leaders: Perspectives on disability and inclusion 2.3.7 Support for special families
RQ3. What were the challenges that churches faced in establishing and sustaining disability ministries?	2.4 Needs and challenges of disability ministry 2.4.1 Challenges arising from church leadership 2.4.2 Challenges arising from the congregation 2.4.3 Challenges arising from people with disabilities and their families 2.4.4 Other challenges 2.4.5 Support needed by disability ministry leaders 2.5 Churches without disability ministries 2.5.1 Self-perception of congregational inclusivity 2.5.2 Reasons for not having disability ministries 2.5.3 Help needed to start a disability ministry

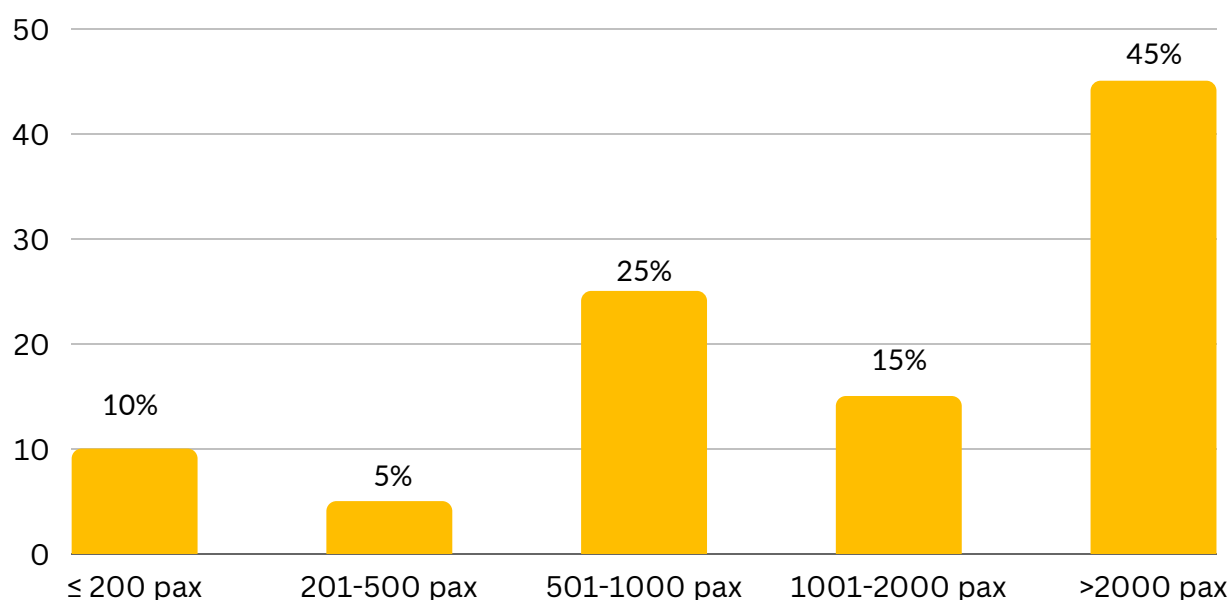
2.2 Description of respondent churches with disability ministries

2.2.1 SIZE OF CONGREGATIONS WITH DISABILITY MINISTRIES

As shown in Figure 2.2.1a, there is a **clear skew towards churches with larger congregations having disability ministries**. 60% of respondent churches with disability ministries had at least 1,000 congregants, while over 85% had over 500 congregants.¹⁷

Figure 2.2.1a

Demographic breakdown of respondent churches with disability ministries



How should this trend be interpreted? It could have a number of causes (not mutually exclusive). One possible practical reason is that larger churches are more likely to have a critical mass of people with disability, thus motivating them to begin a disability ministry. Another possible related reason is that larger churches have greater resourcing (and associated economies of scale) that permit them to have a wider range of ministries, including disability ministries, in a sustainable fashion.¹⁸

¹⁷ This skew towards larger churches is further reinforced when congregation size estimates for the remaining six churches that did not participate in the SDMS 2023 are taken into consideration.

¹⁸ For a corroborating study based in the US, see Lifeway Research, *Pastors' Views on Caring for People with Disabilities: Survey of American Protestant Pastors* (Lifeway Research, September 2019).

However, pragmatic reasons should not be viewed as the only possible cause. For example, it is reasonable to expect larger churches to have leaders who are more eager for their churches to be relevant to society-at-large (which might account for their larger sizes in the first place). Such leaders are also more likely to be interested in disability inclusion. For example, one disability ministry leader from a large church noted that the church’s disability ministry began due to “a vision from our Senior Pastor whose purpose was to build a church without walls in bringing the love of God to the people we reach out to” (see §2.2.4). For such a church, church growth and inclusive disability ministry emerge from the same roots.

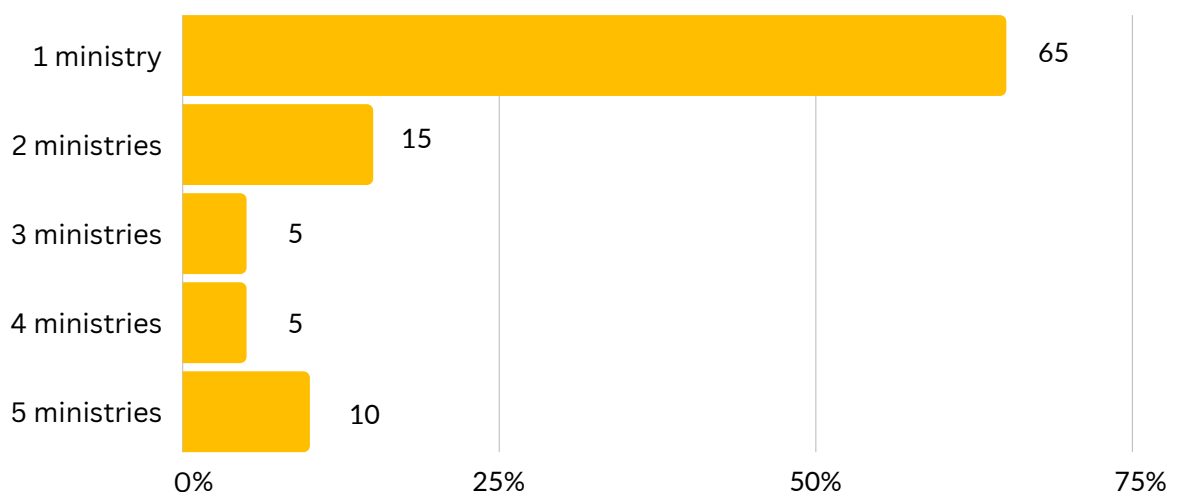
2.2.2 NUMBER OF DISABILITY MINISTRIES

Churches were also asked about the number of distinct disability ministries they had within their church. (For example, an inclusive Sunday school ministry would be regarded as distinct from an inclusive small group ministry or a special parent support group.) Such data would provide a rough estimate of the extent of inclusion within a church.

There was a total of 36 disability ministries in 20 respondent churches. Of these, Figure 2.2.2a shows that a clear majority of churches (65%) had only one disability ministry. This ministry was usually separate in nature (see §2.3.2 for definition of the term “separate”). In contrast, when churches had more than one ministry (35%), these ministries often focused on the inclusion of people with disability within churchwide ministries (e.g., inclusion in youth ministry or Sunday school ministry) or support groups relating to different disabilities. One unique case was a larger-sized church that had several separate ministries focused on different disability groups (that were not support groups).

Figure 2.2.2a

Number of disability ministries in each church



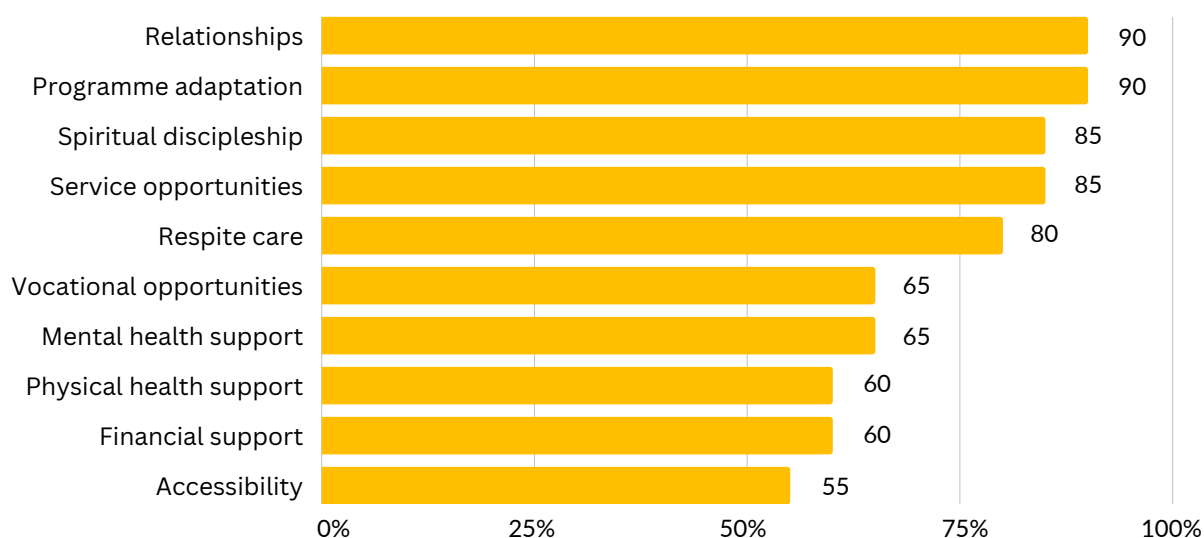
2.2.3 PERCEIVED NEEDS OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY

When asked about what they perceived as the needs of people with disability in their congregation, disability ministry leaders emphasised five key areas (see Figure 2.2.3a), namely:

- i. Relationships with other church members (90%);
- ii. Church programme adaptation (90%);
- iii. Spiritual discipleship (85%);
- iv. Service opportunities in church (85%);
- v. Respite care for caregivers (80%).

Figure 2.2.3a

Perceived needs of people with disability



Hence, among these perceived needs, there seems to be a stronger emphasis on the social inclusion and spirituality of people with disability within the church setting. In comparison, those needs that might be deemed more “practical” (e.g. financial support and accessibility) were less stressed. This is perhaps expected given the spiritual role that disability ministry leaders play and what they think is the church’s role towards persons with disabilities. (Moreover, it should be emphasised that these are perceived needs from the viewpoint of disability ministry leaders – not people with disability themselves.)

“We must be very sensitive to their needs. ... They need moral support, they need prayer support, they also need counselling and so then we have to counsel them, they also need tangible help. ... The biggest challenge is how to stay fresh, how to stay engaged, and how to be sensitive to their needs ... and then how to also respond according to those needs.”

- Disability Ministry Leader

2.2.4 REASONS FOR ESTABLISHING A DISABILITY MINISTRY

Broadly-speaking, the respondents highlighted two main reasons for why their church started a disability ministry:

Needs of the congregation

Several disability ministries (45%, 9 churches) started in order to address the needs of people with disability in their midst. Often, when a critical mass of congregants with disability and their families developed, churches responded by creating ministries to address the needs of these congregants. Others saw a gap in the ministry provided to certain age or disability groups and sought to fulfil that need within the churches. This might be described as the *reactive rationale* for disability ministry.



Vision for the congregation

Other congregations started disability ministries due to a vision from specific individuals within the church (55%, 11 churches). Often, such visions went beyond merely catering for the needs of people with disability to encompass a more thoroughgoing form of inclusion. Such individuals came from different levels of the church hierarchy. It could be a church leader (e.g. senior pastor) or a group of passionate church members. However, what characterised all of them was the desire to see people with disability included and the willingness to operationalise their vision by establishing some form of disability ministry. This might be described as a *proactive rationale* for disability ministry.

It should be noted that these two categories (reactive/proactive) were not mutually exclusive. For example, in one church, a (reactive) response to the presence of people with disability led church leaders to go through a period of soul-searching that led to them crafting a (proactive) strategy for disability inclusion that went beyond merely addressing practical needs. Both motivations for establishing disability ministries are equally important (see Annex A) and work in concert.

“We started as a class, because one of the newcomers to our church at that time, was a family with a teenager who had a rare disease ... and they had been looking for a church to belong to and couldn't find a suitable home church. ... So that was why we decided to try to do our best to include him.”

- Disability Ministry Leader

2.2.5 SELF-PERCEPTION OF CONGREGATIONAL INCLUSIVITY

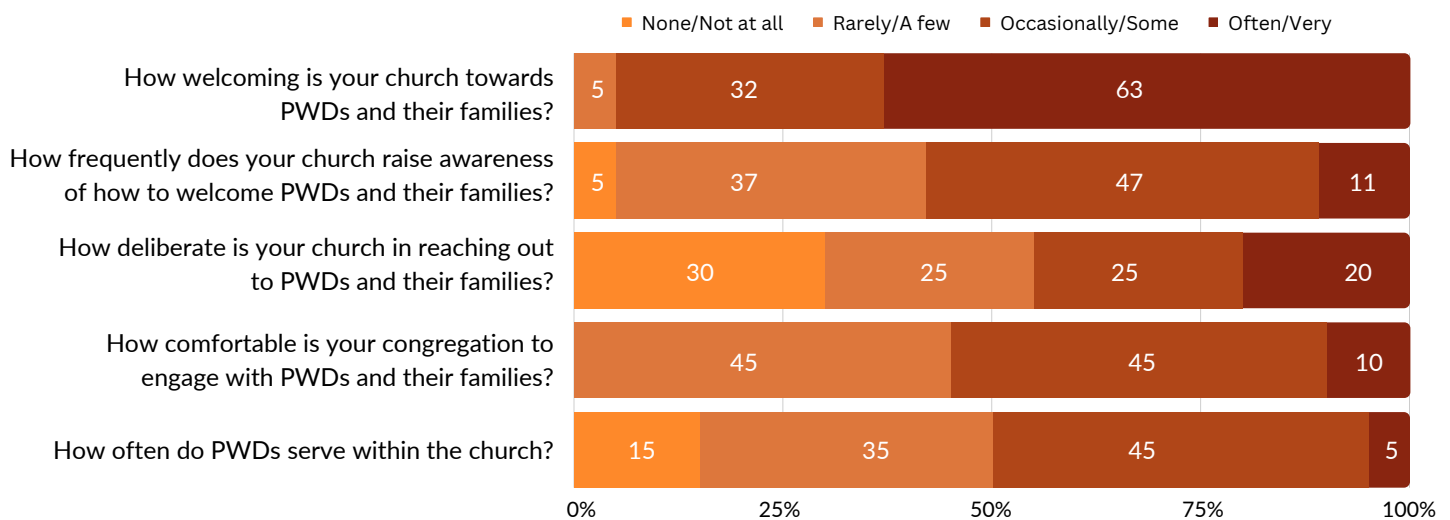
The respondents were asked to grade their church on their church's inclusivity towards people with disability and their families based on five dimensions:

- i. The degree of welcome shown;
- ii. The frequency of awareness raising;
- iii. The deliberateness of outreach;
- iv. The degree of comfort in engagement;
- v. The available opportunities for service by people with disability.

While most respondents felt their congregations were welcoming towards people with disability (>90% said that their church was occasionally or often welcoming), when this term is broken down into its parts, we see a contrast in their responses for the other dimensions. 58% of respondents indicated that their church raised awareness about people with disability on at least an occasional basis, while less than half (45% of respondents) indicated their church engaged in occasional deliberate outreach towards people with disability and their families. Moreover, 45% of respondents indicated that their congregations were less comfortable engaging with people with disability and the families. Finally, 50% of respondents indicated that their churches did not or rarely provided opportunities for people with disability to serve in various ministries.

Figure 2.2.5a

Self-perception of congregational inclusivity



This suggests that, while it is laudable that many churches have established disability ministries, having a disability ministry in one's church does not guarantee that the rest of the church is enthusiastic or engaged in disability inclusion. There is still substantial work that needs to be done on that front even for churches with disability ministries.

"I won't say we are halfway there, we're less than halfway there. Yeah, less than halfway there. But I think it's already quite good that the culture is starting to change a little bit. ... We can actually have a state now where we have youths with autism who are part of their own peer group. That wasn't an easy state to achieve."

- Disability Ministry Leader

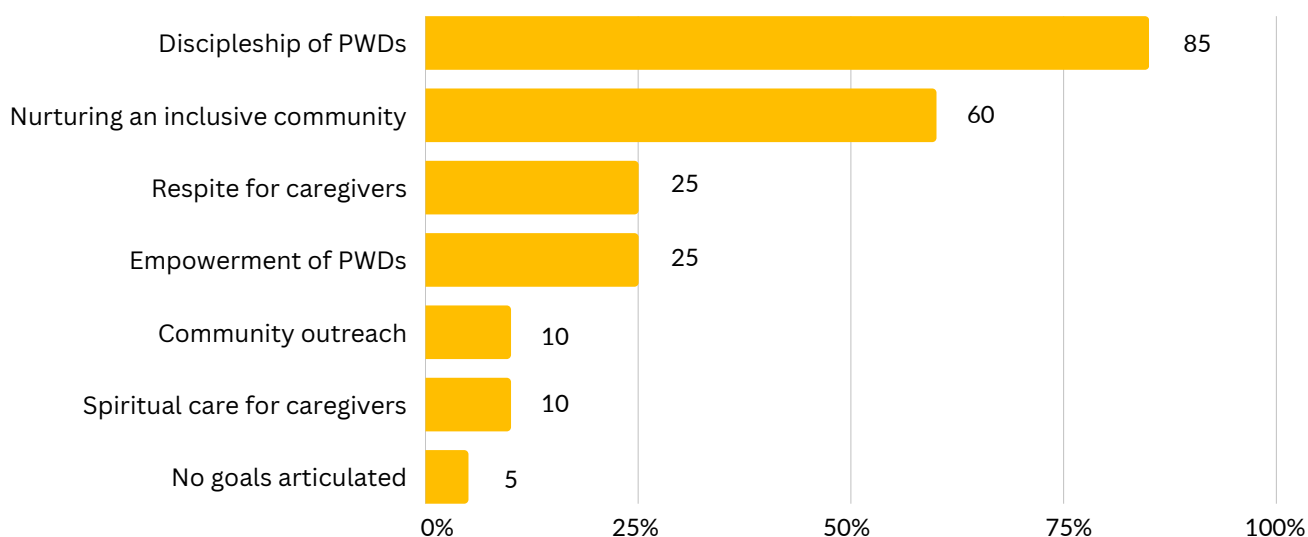
2.3 Churches with disability ministries

2.3.1 GOALS OF DISABILITY MINISTRY

When the respondents were asked about what the goals of their disability ministries were (see Figure 2.3.1a), there was a strong emphasis on the discipleship of people with disability (85%). Such “discipleship” was in the majority of cases defined as helping people with disability to engage cognitively with Christianity. Hence, terms frequently used to describe such discipleship included “know”, “teach”, “learn”, “know God’s Word”. Less frequently, experiential/relational terms towards God were used, e.g. “experience”, “love”, “embrace”, “enjoy”, “worship”.

Figure 2.3.1a

Goals for disability ministries



Another relatively common goal was the desire to nurture an inclusive church community (60%). This reason differed from the previous goal due to this goal’s requirement of engaging other members of the church. For this goal, there was a spectrum of inclusivity that was explicitly targeted – from simple interaction to deeper levels of community building, the latter described using adjectives such as “accepting”, “welcoming”, and “safe”.

The remaining goals were relatively infrequent, with less emphasis given to caregivers both practically (e.g. respite care) and spiritually (e.g. pastoral care). Most ministries also did not explicitly have an outward-looking focus, with only two churches explicitly stating that their ministries had outreach goals to the larger community. One disability ministry also stated that it had no clearly articulated goals for its ministries.

“The families of people with disability are really eager for any programme that will improve the kids’ functioning. But we are quite clear about this, that our programme is not about that. ... The primary aim is spiritual transformation.”

- Disability Ministry Leader

2.3.2 NATURE OF DISABILITY MINISTRY

Approaches of disability ministries. As earlier mentioned in §2.2.2, there were 36 disability ministries across the twenty church respondents. These ministries adopted a wide range of approaches. For example, when the degree of inclusivity of the disability ministries was examined (see Figure 2.3.2a), there was relatively even spread across four types (from less to more inclusive):

SEPARATE (33%; 12 MINISTRIES)

People with disability attend a separate service/ministry from the rest of the congregation.

HYBRID (22%; 8 MINISTRIES)

People with disability attend a separate service/ministry from the rest of the congregation, but with the occasional inclusion of people with disability into the mainstream service/ministry.

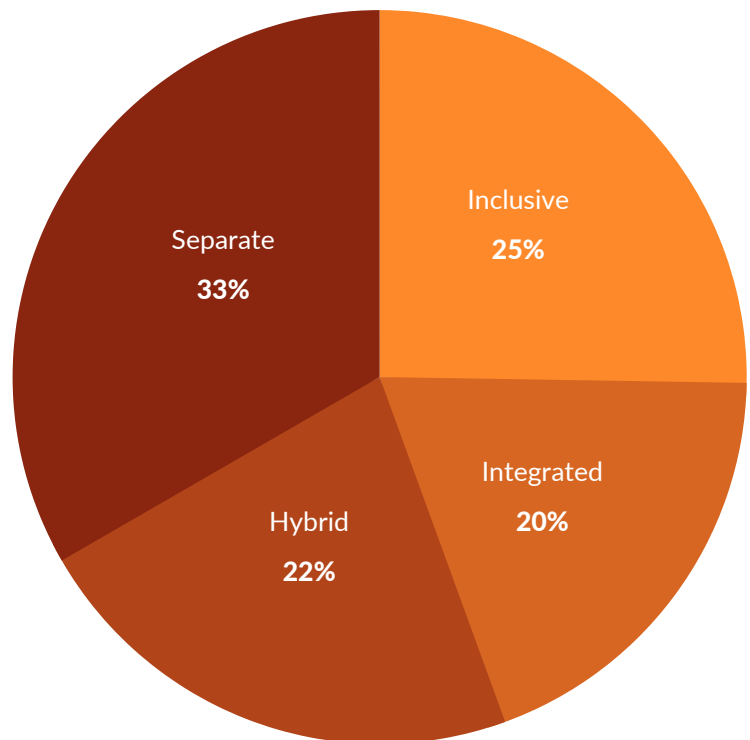
INTEGRATED (20%; 7 MINISTRIES)

People with disability attend the same service/ministry with the rest of the congregation but only with minimal adaptations to include them.

INCLUSIVE (25%; 9 MINISTRIES)

People with disability attend the same service/ministry with the rest of the congregation but with substantial adaptations to include them.

Figure 2.3.2a
Approaches of Disability Ministry



Out of the twelve ministries that are separate, nine of them (75%) are situated in churches that have the size of congregation of ≥ 1000 people. This finding resonates with previous research that found that people who attend segregated activities are significantly more likely to attend churches with a larger congregational size.¹⁹ Although larger congregations have more people and resources, segregated programming may not necessarily facilitate the desired social inclusion for people with disability.

¹⁹ Melinda Jones Ault, Belva C. Collins, and Erik W. Carter, "Factors Associated with Participation in Faith Communities for Individuals with Developmental Disabilities and Their Families," *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health* 17.2 (2013): 184–211.

That being said, it should be observed that the degree of inclusivity of a disability ministry is not necessarily reflective of the quality or commitment of a congregation towards including people with disability. Depending on the nature of people with disability involved, and the activities involved in the ministry, it is possible that a separate ministry might be understood to be more beneficial to people with disability than an inclusive ministry. Each ministry has their own rationale for taking certain approaches, and what might work best for one church may not work for another.

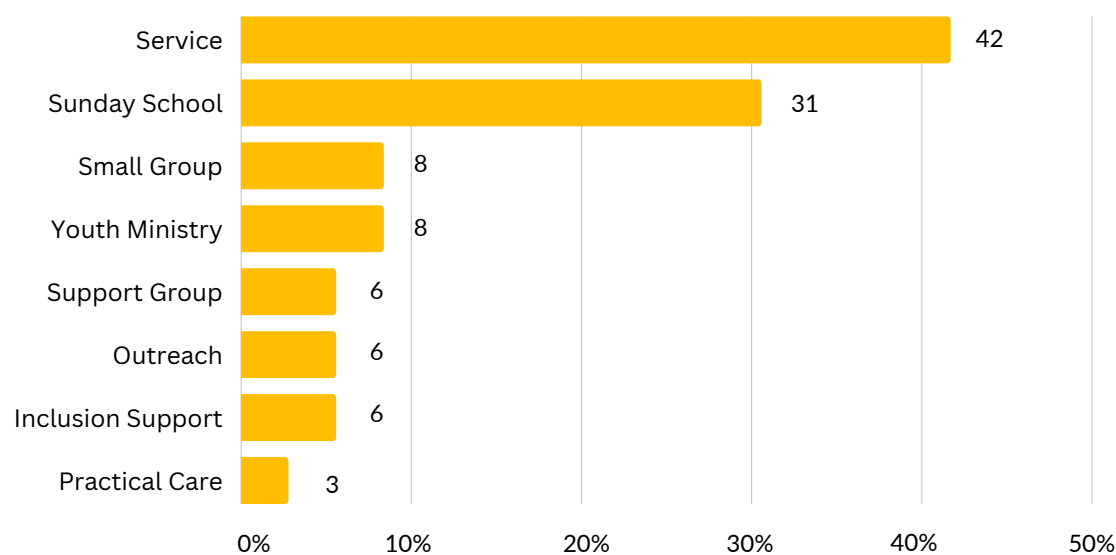
“Yeah, [our inclusive approach] goes back to the philosophy of the Body of Christ. And how there is no demarcation. Everybody has special needs. Everybody. Everybody should learn how to love one another. That's where we're coming from.”

- Disability Ministry Leader

Activities within disability ministries. When the different types of activities are considered (see Figure 2.3.2b), it can be seen that most ministries focus on one of two types of ministries, namely, (i) helping people with disability access a worship service (either a specialised service solely for people with disability, or an inclusive service alongside the rest of the congregation), or (ii) a Sunday school type ministry. As such, there seems to be a heavy emphasis on Word-related ministries which coheres with the strong emphasis on discipleship as a goal (see §2.3.1).

Figure 2.3.2b

Distribution of different types of activities in disability ministries²⁰



²⁰ Since ministries often engage in more than one type of activity, the figures above when added up exceed 100%.

However, this also means that other forms of ministry to people with disability may be under-emphasised. In line with §2.3.1, there is a relatively low focus on outreach, caregiver support groups, and respite. Also, while §2.3.1 indicates that respite care is a goal for some disability ministries, it also appears that respite care tends to be an accompanying outcome of such ministries rather than the primary intent. Sports (only one church) also remains an under-utilised platform for ministry.²¹

“Long term, [our goal is to] build disciple makers. That means if PWDs start to see that, see God's gifts in themselves, and are ready to share ... they are ready to glorify God and they are more willing to step up because they know their purpose is for God.”

- Disability Ministry Leader

2.3.3 AGE GROUPS SERVED BY DISABILITY MINISTRIES

The spread of age groups served by various disability ministries is shown in Figure 2.3.3a. The figures need further qualification:

SENIORS

While the senior (>50 years of age) population appears quite well served (42%), it should be noted that the ministries addressing this population tend to address any adult with disability, and are not seniors specific. Only two ministries specifically addressed disability in the senior population.

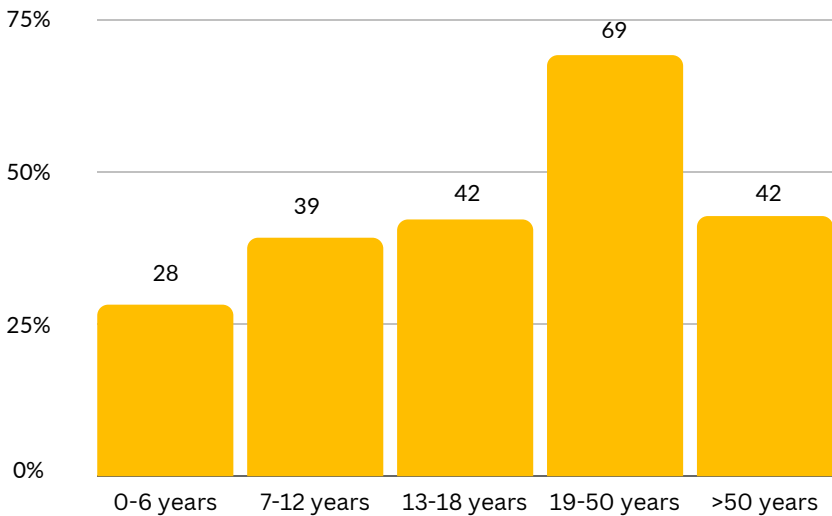
ADULTS

Likewise, while the adult population is purportedly the most frequently-served among disability ministries (69%), these belong to a limited variety of ministry, i.e. disability specific services (e.g. a Deaf service) or caregiver support groups.

YOUTH, CHILDREN, AND TODDLERS

While this population appears to be served by ministries, they almost exclusively comprise Word-focused ministries (e.g. Sunday schools).

Figure 2.3.3a
Distribution of disability ministries by age group served²²



²¹ See Gracia Lee, “This Sports-Based Disability Ministry Wants Kids with Special Needs to Feel Brave,” *Salt&Light*, 7 July 2022, <https://saltandlight.sg/service/this-sports-based-disability-ministry-wants-kids-with-special-needs-to-feel-brave/>. Accessed 31 Jan 2023.

²² Since ministries can serve more than one age group, the figures above when added up exceed 100%.

Thus, it appears that disability ministries tend to be segmented (in their type) largely by age grouping. The reasons why these age groups were ministered to are very much linked to the reasons why the disability ministry (§2.2.4) was set up in the first place.

“Our target group is young adults with disabilities or adults. And the reason why we wanted to target this age group is also because we found that in many churches, there are children's ministries and youth ministries but once they get older, above 18, it becomes inappropriate for them to stay in those younger ministries. They need something more at their age but they probably wouldn't be able to fully fit into the main adult cell groups. So, we felt that there was this gap in churches that we wanted to help meet.”

- Disability Ministry Leader

2.3.4 SCALE AND FREQUENCY OF DISABILITY MINISTRIES

Figure 2.3.4a shows the distribution of disability ministries according to the number of people with disability / caregivers served. As can be seen, most ministries (73%) are relatively small in size, serving 30 people and less. Despite most disability ministries being located in churches with more than 500 congregants, only three ministries served more than 50 people. Based on the data provided, a rough estimate of total number of people with disability served by all 20 churches is ~1,100 people.

Figure 2.3.4a

Scale of different disability ministries (persons with disability / caregivers served)

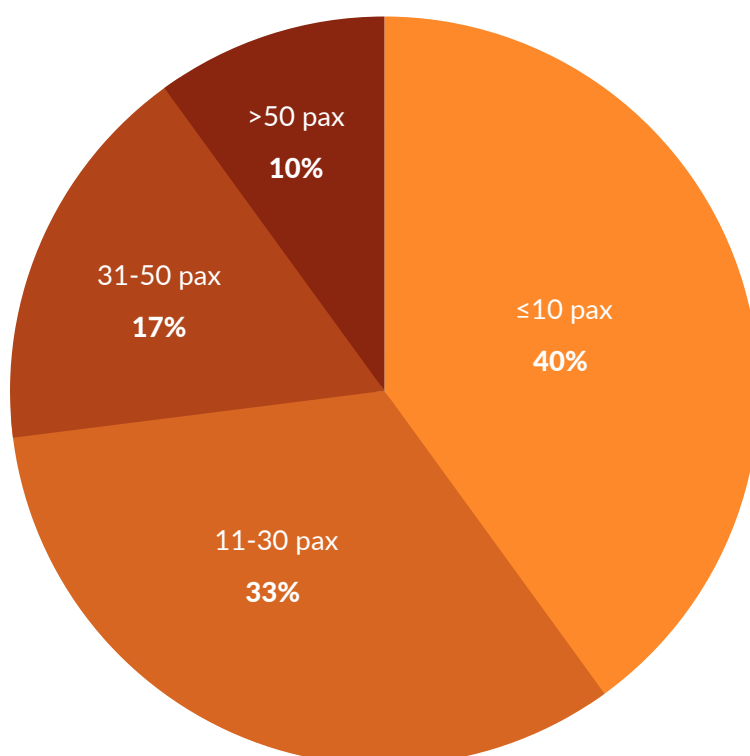
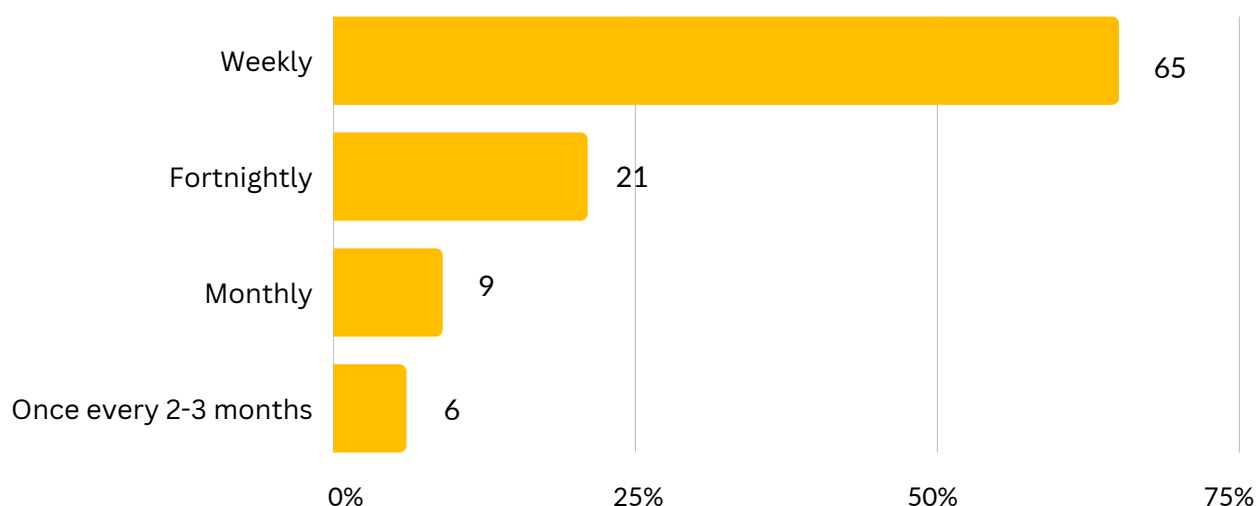


Figure 2.3.4b provides an illustration of the frequency of the activities of disability ministries. Most ministries occur on a regular basis, either weekly or twice a month (>80%). Such ministries tend to be service-type or Sunday school-type ministries. Less frequently occurring ministries tend to be fellowship-based or support group type activities.

Figure 2.3.4b

Frequency of disability ministry activities



“We meet physically on the first week of the month, then the third week of the month. But different groups can have different means of connecting with a special friend. So, it's really up to volunteers, how they want to connect: whether it's through a simple phone call, drop them a message, send them an art and craft activity to do at home, home visit. We have many different touch points.”

- Disability Ministry Leader

2.3.5 DISABILITY MINISTRY LEADERS: GENDER, AGE AND TRAINING PROFILE

Gender. The gender profile of each respondent church's disability ministry head (who completed the OQ) shows a distinct bias towards female leadership of disability ministries. This matches KIN's experience working with churches in Singapore where both leaders and volunteers are mostly female (70%). This emphasises the invaluable contribution of female Christians to this important ministry. At the same time, ministries often express hope for more male participation, especially due to logistical challenges involved for those ministries to adults with disability.

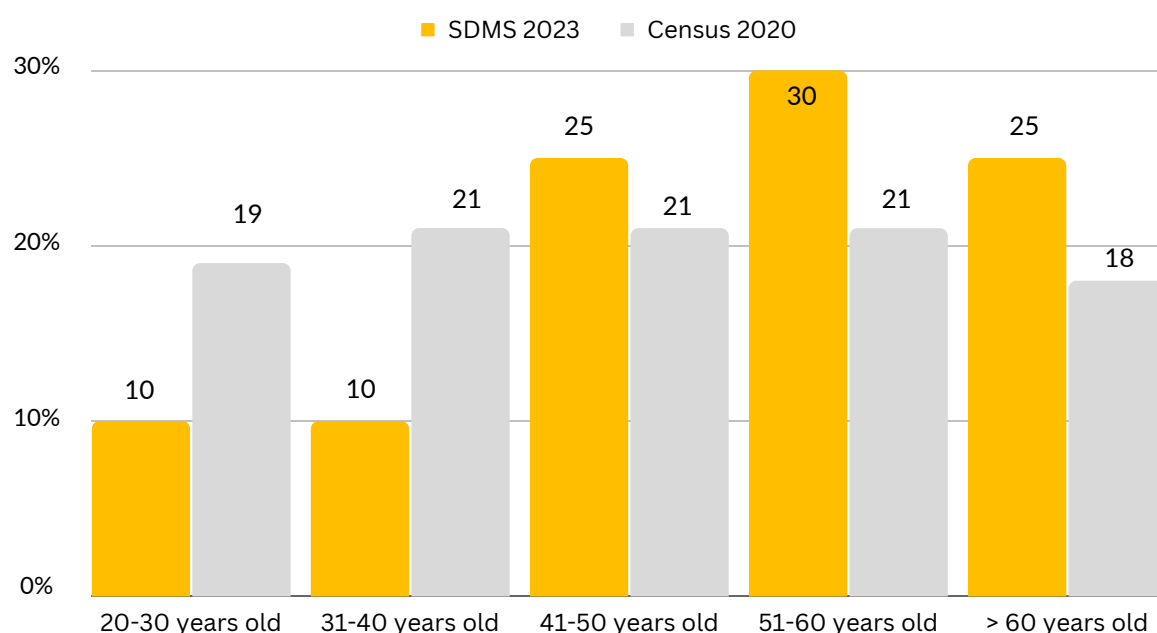
“[In our church,] we lack male volunteers. It's quite a specific need, a lot of the volunteers, we get females. ... But for example, autism, it affects more males than females, right? ... So, it can be a bit challenging if you don't have enough male volunteers, because we try to keep our discussion groups gender specific. Yeah. And so, I think that's the most pressing need.”

- Disability Ministry Leader

Age. Figure 2.3.5a illustrates the age profile of the responding disability ministry leaders, compared to national demographic trends based on the 2020 Census.²³ Compared to Singapore's resident population demographics, which shows a fairly even distribution across age bands (ranging from 18.0% – 21.4%), the disability ministry leader age distribution suggests an over-representation at the older age groups (41–70 years, 80%), and an under representation, especially for those aged 20-30 and 31-40 years (both at 10%). However, such an analysis assumes that leaders' demographic should mirror broad population demographic, which is unlikely to be the case. Having said that, this skew towards older age groups might still suggest that greater emphasis needs to be placed on leadership renewal for disability ministries.

Figure 2.3.5a

Age distribution of disability ministry leaders compared to national demographic trends



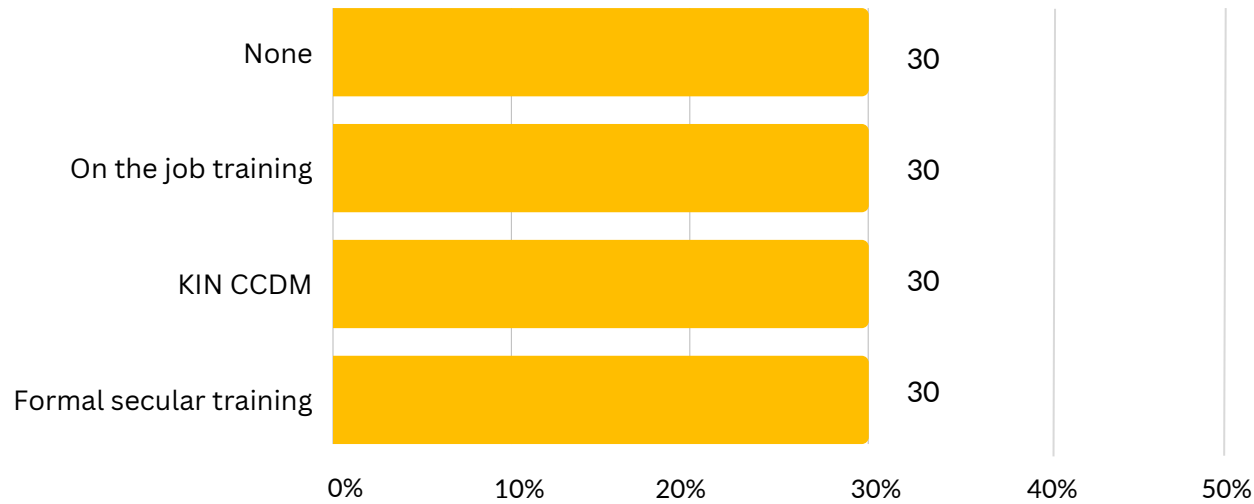
²³ The national trends were calculated based on the Singapore Census 2020. Each percentage figure was obtained by dividing the resident population of each age band (e.g. 20–30 years old) by the total resident population for those aged 20–69 years. Department of Statistics (Singapore), *Census of Population 2020 Statistical Release 1: Demographic Characteristics, Education, Language and Religion* (Singapore: Department of Statistics, 2021), 39.

Training Profile. The training that disability ministry leaders have received is shown in Figure 2.3.5b. It is concerning that about 30% (six leaders) have not had any training at all, while 10% (two other leaders) had no training prior to receiving training from KIN. Another 25% (five leaders) had received only on-the-job training, while 5% (one leader) supplemented their on-the-job training with training from KIN. The remaining six leaders (30%) had received formal secular training in the area of disability (with half of them further supplementing it with KIN’s training).

This lack of training is troubling because research has indicated that there are statistically significant correlations between the disability training of a leader and the presence of certain supports in church.²⁴ For example, if a leader had some disability training, their congregation was more likely to offer counselling ($p = 0.005$) and accessible materials ($p = 0.02$) for people with disability.

Figure 2.3.5b

Training of disability ministry leaders ²⁵



2.3.6 DISABILITY MINISTRY LEADERS: PERSPECTIVES ON DISABILITY AND INCLUSION

Reasons for disability. Disability ministry leaders were asked about why they thought people had disability. Figure 2.3.6a shows the results. Eleven respondents (55%) primarily emphasised the medical or circumstantial dimensions of disability. Terms used to describe such causes include “genetic”, “mental state”, “accident”, “environmental”, “illness” and “ageing”.

²⁴ Ault et al., “Perceptions of Faith Leaders on the Inclusion and Participation of Individuals with Disabilities in Their Communities.”

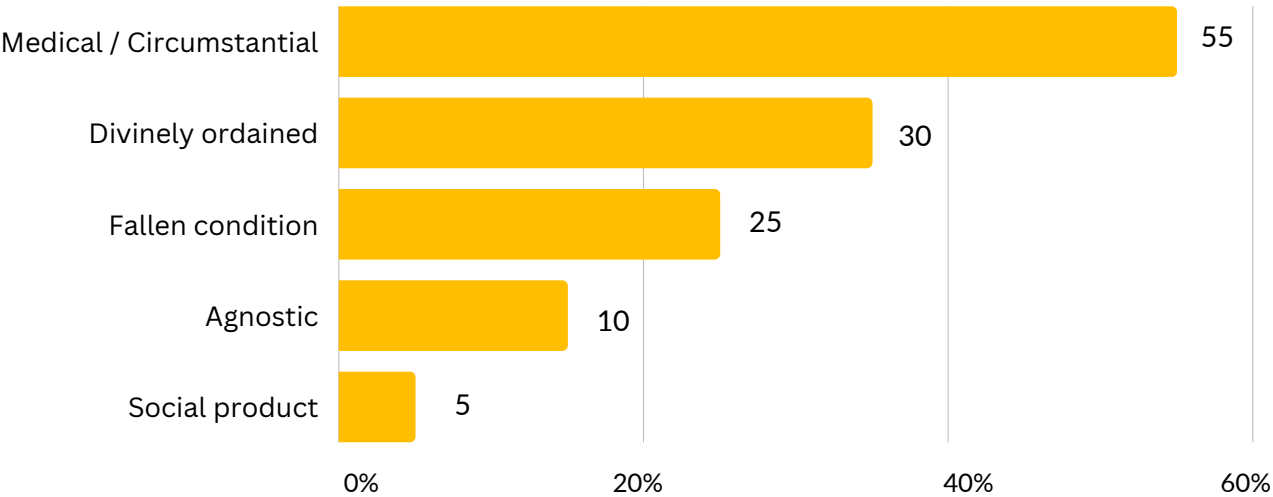
²⁵ As leaders had received training from more than one source, the percentages in this figure do not add up to 100%.

A significantly smaller group of leaders emphasised the theological dimensions of disability with five leaders (25%) discussing disability as a result of human fallenness, and six leaders (30%) placing the initiative on God. For the latter, a variety of motivations were given emphasising disability's instrumentality, e.g. (i) disability as a means to know God's grace/love, (ii) disability as a means to learn faith/trust, (iii) disability as a means of glorifying God.

Two leaders (10%) were deliberately agnostic about the cause of disability, preferring not to speculate. Finally, only one leader (5%) discussed disability from a social perspective, thus delinking disability from the individual with an impairment, instead locating disability within the church community.

Figure 2.3.6a

Perspective of disability ministry leaders for the cause of disability ²⁶



“So being disabled is part of a fallen world. Even people who appear able are disabled, we all have our own quirkiness, we all have our tendency to various sins.”

- Disability Ministry Leader

²⁶ As leaders had indicated more than one reason for disability occurring, the percentages in this figure do not add up to 100%.

Reasons for inclusion. In addition, disability ministry leaders were also asked concerning why they thought people with disability should be included in churches. A wide range of answers were given, which can be categorised into five broad groups:

- i. **God's initiative towards people with disability.** Respondents who cited this reason emphasised different aspects of God's actions and how they related to people with disability, such as (a) how the gospel was universal in scope, (b) how God loves everyone, and (c) how God has a special love for those who are marginalised.
- ii. **A common identity.** Respondents who gave this group of reasons saw that people with and without disability have a common identity. Such identities include *all people* (a) being made in the image of God, (b) being disabled due to the fall, and (c) being part of a common creation. This group also included reasons such as *all Christians* (d) being part of the body of Christ, and (e) being part of God's family.
- iii. **Value to the Church.** Some ministry leaders emphasised the value that people with disability bring to the church. This included reasons such as: (a) how people with disability provide an opportunity for Christians to practise love, (b) how people with disability can minister to others in a different way compared to Christians without disability, and (c) how people with disability can provide greater insight on theological truths.
- iv. **Role of the Church.** They viewed the Church as necessary (a) to unify everyone in worship, and (b) a place for people with disability to have freedom of expression to actively worship, contribute and build relationships with the main body. Through this, respondents also expressed what an inclusive church is not, namely where (a) people with disability are only served, and (b) they remain apart from the main body.
- v. **Social.** The church is part of an increasingly-inclusive society and therefore should follow suit. One leader observed, "Society has already embraced disability – all the more the Church should do so and not neglect this group of people."

"By including them, we are all part of this body of Christ. And, in fact, it makes this part of the body of Christ all the richer. It's much richer than if they were not here."

- Disability Ministry Leader

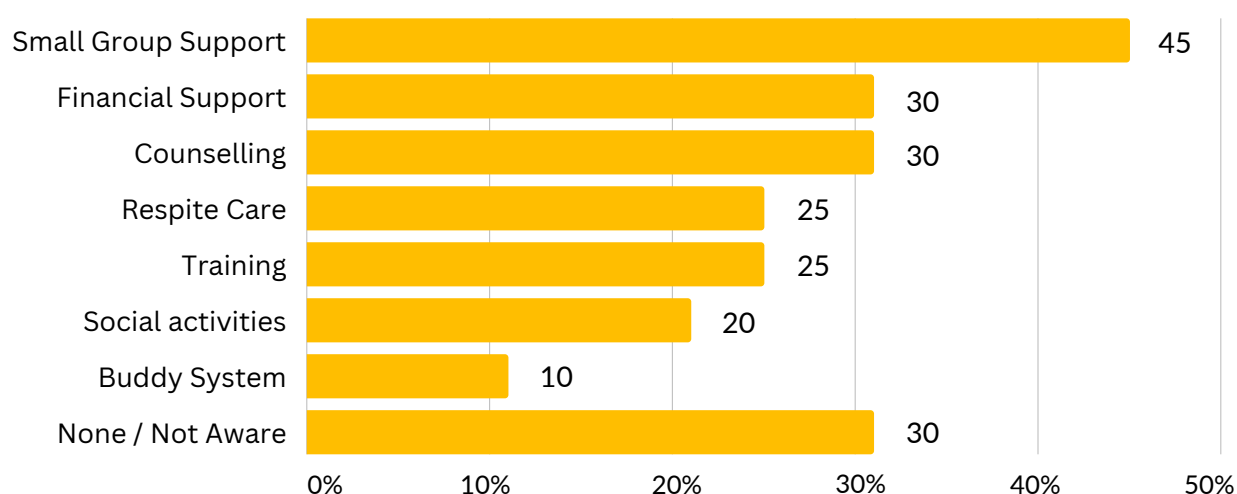
2.3.7 SUPPORT FOR SPECIAL FAMILIES

Other than the disability ministry itself, disability ministry leaders were asked about other provisions made for members of special families, e.g. caregivers and siblings of people with disability. This is because disability ministries often have greater impact beyond the services they provide since they connect special families to the larger network of the local church.

Encouragingly, nearly half of respondent churches (45%) observed that there were small support groups (e.g. through cell groups) that provided care for the family members of persons with disability (see Figure 2.3.7a). However, besides small support groups, the provision of other forms of support such as respite care, financial support, or counselling that special families would benefit from remained low. Of particular concern was the six respondents (30%) that indicated that they were not aware of any kind of support for special families in their churches.

Figure 2.3.7a

Support for special families ²⁷



“A number of our caregivers are actually single parents, and thus, low income families. And because they are single parents, and their child has moderate to higher support needs, they can't work. So actually, they get most of their money from disbursements or donations.”

- Disability Ministry Leader

²⁷ As leaders had indicated more than one support for special families, the percentages in this figure do not add up to 100%.

2.4 Needs and challenges of disability ministry

The following sections (§2.4.1–§2.4.5) discuss the challenges disability ministry leaders faced from stakeholder groups involved in disability ministry (i.e. church leadership, the congregation, people with disability and their families), the broader challenges they face in their ministry, and the support that they needed to address these challenges.

Caveat. The reporting of data below simply follows what the disability ministry leaders expressed. There is no implied agreement from the researcher team with the perspectives expressed. For example, when a disability ministry leader stated that a special family was challenging in a particular way, fault or blame cannot necessarily be placed on the special family. The data presented below should be interpreted as simply describing the lived experience of the respondents.

2.4.1 CHALLENGES ARISING FROM CHURCH LEADERSHIP

Disability ministry leaders were asked about some of the challenges they faced while working with their church leadership. More common challenges highlighted include church leaders:

- i. Not appreciating the importance of inclusion of people with disability and their community, and thus not including them in the church's ministry strategy.
- ii. Not understanding the needs and behaviours of people with disability and their community, and therefore viewing them as a potential problem to be managed than as a group to be ministered to.

Less commonly mentioned challenges include church leaders:

- iii. Not appreciating that inclusion involves a long-term commitment to people with disability (rather than simply staging one-off "inclusion events").
- iv. Viewing people with disability and their community as the target audience for a single ministry, rather than viewing them as part of the larger church family.
- v. Requiring significant growth in numbers in order to justify staff support of the ministry (and thus not appreciating that disability ministries typically require a higher staff/volunteer-to-attendee ratio).
- vi. Being inward-looking (caring for their own congregation only) rather than being outward-looking (seeing disability ministry as a platform for missions).

"I think our leadership is still working their way to it as far as awareness."

- Disability ministry leader

"They care more for [people with disability] than they care more for results. So, our senior leadership is very supportive for the ministry."

- Disability ministry leader

2.4.2 CHALLENGES ARISING FROM THE CONGREGATION

When asked about the challenges that they faced from the congregation at large, disability ministry leaders highlighted the following main challenges:

- i. The congregation viewed church services as a time for them to receive rather than to serve. Therefore, they viewed the social behaviour of people with disability as unacceptable, rejecting the presence of such individuals in their midst.
- ii. The congregation was afraid that people with disability might cause physical hurt to others.
- iii. The congregation was resistant to change, even though they recognised that including people with disability required change in the way that ministry was done in their church.
- iv. The congregation lacked competence in engaging with people with disability and therefore did not want to engage with them.
- v. The congregation lacked enthusiasm in serving in ministries with people with disability.
- vi. The congregation viewed the disability ministry and people with disability as a separate entity in the church.

In addition to these six challenges, a number of leaders said that they could not answer this question in an informed manner because their churches had not tried to include people with disability alongside the rest of the congregation. Interestingly, several respondents also noted that many of the challenges arising from the congregation were likely linked to the influence of the church leadership or the nature of their disability ministry, e.g., separate services for people with disability.

“I think there is fear. And what we fear, we distance ourselves from. So I think that there needs to be a lot of education. ... The church should have activities between people with disability and those without. Then maybe we will realise that we are not so different after all.”

- Disability ministry leader

2.4.3 CHALLENGES ARISING FROM PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY AND THEIR FAMILIES

When asked about the challenges that disability ministry leaders faced from people with disability and their families, they noted the following:

- i. Due to a fear of rejection or past hurts, there was a lack of openness among people with disability towards participation in church activities, even if those activities were meant to benefit them. Some caregivers, for similar reasons, were also reluctant to allow their care recipients to participate in church activities.
- ii. Caregivers did not see value in allowing their care recipients to participate in church activities.
- iii. Caregivers found it difficult to regularly bring their care recipients to church.

- iv. The behaviour of people with disability was challenging to adapt to, such as:
 - a. Physically aggressive behaviour, especially among adult males;
 - b. Meltdowns;
 - c. The lack of understanding of social norms leading to conflict;
 - d. Limited intellectual abilities, leading to leaders concerned that they were not benefitting from activities;
 - e. Limited adaptability leading to challenges such as getting used to new volunteers.

"Caregivers don't want to bring the person with disability to church, to our meetings. They really are too busy or they find a lot of a hassle."

- Disability ministry leader

2.4.4 OTHER CHALLENGES

Other than the challenges related to managing the various stakeholder groups listed above, disability ministry leaders also noted the following challenges:

1. A lack of manpower for supporting their disability ministry (both staff and volunteers).
2. Managing safe management measures during the Covid-19 period.
3. Securing suitable premises for their ministries.
4. Ensuring sustainable and effective planning for their ministries, especially in the areas of growth and outreach.
5. Ensuring that their own personal training and experiences were adequate for leading the ministry.
6. Modern Christian culture that emphasises the intellectual leading to the devaluation of those with intellectual disability.

"I think I have impostor syndrome [laughs]. I feel like I'm a fraud. I tell all my co-leaders that, thankfully, I have a team. So, in my core team, we have people with real expertise. We have an occupational therapist, child psychologist, doctor ... I tap into their expertise, I'll ask them for help."

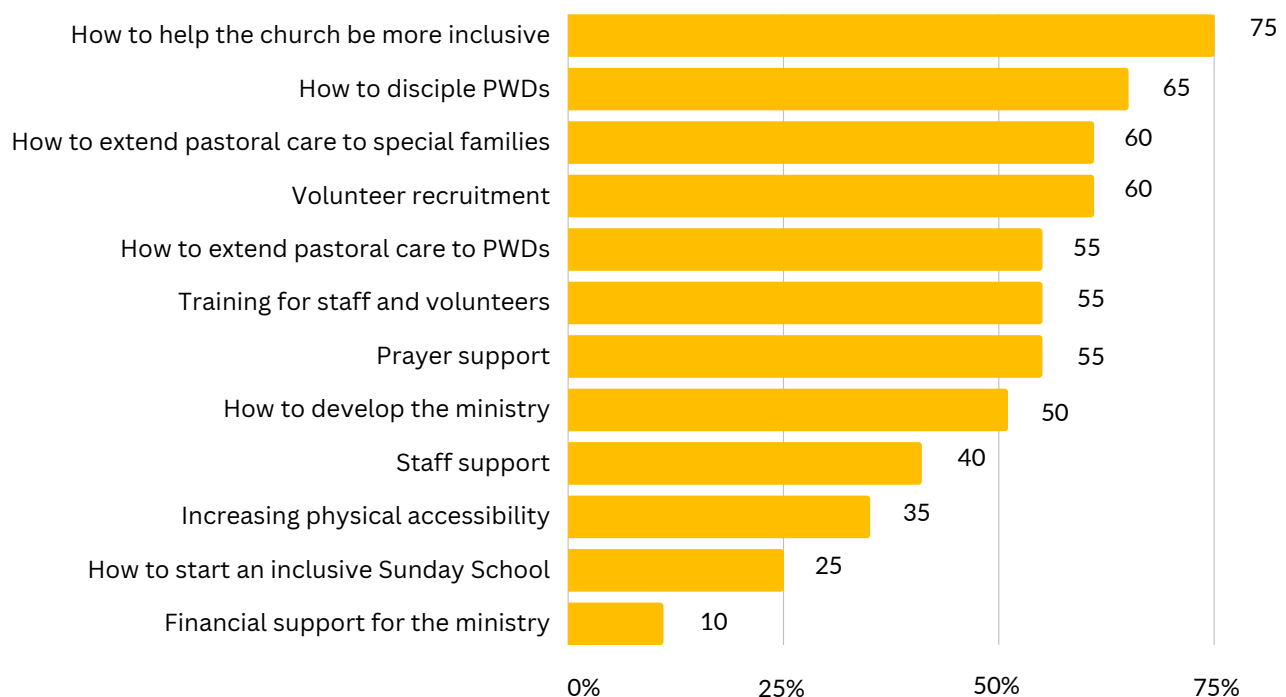
- Disability ministry leader

2.4.5 SUPPORT NEEDED BY DISABILITY MINISTRY LEADERS

Other than reporting about the challenges they faced, disability ministry leaders were also asked how they could be better supported. Figure 2.4.5a below illustrates their responses. Most noticeably, the respondents highlighted their top concerns as: (i) learning to help the church become more inclusive, (ii) how to better disciple people with disability, (iii) extending pastoral care to special families, and (iv) getting more volunteers. In addition, one area of support that was mentioned frequently during the SSIs was the need for greater collaboration with other disability ministries or churches in order that best practices may be shared, resources pooled, and mutual encouragement given.

Figure 2.4.5a

Support needed by disability ministry leaders ²⁸



"We need more people to join us physically. You don't have to change church! Just come occasionally and be part of our mission."

- Disability ministry leader

²⁸ As leaders had indicated more than one area of support they require, the percentages in this figure do not add up to 100%.

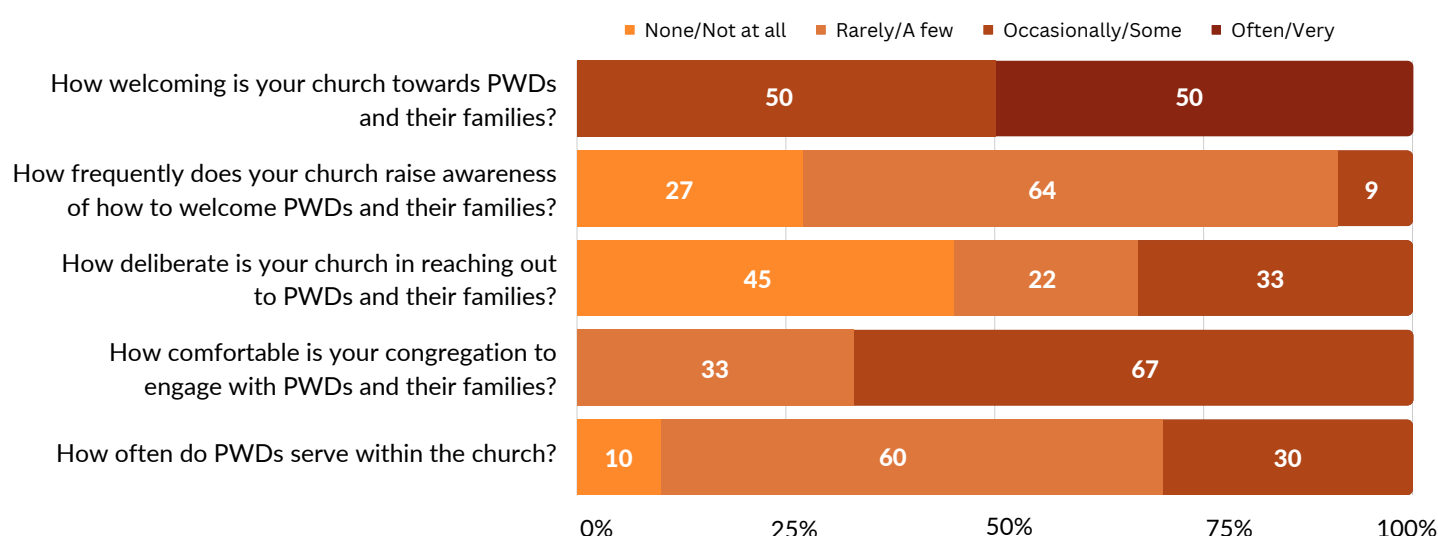
2.5 Churches without disability ministries

2.5.1 SELF-PERCEPTION OF CONGREGATIONAL INCLUSIVITY

Churches without disability ministries were asked about their church's inclusivity towards people with disability and their families, as well as deliberate efforts that they took to engage with people with disability. The results are shown in Figure 2.5.1a (it should be noted that, due to the small sample size, the data should not be taken as representative of churches without disability ministries in general).

Figure 2.5.1a

Self-perception of congregational inclusivity



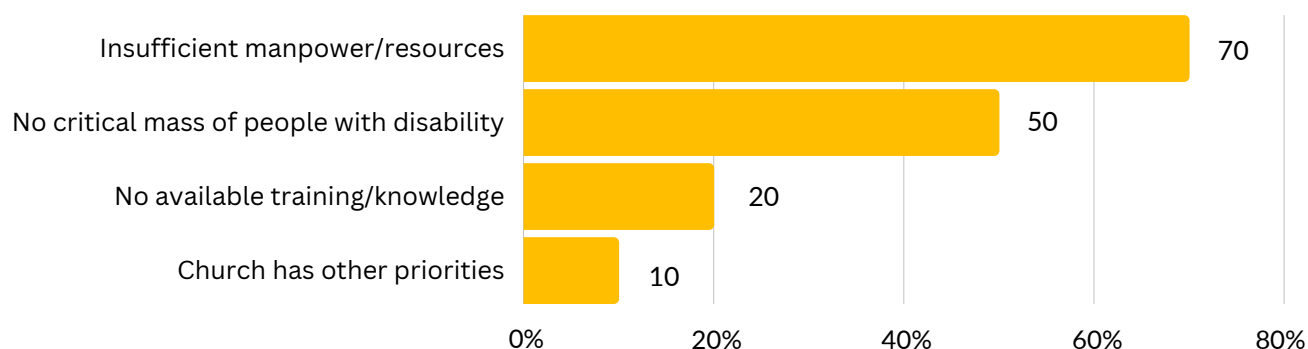
When compared with similar figures for churches with disability ministries (Figure 2.2.5a), churches without disability ministries tend to have a lower self-perception of their own congregational inclusivity and their own efforts towards disability-inclusion. Most of these churches (91%) rarely or do not raise awareness about disability inclusion and two-thirds (66%) rarely or do not reach out to people with disability and their families. At least 70% of churches rarely or do not have people with disability serve within the church.

2.5.2 REASONS FOR NOT HAVING DISABILITY MINISTRIES

When asked why these churches did not have disability ministries, as shown in Figure 2.5.2a, their top reason is a perceived lack of manpower (70%). Interestingly, the second major reason is the perceived lack of critical mass of people with disability (50%). For this latter reason, it should be noted that it is a “catch-22” type of situation, since people with disability are unlikely to attend a church which does not cater to their needs.

Figure 2.5.2a

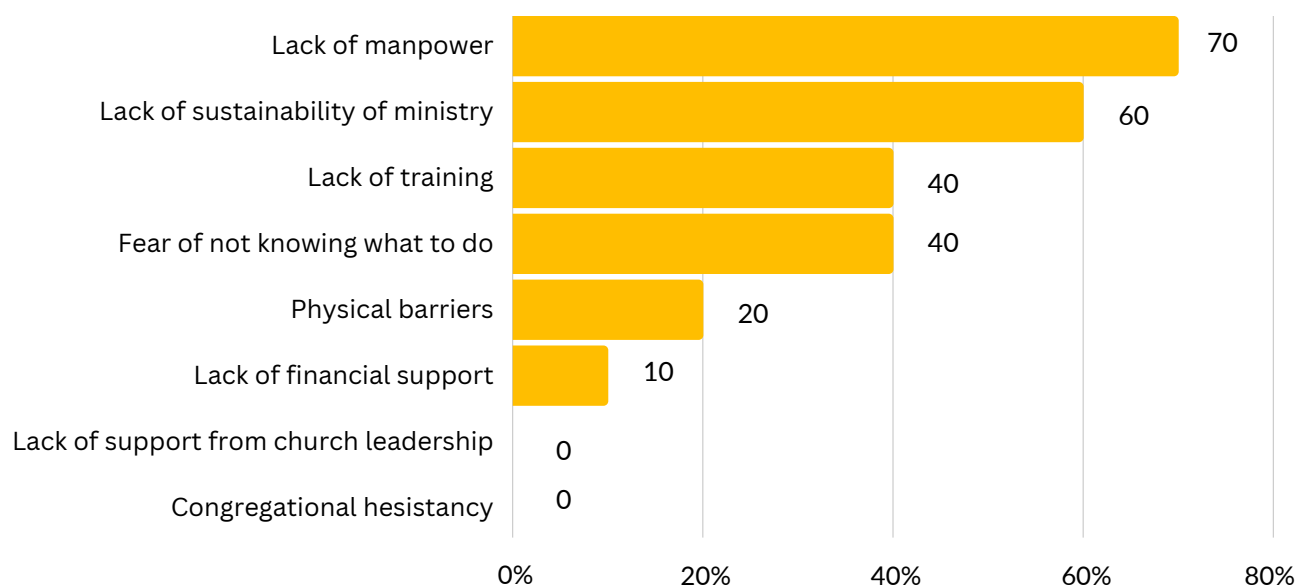
Reasons why churches did not have a disability ministry²⁹



When these churches are pressed further on what *concerns* they had (Figure 2.5.2b), the two most often cited concerns were the perceived lack of manpower and expertise (70%) and the lack of sustainability of the ministry (60%). The latter might be linked to a (perceived) lack of people with disability in their congregations to form a critical mass of people for a ministry. At the same time, it is notable that most church leaders did not see physical accessibility (20%), financial constraints (10%), or their congregations or leaders (0%) as major concerns.

Figure 2.5.2b

Concerns over starting a disability ministry³⁰



²⁹ As leaders had indicated more than one reason for not having a disability ministry, the percentages in this figure do not add up to 100%.

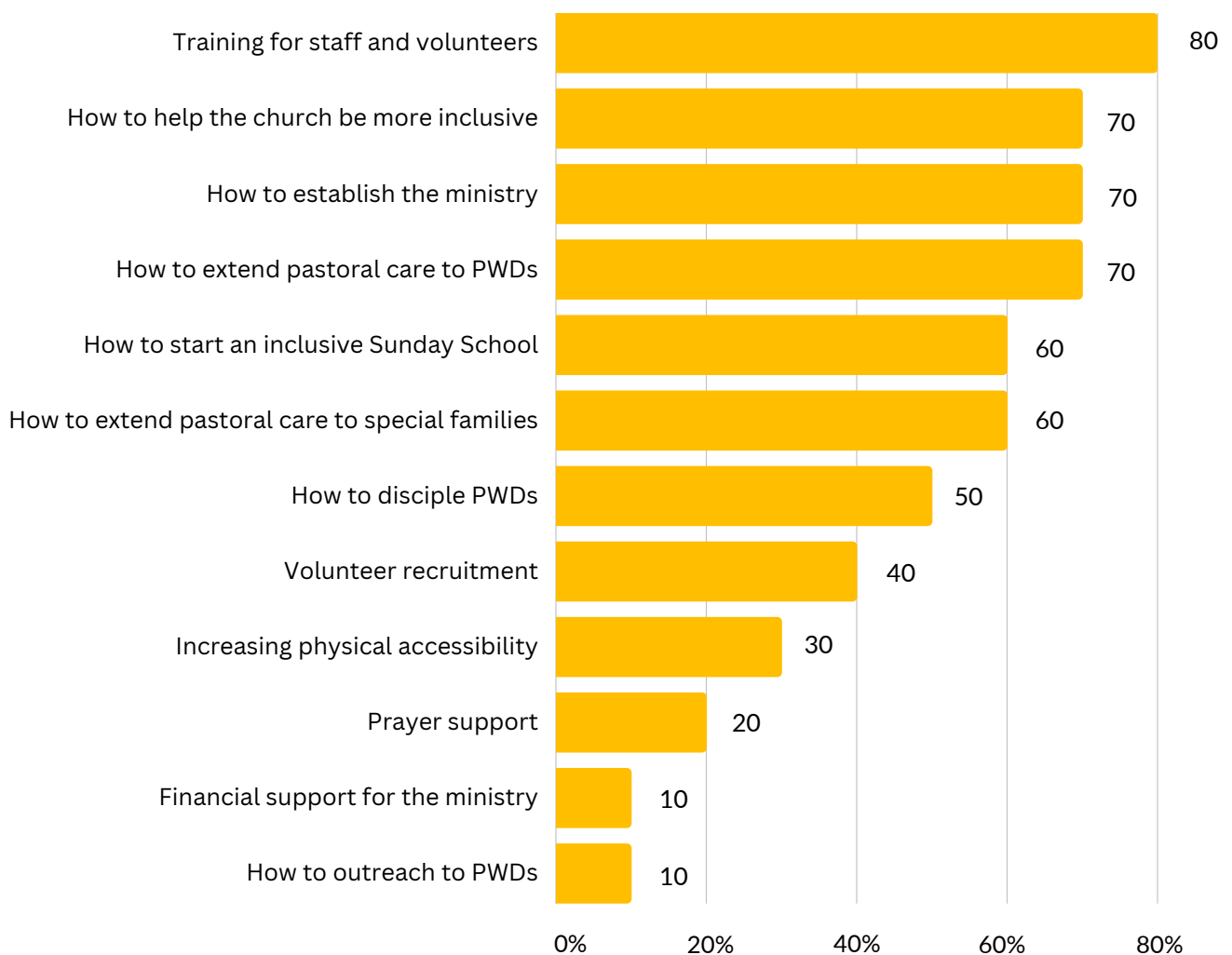
³⁰ As leaders had indicated more than one concern for setting up a disability ministry, the percentages in this figure do not add up to 100%.

2.5.3 HELP NEEDED TO START A DISABILITY MINISTRY

Finally, church leaders from churches without a disability ministry were asked about what kind of support their churches would need in order to start a disability ministry. Figure 2.5.3a highlights data consistent with their aforementioned feedback with support for (i) training for staff/volunteers being the highest perceived need (80%). Following closely behind was support to grow in the areas of (ii) how to help the church as a whole be more inclusive, how to establish a disability ministry and how to extend pastoral care to PWDs, and (iii) how to start an inclusive Sunday School.

Figure 2.5.3a

Support requested by churches without a disability ministry ³¹



³¹ As leaders had indicated more than one area of support to start a disability ministry, the percentages in this figure do not add up to 100%.



3. Discussion of the Findings

Having described the data from the SDMS 2023, this section will focus on discussing the data and its implications.

3.1 Areas of thanksgiving for disability ministry in Singapore

There is much to give thanks to God for concerning the disability ministry landscape in Singapore as seen from the data. Despite disability-inclusive church-based ministries being a relatively young phenomenon among churches in Singapore (the oldest only going back less than three decades),³² the emergence of over 40 ministries in 26 churches serving about 1,100 persons with disability – many being formed in the last ten years – is a great encouragement. **KIN is convinced that this is a singular movement of God, and one that the Church in Singapore should come alongside.**

Equally impressive is the heart and passion of disability ministry leaders and volunteers who have been serving in these ministries. They took inclusion very seriously, going far beyond merely "tolerating" the presence of persons with disability, to embracing them as fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. It is telling that 85% of disability ministry leaders (§2.3.1) saw discipleship of persons with disability as the goal of their ministries. This reflects their conviction that persons with disability are equal members of the church and equally valuable in the body of Christ.

Moreover, there was also an increasing trend of ministries seeking to go beyond standalone disability ministries. Thus, 67% of ministries sought to nurture an inclusive community within the church, that is, to nurture congregations that welcomed persons with disability, allowing them to have a true sense of belonging. In line with this, 45% of the ministries studied were integrated or inclusive in nature (§2.3.2), allowing persons with disability to be fully participating members of their community.

3.2 Needs within the Disability Ministry Landscape

*“Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.”
– Philippians 3.12 (ESV)*

Other than celebrating God’s faithfulness within the disability ministry sector in Singapore, the survey data also allows for the identification of gaps within the sector, providing focal areas for the Church in Singapore to grow in. Based on the data, three broad needs can be identified, namely:

- i. Insufficient disability ministries;
- ii. Greater development of disability ministry leaders;
- iii. Further mobilisation of volunteers for disability ministries.

We will now elaborate on each of these needs in turn:

3.2.1 NEED 1: INSUFFICIENT DISABILITY MINISTRIES

The need for more disability ministries. The data shows that existing disability ministries in Singapore serve about 1,100 people. Is this meeting the needs of the Christians with disabilities? Or to put it another way, are there sufficient disability ministries among churches in Singapore? In order to answer this question, one needs to first define “sufficient”. *Conservatively*, one way to define the term is to make the following assumptions:

³² To be clear, we are only here referring to church-based ministries, rather than to Christian disability services (such as those offered by St Andrew’s Mission Hospital) or Christian disability organisations (such as Christian Outreach to the Handicapped). The latter have a long and storied history of faithful service in Singapore, and were integral to early Christian missions in Singapore. There is much to give thanks for concerning these organisations.

- i. The percentage of people with disability in Singapore churches should *at least* be representative of the percentage of people with disability in the resident population of Singapore (as a whole).³³
- ii. Not every person with a disability would require the support of a disability ministry. Informal support from family and friends at church might be sufficient for individuals with lower support needs. It is individuals who require higher levels of support who might need the services of a disability ministry.

If so, then “sufficient” can be roughly defined as having sufficient disability ministries to serve the population consisting of Christians with higher support needs. In order to estimate this, a suitable proxy measure to consider is a (new) set of statistics recently included in Singapore’s Census 2020: the number of people in Singapore who are “5 years and over” who “were unable to perform or had a lot of difficulty performing at least one basic activity” (i.e. mobility or self-care).³⁴ It was assessed in Census 2020 that approximately 97,600 out of 3,866,000 residents (or 2.5%) fell into this category. While recognising that the use of this single measure is a blunt estimate at best, it nonetheless allows us to calculate that, out of the 411,600 (non-Catholic) Christians in Singapore,³⁵ **one might expect a population of about 10,300 persons with disability who might require a disability ministry of some kind in order to be part of a church community,**³⁶ i.e., 2.5%.

However, as noted in §2.3.4, the twenty respondent churches are estimated to only cater to about 1,100 persons in total, i.e., addressing only 10% of the estimated demand.³⁷ Therefore, **there is still a great need to continue to establish more disability ministries in Singapore to provide people with disability access to Christian communities. It also suggests that people with disability constitute an untouched mission field for churches in Singapore.**

Moreover, the estimate above should be regarded as an **underestimate**³⁸ for three reasons: (i) children with disability, especially those younger than five years of age were not included, (ii) since inclusion goes beyond merely providing physical access to church services, even people with disability that have lower support needs might also need the help of disability ministries to fully partake in the life of their local church, and (iii) the church is not only called to minister to Christians with disability but also to be missional towards those with disability who are not yet within the fold of the Church.

³³ Such a calculation assumes that churches are only interested in ministering to people with disability who are already Christians. It does not take into account missions towards people with disability.

³⁴ Department of Statistics (Singapore), *Census of Population 2020 Statistical Release 2: Households, Geographic Distribution, Transport and Difficulty in Basic Activities* (Singapore: Department of Statistics, 2021), xiv.

³⁵ Department of Statistics (Singapore), *Census 2020 (SR1)*, 199.

³⁶ Calculation = 411,600 x 0.025 = 10,290.

³⁷ Even if the remaining six churches which did not take part in SDMS 2023 are taken into consideration, it is unlikely that this figure will rise to more than 15–20% of the total need.

³⁸ Remember also that 3.4% of Singapore’s resident population aged 18–49 years has a disability while 13.3% of Singapore’s resident population aged 50 years and above has a disability. See n. 4.

The need for greater diversity of ministries. Other than simply establishing more disability ministries, the preceding data also highlighted three areas of ministry focus for development:

- i. **Seniors ministry.** While the data appeared to suggest that 42% of disability ministries addressed seniors (>50 years of age), this figure included all ministries that catered to adults (§2.3.3). When those are removed, there are far fewer ministries in Singapore that specifically address the seniors.

This is especially worrying, given the rapid rise of dementia in the Singaporean population, with some estimates indicating that one in ten people above the age of sixty have dementia.³⁹ This suggests a population of approximately 10,000 individuals among non-Catholic Christians in Singapore with dementia.⁴⁰

Given Singapore's ageing population, this number will only increase. There is therefore an urgent need for churches to expand into senior ministry in order to remain ministerially relevant to their own congregations as well as to society at large.

“Seniors are people too. We all grow old. Growing older is a part of life. Unfortunately, the culture of churches is that we are very focused on the people who are visible, who are in attendance in worship services every week. The elderly who do not participate become invisible, they drop out. But they are still part of the church.”

- Disability ministry leader

- ii. **Family support.** Apart from services provided by the disability ministries, respondents noted a lack of knowledge in support for family members of persons with disability. See §2.3.7. Other than support provided by cell group ministries or support groups, ≤30% of churches with disability ministries had other kinds of support for special families. One can infer that these figures could be even lower for churches without disability ministries. In light of the Church's call to minister to those on the margins as well as to take care of those in their midst, such figures suggest that churches in Singapore should invest in greater pastoral care support for the special families in their midst even if they do not provide disability ministries.

³⁹ Institute of Mental Health. “Study Establishes Prevalence of Dementia among Older Adults in Singapore,” March 25, 2015. <https://www.imh.com.sg>. Accessed 31 Jan 2023.

⁴⁰ This figure is 10% of the population of non-Catholic Christians aged 60 years and above. See Department of Statistics (Singapore), *Census 2020* (SR1), 199. This estimated number of 10,000 persons with dementia (some of whom would have mobility and self-care issues) overlaps with the estimated 10,300 persons with disabilities stated earlier.

- iii. **Greater variety of disability ministry.** Existing disability ministries tended to be one of two kinds: church services or Sunday school-like ministries. While such figures are expected since such ministry types are the “bread and butter” of a typical church, churches should consider other ministry types in order to broaden their outreach to people with disability in their midst.

Noticeably, relationally-focused ministries such as small group ministry and youth ministry are relatively less represented. Likewise, outward-oriented ministries such as outreach and evangelism ministries are also less represented, suggesting that disability ministry is seen primarily as a pastoral care issue in churches rather than as an opportunity for missions.

EMP2030, with its comprehensive coverage of areas such as sports and arts and heritage, suggests that there might be other non-traditional platforms for churches to engage with people with disability from a missional perspective. Consider, for example, 3:16 Church which established Brave Club, a sports and dance-based activity for children with special needs that meets on a monthly basis. This ministry has been very well-received, even by pre-believing special families. In addition to the sports activities, the church has also begun to conduct home visitations to the attending special families.⁴¹

3.2.2 NEED 2: GREATER DEVELOPMENT OF DISABILITY MINISTRY LEADERS

Disability ministry leaders are essential to the effectiveness and long-term sustainability of a disability ministry. However, there were several areas of concerns arising from the data:

- i. **Insufficient training.** It is worrying that, prior to KIN establishing its training programmes, 40% of respondent disability ministry leaders had not received any training at all, while a further 30% only received on-the-job training. Only 30% of leaders had received formal training of any kind (§2.3.5). Since most churches do not view financial resourcing as a limitation to their ministries (cf. §2.4.5, §2.5.2), churches should consider investing more financial resources to ensure that their ministry leaders receive deeper training, both by Christian providers such as KIN and secular providers (in the area of disability and inclusion).
- ii. **Increased networking and collaboration.** Several disability ministry leaders spoke about the need for greater networking between different churches (§2.4.5). They observed that this would lead to more collaboration, best practice sharing, and mutual encouragement.
- iii. **Need for renewal.** The age demographics of existing disability ministry leaders (§2.3.5) suggest that the current group of disability ministry leaders is ageing. There is a need to invest more in raising a younger generation of leaders to support and eventually succeed leadership in these ministries.

⁴¹ Lee, “This Sports-Based Disability Ministry Wants Kids with Special Needs to Feel Brave.”

- iv. **Refinement of perspectives.** The data showed that disability ministry leaders were passionate about their ministries and loved those under their charge. At the same time, the data also suggested that disability ministry leaders might benefit from greater refinement of their perspectives on disability. For example, when asked about the causes of disability, only a single respondent identified society as a cause (§2.3.6) despite disabling social practices being a well-established dimension of disability. Since leadership perspectives on the disability – especially its causes and how one should respond – is core to how ministries operate, there is a need to help disability ministry leaders refine their perspectives.
- v. **Helping leaders deal with complexity.** The data concerning the challenges that disability ministry leaders face (§2.4.1–2.4.5) indicate that disability ministry leaders face many challenges arising from a broad range of stakeholders. Hence, in addition to skills in discipling and caring for persons with disability, they also need skills in stakeholder management, volunteer training and mobilisation, just to name a few. More could be done to help them acquire these broad range of skills to handle such complexity.

3.2.3 NEED 3: FURTHER MOBILISATION OF VOLUNTEERS FOR DISABILITY MINISTRIES

Disability ministry is often manpower intensive, and churches need to think of ways to encourage and incentivise their members to volunteer for such ministries. It was striking that one of the top concerns of disability ministry leaders (§2.4.5) was to raise more volunteers for their ministries (60%). This was also reflected in the data from churches without disability ministries (§2.5.2) which highlighted the lack of manpower as their top reason (70%) for not starting a disability ministry. Understandably, 60% of these churches also cited a perceived lack of sustainability for the ministry as another reason for not starting disability ministries.

However, as any church leader knows, effective mobilisation of volunteers is not simply done by allowing the disability ministry to advertise their need. Volunteer mobilisation needs to be viewed systemically, including providing disability ministry leaders with sufficient resources to train their volunteers so that volunteers are developed and retained. Reflective of this need is that 55% of disability ministry leaders require support in volunteer training (§2.4.5). Likewise, the top request from churches without disability ministries for the kind of support they need to start a disability ministry was in the area of staff and volunteer training (80%; §2.5.3).

“Another challenge is supporting volunteers. ... [There are some] who volunteer for a short time, and then they don't come anymore. So, I think knowing volunteer management is something that I have seen a need for. How to support volunteers, how to help them to be refreshed and sustained in their role.”

- Disability ministry leader

3.3 Conclusion

While SDMS 2023 has much to give thanks to God for, it has also identified major areas of growth needed for Singapore's disability ministry sector:

(i) Insufficient disability ministries;

(ii) greater development of disability ministry leaders; and

(iii) further mobilisation of volunteers for disability ministries.

In the next section, we will outline how KIN seeks to partner with the Church in Singapore to address these areas of need.



4. Sector-Empowerment Strategies by KIN

While the gaps highlighted in Chapter 3 require a holistic response from all churches in Singapore, KIN as a sector-empowerment organisation will nonetheless be implementing some key strategies to lead change in the Church in Singapore. These strategies, to be implemented from 2023–2025, are categorised according to the three major gaps identified in Chapter 3.

4.1 Strategic Area I: Supporting the establishment of new disability ministries

There is strong need to develop more disability ministries in churches to cater for the diversity of persons with disability in Singapore. In order to address this need for growth, KIN will be adopting the following strategies:

4.1.1 STRATEGY I(A): INCLUSIVE SUNDAY SCHOOL PROGRAMME

As seen from the data, one of the most common disability ministries in Singapore belong to the category of Christian Education, especially for children and youth. This is an important form of ministry, not least because churches often encounter persons with disability through their Sunday school ministry (e.g., when a church member has a child with a disability, or when a visiting family comes with a child with a disability). Sunday schools thus often become the first point of contact between a church and persons with disability and their families. 60% of churches without disability ministries studied were interested to learn how to start an inclusive Sunday school. KIN's experience with churches corroborates the data, indicating that this is a significant area of great demand for KIN's services and expertise.

KIN will therefore develop a **focused training programme for churches interested in developing their existing Sunday Schools into inclusive programmes**. This programme, developed for church Sunday school superintendents and teachers, will allow children with mild disability to meaningfully participate in a church's Sunday school. Through a series of training modules, KIN will help teachers learn to ensure safety (through behavioural management) and produce quality learning experiences (for both children with/without disability). The training sessions will be complemented by in-church observations (followed by feedback) as well as consultations to ensure that learning is properly implemented in a church's Sunday school ministry.

4.1.2 STRATEGY I(B): START-UP CONSULTANCY

In order to help churches that wish to start a disability ministry get started, **KIN will refine its consultancy services to ensure churches are better supported in their inclusion journeys**. Such consultancy services will be offered through a menu of varied programmes so as to meet the different needs of different churches. Such services include preaching (to generate awareness), bespoke workshops, Bible study materials (to train church members), and even provision of high-quality reference materials (such as KIN's Disability Ministry in Asia series).

“So, we [the disability ministry team] were part of the training by KIN, because of KIN's consultancy. We are very, very glad that KIN is a very strong partner with us. From there, we are enriched. We ourselves are equipped before we equip others.”

- Disability ministry leader

4.1.3 STRATEGY I(C): FURTHER EXPLORATIONS IN INCLUDING PERSONS WITH DEMENTIA

The data from the survey along with data from other sources indicate that the population of persons with dementia will continue to grow in Singapore. At present, there is only one Protestant church in Singapore that has a formal ministry to address such persons. To address the need for churches to grow in their ministry towards people with dementia, KIN has already organised a 2021 seminar on including persons with dementia by world-leading expert Prof. John Swinton (University of Aberdeen), as well as spoken at a 2022 public seminar on dementia and spirituality organised by St Luke's ElderCare. Moving ahead, KIN will continue to invest resources to drive positive change in this area, including partnering with more local churches to explore ministry models towards people with dementia.

4.2 Strategic Area II: Developing disability ministry leaders

Changes within local churches often takes place due to the efforts of disability ministry leaders. Faithful, competent, and well-supported leaders can be transformational in creating change within churches. KIN intends to provide greater support towards disability ministry leaders through the following strategies:

4.2.1 STRATEGY II(A): COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE FOR DISABILITY MINISTRY LEADERS (DMLs)

A starburst-shaped badge with the word "NEW" in white capital letters on an orange background.

The data from the survey indicates that, due to the intensity of their roles, DMLs are often under-trained, under-supported, and under-networked (i.e., they do not know their peers from other churches). For this reason, they can be burnt out, leading to lack of sustainability and succession. Hence, the DMLs themselves requested for greater networking with other DMLs. **In order to provide a community where continual training, pastoring, and networking can take place, KIN will establish a community of practice (COP) that will meet on a regular basis.** This community will be co-led by KIN as well as disability ministry leaders.

Activities within the COP will include (i) masterclasses by disability experts, and (ii) sharing sessions by disability ministry leaders (to receive encouragement and feedback). A strong networked community might even lead to collaborations between different churches in the area of disability ministry. KIN also intends to use the feedback provided by disability ministry leaders during the COP to refine its suite of services provided towards churches.

"I think that networking would be very important. There are so many of us in many different churches that probably have skills. If we don't have skills, there is a certain encouragement to know that you are not alone in doing this and there are other people that are doing this as well and then pray together. I think that is one of the resources that is needed, encouragement if there is a support group, or if there's a larger group that we can get together, organise activities, talk to each other, band together."

- Disability ministry leader

4.2.2 STRATEGY II(B): REGULAR RESOURCING OF DISABILITY MINISTRY LEADERS (DML)

NEW

To provide disability ministry leaders (and volunteers) with more targeted learning support, **KIN will continue to equip disability ministry leaders with resources to grow in their competence in their ministries.** These resources will be sent directly to disability ministry leaders via email for quick and convenient dissemination. We aim to develop disability ministry leaders theologically, spiritually, and practically through our contextualised resources.

4.3 Strategic Area III: Developing ministry volunteers

In addition to disability ministry leaders, another critical group of individuals necessary for successful disability ministries are volunteers. It is telling that the survey's data indicated that volunteer training, and retention are the foremost concerns of disability ministry leaders. KIN intends to support disability ministries through the following initiatives:

4.3.1 STRATEGY III(A): ESTABLISH THE CERTIFICATE OF CHRISTIAN DISABILITY MINISTRY (CCDM) INTO A REGULAR TRAINING PLATFORM

In 2020, KIN established the CCDM programme to be a one-stop training platform for disability ministry volunteers. The CCDM programme has been consistently fully subscribed (and at times, oversubscribed). Despite its humble beginnings, the programme has now trained over a hundred people from more than 50 churches across eleven denominations, with 29 of our students being full graduates of the programme! Due to excellent feedback given, **KIN will ensure that CCDM is a regular feature of the church training calendar in order to ensure that churches can plan their volunteer training on a consistent basis.** In addition, KIN is also continuing to refine the CCDM programme, including exploring approaches such as e-learning to ensure the quality, accessibility, and relevance of the programme.

4.3.2 STRATEGY III(B): FURTHER TRAINING PATHWAY WITH WESTERN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

NEW

Due to the success of the CCDM, churches have been requesting for more training avenues to further deepen the competencies of their volunteers, especially those in leadership positions. KIN is proud to announce the establishment of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Western Theological Seminary's (WTS) Center for Disability and Ministry (CDM), which conducts the Graduate Certificate in Disability and Ministry (GCDM) fully-online. The GCDM is taught by some of the world's best faculty in disability ministry, such as Professor John Swinton (University of Aberdeen), and Professor Erik Carter (Vanderbilt University).

4.3.3 STRATEGY III(C): THE LEAENA TAMBYAH SCHOLARSHIP FOR DISABILITY MINISTRY

NEW

Finally, in order to ensure that WTS' GCDM remains affordable, especially for disability ministry leaders, KIN has established the Leaena Tambyah Scholarship for Disability Ministry (LTSDM) to provide financial support for qualifying CCDM graduates who have the potential to impact not just their own churches but Singapore and beyond. In a pilot of the LTSDM, KIN has already appointed an inaugural LTSDM awardee: Ms Gwee Ting Ai, a disability ministry leader who is also the mother of an adult son with autism.

4.4 Conclusion

While it is KIN's hope that the strategies mentioned will contribute to positive kingdom impact in the area of disability ministry for the Church in Singapore, KIN cannot develop Singapore's disability ministry sector alone. We welcome all churches to partner with us to drive positive change, and to ensure that persons with disability know that they are welcomed as disciples and disciplemakers within our gospel communities.

To God be the glory!

Reasons to Include People with Disability in the Church⁴²

This article outlines seven reasons why churches in Singapore should include people with disability. These seven reasons can be divided into two sets. The first set (comprising the first three reasons) concerns relevance – how a church can meaningfully engage with the hurting and broken world that the *Missio Dei* is directed towards. The second (comprising the last four reasons) concerns faithfulness – how churches can live as communities obedient to God's design for the Church as revealed in Scripture.

1. Disability is Common in Singapore

One local estimate suggests that one in fourteen people in Singapore has a disability. That is about one person in every small group in church! Such a figure poses a key question to Christians: Is this what we see at our own local church or small group? If that is not the case, then it suggests to us two implications. First, it might be that we are not as inclusive as we think we are. It is a humbling call for us to grow in our mindsets and our competencies regarding inclusion. Second, there is tremendous potential for churches to grow in their outreach to persons with disability. This is an opportunity not to be wasted.

2. Disability is Increasing in Singapore

The key driver of such increase is Singapore's ageing population. According to the Third Enabling Masterplan, percentage-wise, there are four times as many people with disability aged 50 and above compared to those 18 to 49 years old.⁴³ Moreover, when a population ages, the social challenge is compounded since there will be less familial support for elderly persons with disability. In addition, disabilities that are more challenging to understand and support—such as autism and dementia—are also increasing in Singapore. Therefore, disability is not an issue that will disappear if churches bury their heads in the sand. Rather, disability will become a more salient issue for churches over time. Inclusion needs to start now.

⁴² This annex is adapted from an article which first appeared in the ETHOS Institute for Public Christianity's *Feature* section. Reproduced with permission. For the original article, see Leow Wen Pin, "7 Reasons to Include People with Disabilities in the Church," *Feature*, ETHOS Institute for Public Christianity, Jul 8, 2022. <https://ethosinstitute.sg/7-reasons-to-include-people-with-disabilities-in-the-church/>. Accessed 31 Jan 2023.

⁴³ Ministry of Social and Family Development, "Enabling Masterplan 3," 2016, 3, <https://www.msf.gov.sg/policies/Disabilities-and-Special-Needs/Enabling-Masterplans/Pages/default.aspx>. Accessed 3 Mar 2023.

3. Disability is a Universal Stage of Life

Every person will become disabled if they live long enough. Singapore has one of the highest life expectancies in the world,⁴⁴ and so Singaporeans should plan ahead with the expectation that they will spend a significant portion of their lives with a disability. Thus, Christians should ask ourselves some hard questions: Will my church be prepared for me when I grow old? Will there be a place for me in this community? Or from a more positive and other-centred perspective, we should also ask ourselves: How can we honour the disabled elderly in our midst since Scripture calls us to “stand up before the grey head and honour the face of an old man” (Lev 19.32)?

4. People with Disability are Included in the Great Commission

In general, churches are aware that the Great Commission calls us to “go therefore and make disciples of all people groups (*ethnē*)” (Matt 28.19). However, a self-searching question that we should pose to ourselves is: Have we consciously or unconsciously limited ourselves to only some groups, especially by favouring the able-bodied while ignoring those with disability? Moreover, not only is the Great Commission universal (and therefore includes people with disability), but there also is ample evidence in Scripture that God desires for His people to focus particularly on marginalised groups, such as people with disability. For example, in the Parable of the Great Banquet (Luke 14.12-24), Jesus instructs the Pharisees that they should “invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind” (Luke 14.13) to their banquets (cf. also Matt 25.40). To exclude people with disability is therefore to ignore God’s command.

5. Including People with Disability Demonstrates the Gospel

The gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes (Rom 1.16). One way such power is revealed to a watching world is through how the Church lives out that very gospel. That is, the life of the gospel community bears witness to gospel’s power. If so, then the inclusion of people with disability in churches is essential to faithful gospel witness. As missiologist Lesslie Newbigin reminds us:

... when the witness of the handicapped is an integral part of the witness of the whole Church
... this witness is true to the Gospel. ... [For] with this witness as part of its total message
... the Church’s message measure[s] up to the heights and depths of the human situation.⁴⁵

In other words, Newbigin is saying this: When the Church includes people with disability, it convincingly demonstrates to the world that the gospel can truly enter into the most profound pain and difficulty faced by mankind. The gospel that we declare with our mouths is thus demonstrated in our communities.

⁴⁴ Ministry of Finance, “Singapore Public Sector Outcomes Review 2022”, 2022, <https://www.mof.gov.sg/singapore-public-sector-outcomes-review/citizens/opportunities-for-all-at-every-stage-of-life/health-and-wellness>. Accessed 31 Jan 2022.

⁴⁵ Lesslie J.E. Newbigin, “Not Whole without the Handicapped,” in *Partners in Life: The Handicapped and the Church*, ed. Geiko Müller-Fahrenholz (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1979), 24.

6. People with Disability are Indispensable to the Church

People with disability should not be included in churches out of pity. Rather, Christians must recognise that God has planned for these brothers and sisters to be indispensable members of the Church. For example, speaking of the Church metaphorically as a body, Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 12 that “the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are *indispensable*” (v. 22; italics added), and that “God has so composed the body, giving greater honour to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another” (vv. 24b-25). These verses remind us that while people with disability might be perceived as weaker, they are nonetheless vital since the different strengths of the members of the church allow mutual care to be practised. In other words, any so-called weakness is not a hindrance to church life; rather, such weaknesses allow Christians to exercise care for one other just as God has designed.

7. People with Disability are Fellow Disciples and Disciplemakers

In another reflection on the Church as a body, Paul writes in Ephesians 4 that “the whole body, joined and held together by every *joint* with which it is equipped, when *each part* is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love” (vv. 15-16, italics added). In this observation, Paul concludes that the body only grows when “every joint” and “each part” is contributing. This certainly includes people with disability; they too are spirit-empowered disciples and disciplemakers. If so, then the questions that we must ask ourselves are these: Will we let them join us in disciplemaking? And will we invest time to fan their gifts into flame? In fact, to marginalise our brothers and sisters with disability in the work of disciplemaking would be tantamount to lopping off a part of Christ’s body! Thus, paradoxically, the church that excludes people with disability is the one that is truly “disabled”.

In conclusion, we see that these seven reasons show us that the inclusion of people with disability is no social fad. Rather, inclusion is a key facet of relevant and faithful churches that convincingly live out the gospel of Jesus Christ in an increasingly diverse world. Indeed, the presence of people with disability in our communities poses a missional and ecclesiological challenge to churches—are we ready to accept such a challenge? In this vein, I end with some thought-provoking words from a young Christian lady (a special education teacher) whom we interviewed some years back:

It is important to realise that all of us have a duty to people with special needs because they are members of the body of Christ. We cannot outsource their care to others. ... [So] the real question we have to ask ourselves is not about how we are to include people with special needs, but rather about *what the Church is, and what the purpose of our existence is*. What are we here to do every Sunday? What are we doing to be connected to this community of God?⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Charlene Ong, “Brokenness to Beauty,” in *Call Me by Name: Stories of Faith, Identity, and Special Needs*, ed. Wen Pin Leow and Anne Wong-Png (Singapore: Graceworks, 2018), 159.

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My Notes



My Notes



My Notes





KIN is a disability mission organisation that enables the Church to welcome and disciple people of all abilities.

It does so through partnering churches by connecting, equipping, and resourcing them in their inclusion journey.

Services offered by KIN include training, consultancy, preaching and more.

To find out more, go to: kin.org.sg



The Centre for Disability Ministry in Asia is KIN's research unit, dedicated to the mission of producing context-relevant resources to enable disability ministry in Asia.

To find out more, go to: kin.org.sg/cdma

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