

# Build An Illness Ministry

## STEPPING IN:

### WHY DO WE NEED A CHRONIC ILLNESS MINISTRY?

1. Approximately *1 in 2 people* live with one or more chronic illnesses.
2. Mental illness affects *1 in 5 adults*.
3. Many with chronic illness are hurting, lonely and exhausted.
4. Many struggle with anxiety, depression, pain and/or significant limitations.
5. Many with chronic illness don't look sick, so they become an invisible statistic.
6. Chronic illness can be a staggering financial burden. According to the CDC, 86% of all health care spending in 2010 was for people with chronic medical conditions.
7. Chronic illness affects marriage, family, faith, finances, friendships, education, hobbies and work, in short, every aspect of life.

### WHAT CAN YOU DO?

1. Start the conversation. Begin with one person you know who has chronic illness. Ask them what it's like. Listen. Try to hear what they might not be saying.
2. Invite a small group to brainstorm about what a chronic illness ministry might look like in your church, neighborhood, work place or organization. Might it include awareness? Resources? Education? A small group? Counseling? Transportation? Meals? Financial assistance?
3. Think about possible service projects. How could this ministry offer opportunities for participants to *invest in others*?
4. Could you offer a Bible study? How often? How long?
5. Think about caregivers. What could you do to help them?

## GOING DEEPER:

### ONCE YOU'VE DECIDED TO START A MINISTRY

1. ***Create a Mission Statement***  
Example: To provide a safe, caring, loving environment in which people can grieve, accept and learn to thrive in a life with chronic illness.



## 2. **Develop a Vision Statement**

Example: To facilitate participation between those living with chronic illness and [your organization] – an opportunity to serve and minister to those with chronic illness, including them as vital, necessary and important members, and offering them creative opportunities to serve and be involved.

## 3. **Small Groups**

- Consider these four core group values as you launch your first small group: *Hope, Purpose, Worth, Joy* and how these values connect us deeply to God and to one another, how they help us connect, grow and serve right where we are.
- We suggest bi-weekly meetings of 90 minutes or less.
- Small groups of up to six participants each are recommended to allow each person the opportunity to share and be heard.
- Consider the needs of your participants. Will they need:
  - access to bathrooms
  - space for those who may need to occasionally move (e.g.: sit, stand, walk a bit) to be comfortable
  - perhaps a few high tables for those who may need to stand
  - wheelchair accessibility
  - time of day and day of week
  - food restrictions if you offer refreshments
  - cost to participants
- Consider starting a virtual group using Facebook video, Skype or Google Hangouts.

## 4. **Caregivers**

Caregivers need care too. Consider hosting a group specifically for them.

## 5. **Resources**

What will you need to facilitate this ministry?

- A place to meet
- Printed materials?
- Curricula?
- Financial support?
- The support of a pastor or trained counselor?
- Email, website, database and/or social media support?
- Refreshments?



## 6. **Curricula**

- The Chronic Joy Thrive Series – *Discovering Hope, Finding Purpose, Embracing Worth* and *Encountering Joy* are specifically designed for chronic illness small groups.

## 7. **Leaders**

- Who will lead small groups and for how long?
- Will you provide training for them?
- *Grace, Truth & Time: Facilitating Small Groups That Thrive* by Heather MacLaren Johnson, Psy.D. is a leader guide chock-full of well-thought-out, valuable resources.
- A wealth of resources to equip small group leaders are available at [www.chronic-joy.org/leaders](http://www.chronic-joy.org/leaders).

### **PRESSING ON:**

## 8. **Service Opportunities**

How can those in your chronic illness small groups begin to serve others in your church, organization, community or around the world? Here's a short list to get you thinking:

- Write cards or letters for those who are hospitalized or homebound.
- Write to soldiers or missionaries serving overseas.
- Make colorful cards for children's meal trays at your local children's hospital.
- Read to a child or for the visually impaired.
- Knit or crochet prayer shawls, baby blankets, mittens, hats or scarves for those who are grieving, facing surgery or in homeless shelters.
- Bake cookies for a youth event, bake sale or for someone who is homebound.
- Send birthday cards to nursing home residents.
- Make "care kits" with shampoo, soap, toothbrushes, deodorant, healthy snacks, etc. to donate to the homeless/homeless shelters.
- Make hospital care bags for those in the hospital or their caregivers – healthy snacks, fruit, homemade cookies or breads, a soft blanket, toothpaste, lotion, a book, puzzle or game, gift cards for gas, the hospital cafeteria, toiletries, etc.
- Create "Birthday in a Bag" kits for local children's shelters. Include party hats, plates, cups, napkins, forks, a cake mix, frosting, candles, etc.

Be creative. Look for opportunities. Brainstorm ideas. Serving unlocks the door to hope.

