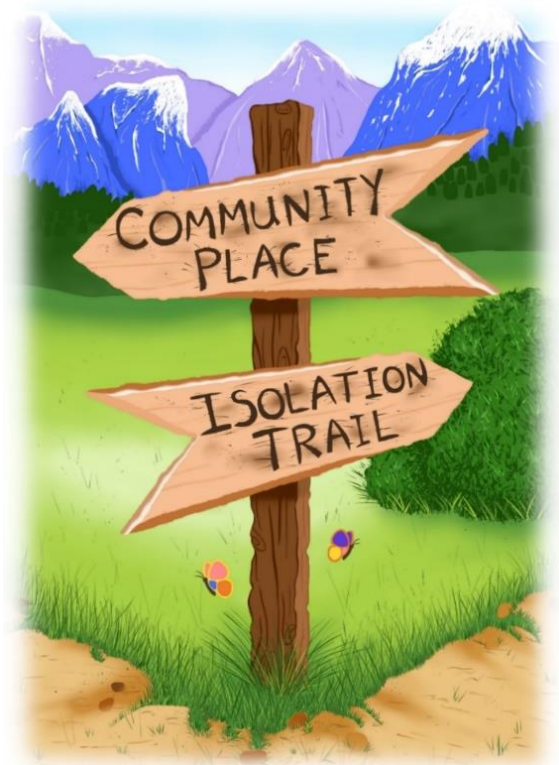


TOPIC 1—INTRODUCTION

NEW WINESKIN

- Connection Ministries encourages Friendship groups to find their own style, but include the five ministry elements;
 - Worship
 - study of God's Word
 - Prayer
 - Fellowship
 - Ministry Together
- The Indispensable series is divided into topics, each covering an overall subject. Many of the topics are further segmented into episodes. The entire series can be viewed from the beginning or a specific subject can be chosen. It will be important to understand the foundational concepts covered in the early topics.
- The concepts discussed in this series are based on Christian community described in **Acts 2:42-47**.
- Ask yourself this question; *“Does the vision for this ministry in my church cause my congregation to embrace people with intellectual disabilities in the same way Jesus embraces His Church?”*



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NEW WINESKIN CONTINUED

- **Matthew 9:17**; John's disciples asked Jesus why His disciples didn't fast. Jesus came to bring Good News to free them from the law-based system. But if they were to understand what Jesus was teaching, they would need a new paradigm, or wineskin.
- Old wineskins are dry and brittle. They are unable to expand during the fermentation of new wine. Only a new wineskin has the elasticity needed to accommodate the carbon dioxide that is produced.
- The same analogy can be used when considering the way disability ministry is done in churches.
- What does the Bible have to say? God's Word through the Holy Spirit has the power to transform minds so that we can grasp the wisdom and heart of God.
- Sharing the Good News of Jesus is hopefully common for most Christian churches. But, reaching into the surrounding neighborhoods and embracing people with intellectual disabilities that live there, along with their families and direct support staff, and growing closer to Christ with them is far less common.
- Jesus put an emphasis in His ministry with people who were ill, had disabilities, or were even deceased. He also cared for the people who were important in their lives.
- People with disabilities face physical and social barriers in churches today. Simply getting to church can be difficult. Few churches intentionally use their resources to seek out such people and include them in their faith community.
- In the nine-county area where Connection Ministries focuses its effort, there are over 28,000 adults with cognitive disabilities. However, only a very small percentage is part of a faith community.
- **1 Corinthians 12**; Paul explains that every part of the body is necessary. In verses 21-22, he makes the point that those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are "*indispensable*".

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NEW WINESKIN CONTINUED

- “Indispensable” is defined as necessary, essential, and incapable of being disregarded or neglected. We all need to know, including people with disabilities, that God considers us as indispensable. We are all needed in our churches and this includes people with disabilities.
- Quote from Joni Ericson Tada; *“Not everyone can be trusted with suffering. Not everyone can endure a fiery ordeal. So, the Master scrutinizes the jewels and carefully selects those that can bear the refining, the branches which can withstand the knife. It is given to some to preach, for others to work, for others to give, and for still others to suffer.”*
- The vision for Connection Ministries is that Christian congregations are the authentic faith communities that reach out, share the Good News of Jesus Christ, and truly embrace people with intellectual disabilities, their families and direct support staff, and grow together in their relationship with Christ.
- Connection Ministries believes that churches should not only reach out to people with disabilities but embrace them with the love of Jesus.
- The vision for disability ministry in your church needs to be more than a ministry for people with disabilities. It needs to be a ministry that embraces them. We need to create an environment where friendships are forged, not just with those who are involved in the ministry, but others in the congregation.
- If these concepts are a stretch for your ministry, the power of the Holy Spirit is available to help you take on a new wineskin. Will we be imitators of God as beloved children and walk in love, as Christ loved us? **(Ephesians 5:1-2)**