

Dave Deuel

DEVELOPING YOUNG DISABILITY MINISTRY LEADERS

The Story of the Lausanne Disability Concerns Network

The upside-down kingdom is rife with disability satire. For example, developing young disability leaders in the face of discrimination, even isolation, reveals many surprises. The toxic burden of low expectations proves itself ironic. Young leaders with disabilities prove to be outstanding in their wisdom, resilience in the face of confusion, and persistence in getting the job done. But why should we be surprised?

This study chronicles the story of disability leadership development in one ministry organization, the Lausanne Disability Concerns Network (LDCN). Following an explanation of the growing need for leadership development in disability ministry, we will consider the birth and growth of LDCN. Next, we will discuss the tools for organizational growth, LDCN's events, publications, and mentoring. We then consider LDCN's emerging focus on disability focused vocations aimed to provide spiritual care for people with disabling conditions. Finally, we will hear a story of one disability leader's journey that illustrates some of this chapter's salient features.

The need to develop young disability leaders in LDCN

Disability ministries are often mom and pop organizations. Part of the reason is that they are formed, developed, and operated by parents of a child with a disability *for parents* as well as for their child with a disability. Due to their increased awareness of disability needs, parents often start disability ministries as a way of helping their child and other children with disabilities. They also want to help their church be more inclusive. Pastors and other church leaders appreciate these

parents because who else would start disability ministries and who better to lead with lived experience and passion?

This family-focused disability ministry model means that most ministries remain small enough to address specific individual and family needs. One-on-one is crucial. Parent-led disability ministries tend to work well for parents. We need more of them. But these ministries alone, do little to help called, gifted, and commissioned leaders with disabilities to find leadership development and placement in their local churches. It happens. But it is rare.

To address this specific need, the LDCN focuses on developing disability ministry leaders with and without disabilities. Ideally, we would narrow our focus exclusively to developing leaders with disabilities. But currently, we find greater momentum in including both groups with the same efforts.

The birth and early growth of LDCN

Joni Eareckson Tada launched LDCN when Billy Graham and John Stott served as key leaders in the Lausanne Movement. Since its inception, LDCN has enjoyed an affirmative working relationship with Joni and Friends, a ministry that serves as a resource platform. Our story begins with God's story of disability in scripture and builds upon the grand narrative spanning Genesis to Revelation.¹ For this study, we will focus on the last 8 years of LDCN.

Progress through LDCN publications and events

Among other means, LDCN works through events and publications. To launch its message the group started out with a Lausanne consultation in 2015 that focused on access to

¹ Dave Deuel, God's Story of Disability. The unfolding plan from Genesis to Revelation, in: *The Journal for the Christian Institute on Disability* 2.2 (2013), p. 81-96.

local church ministry.² Using the research gathered at the consultation, the network produced a journal article raising awareness for the need for young leaders with disabilities.³ To amplify this message we needed a book collection of stories demonstrating that God has and will continue to use people with disabilities and their families effectively in mission.⁴ The official book launch was a Lausanne event, the Global Workforce Forum conducted in Manila, Philippines (2019).⁵

The book drew an encouraging response from people with disabilities who had similar stories to tell about their experiences in mission. In support of this interest, Joni and Friends (JAF) gave LDCN messaging space in the JAF blog under the theme, Disability in Mission.⁶ The JAF blog platform is widely accessed and links to the LDCN sub site along with over twenty separate mission organizational web sites. A summary blog for the first series, “Let’s Ask the Right Questions about People with Disabilities in Mission” attempts to change mission policy forbidding people with disabilities from going on mission.⁷ The blog captures the entire first 10-part series of blog messages in one argument, a reasoned appeal to local church mission committees and mission agencies to include people with disabilities in their mission efforts. From the book and blog authors’ pool, we have developed an informal Dis-

² Ministry Access, *The Lausanne Consultation on Disability Concerns*, Agoura Hills, CA, February 2015, <https://lausanne.org/gathering/consultation-on-disability-concerns>, accessed on: 13.02.2025.

³ Dave Deuel, Developing Young Leaders with Disabilities, in: *Lausanne Global Analysis 5* (2016), 1, <https://lausanne.org/content/lga/2016-01/developing-young-leaders-disabilities>, accessed on: 24.01.2025.

⁴ David C. Deuel/Nathan G. John (Eds.), *Disability in Mission. The Church’s Hidden Treasure*, Hendrickson 2019.

⁵ Book Presentation at the Lausanne Movement’s Global Workforce Forum conducted in Manila, Philippines 2019, <https://lausanne.org/content/disability-mission-churchs-hidden-treasure>, accessed on: 13.02.2025.

⁶ <https://www.joniandfriends.org/category/hope-inspiration/disability-in-mission/>, accessed on: 29.09.2020.

⁷ <https://www.joniandfriends.org/category/hope-inspiration/disability-in-mission/page/2/>, accessed on: 29.09.2020.

ability in Mission writers' group that focuses on messaging a call to develop leaders with disabilities for mission and offers an ongoing stream of publications on that topic.

In all publications and at all events, LDCN aims to avoid incendiary comments and shaming by using reasoned and positive appeals to Christian leaders globally. Another article views the need for people with disabilities in mission in the most positive light, the benefits to mission.⁸ The shortest and clearest description of our entire initiative is a new Lausanne Occasional Paper #68 titled, "Ministries of People with Disabilities: 'All in'"⁹ In support of people with disabilities who view their vocation as ministry, we produced another journal article focusing on disability employment.¹⁰ The aim of the article is to provide much-needed jobs for all people with disabilities who need them.

LDCN in the Lausanne's Young Leader Generation (YLGGen) Mentor Community

To develop young leaders for disability ministry and mission, LDCN works closely with the Lausanne Young Leaders Generation Mentor Community. Young leaders who have started or already lead disability ministries receive the spiritual encouragement and vocational nurture that they need from experienced disability leaders. Whole life mentoring meets needs in the moment and offers ongoing support to develop disability ministries in new directions. In the last few years,

⁸ Dave Deuel, Inclusive Mission. God is Removing Obstacles and Calling Us to Join Him, in: *The Mission Mobilization Journal* 1.2 (2021), p. 76-83.

⁹ Nathan John/Dave Deuel, Ministries of People with Disabilities. 'All in', in: *Lausanne Occasional Papers* 69, <https://lausanne.org/category/lop>, accessed on: 24.01.2025.

¹⁰ Dave Deuel, A Workplace for Mephibosheth. A Biblical Case for Employing People with Disabilities, in: *Lausanne Global Analysis* 10.2 (2021), <https://lausanne.org/lga-05/a-workplace-for-mephibosheth>, accessed on: 13.02.2025.

we have added a critical and almost unaddressed group, one-on-one vocations serving people with disability.

A new LDCN focus: one on one in disability caregiving vocations

Keeping our focus on ministry for people with disabilities and those who choose careers serving them we have added another calling pool to LCDN. People with disability need medical, educational, and disability services. But critically, they also need others in their lives who will show them the love of Christ for they are often isolated due to their disability. Three groups of vocational workers are uniquely qualified and gifted to address these needs:

- 1.) Health care workers who focus on disabilities
- 2.) Educational professions who specialize in disability
- 3.) Disability services specialists for people with disabilities—

Because all three of these professional groups engage one-on-one with people with disabilities, they are ideally suited to meet one of their greatest needs, social isolation while at the same time sharing the Gospel with them and encouraging them spiritually for growth and suffering. These three groups are potential biblical counselors uniquely appointed to meet personal needs in the course of their jobs. They represent vocations waiting to be activated for this important ministry.

Over the last several years, the LDCN recognized the need for an interdisciplinary approach to its ministry activity and leadership development. After all, there are millions of disability care workers of all sorts, many of whom are Christians and who need encouragement in their one-on-one roles. In the interest of aligning with the need addressed above, we recently invited two new LDCN catalysts (the issue group leading role). Dr. Nathan John (pseudonym), a university professor and active missionary focuses on disability in healthcare, and Dr. Ashley Hall, also a university educator and active missionary serving in Uganda focuses on inclusive education. Dave

Deuel's role continues to focus on disability family advocacy and policymaking for disability services. All three catalysts consider spiritual needs of individuals with disabilities and their families first priority.

The heartbeat of LDCN: A satirical story of disability in mission in the Congo

We close with a deeply satirical disability story, a true head-roller.¹¹ Kyungu Tchikala Daniel is the Responsible Bishop of the first community of the Church of Christ in Congo: Africa Inland Church Congo, in the Democratic Republic of Congo. In this interview, Daniel tells us his story from rejection to church, university, and business leadership in the congo. I, the interviewer, have the privilege of serving as Daniel's Lausanne mentor.

When we think about people with disability in mission, our minds immediately go to the seemingly insurmountable challenges that they might face in the role as missionary or church leader. Daniel Kyungu's story is a reminder that God delights in overcoming the odds. He pulls down barriers and removes obstructions effortlessly so that his called and gifted child, an empowered leader, not only succeeds *in spite of* disability but *because of* it.

A warm welcome to you, Dr. Kyungu. Thank you for reaching out to me and introducing yourself on social media. It is an honor to speak with you regarding the Joni and Friends blog. Thank you also for the privilege of being your Lausanne mentor. I'd like to ask you a few questions that will help us understand and appreciate the amazing testimony of disability in ministry that God has given you.

¹¹ The Joni and Friends Blog, *From Rejection to Church, University, and Business Leadership in the Congo*, 17.08.2020, <https://www.joniandfriends.org/from-rejection-to-church-university-and-business-leadership-in-the-congo/>, accessed on: 24.01.2025.

Dave: Tell us about yourself. Where is your home and what is your story?

DANIEL: My name is KYUNGU TCHIKALA Daniel. I am 36 years old and am a pastor, teacher at the University of Lubumbashi, and doctoral student in the field of human resource management / professional integration of people with disabilities. My research for the doctoral thesis is oriented towards the professional integration of people with disabilities, because I am myself a person with a disability. My home is in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Africa. I was born in Lubumbashi, on September 17, 1983 and have a twin. I wasn't born with a disability but developed one at the age of 11.

DAVE: What is your disability?

DANIEL: I have had a physical disability for over 24 years. I can stand up, but I cannot walk without leaning on someone's shoulder or a wall. I do not know the name of my disability because I have never consulted a doctor for a diagnosis. My parents did not have the money to pay for medical care, so consequently, neither have I been treated in a hospital by doctors. I just rely on the help of the Lord.

DAVE: What difficulties has your disability given you?

DANIEL: I have very limited mobility. Socially, I lost a lot of my friends when I developed my disability, so I was often isolated. As you might imagine, living alone causes me much sadness and stress in life. In fact, people I do not even know often insult me because of my disability when they meet me. What is more, employers refuse to hire me because of my disability.

DAVE: Are there other ways that disability changed your life?

DANIEL: Before acquiring the disability, I was ‘normal’. I played with others and went to school. The most difficult consequence of my disability is alienation. When my disability developed, my childhood friends were disturbed to see the change. One day they came to the window of my room and shouted at me, “Daniel, disabled, Daniel, disabled.” These cries plunged me into the depths of despair, and I planned to kill myself. I spent a year in my room hardly going out for fear of insulting cries from my childhood ‘friends’.

Some people told my family that witchcraft caused my disability. They said that spirits had called upon me to sacrifice my parents but when I refused, spirits brought disability upon me as punishment. As you can imagine, this was terribly distressing. If that wasn’t enough, the war in the east of our country in 1998 forced my family to leave our city, Kalemie. Since I couldn’t flee with them because of my disability, I had to stay behind in the conflict zone in Kalemie until 2003. I was abandoned in a war zone at the age of 15 and beaten and humiliated by soldiers. This was a difficult time. One day I was walking with my crutch and a soldier picked up stones and threw them at me until his supervisor stopped him.

DAVE: What was it like to grow up with a disability in the Congo?

DANIEL: According to the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency 2015 report, the DRC may be one of the world’s most challenging places for people with disabilities to live. More than 90 percent are illiterate and 96 percent live in inhumane and degrading conditions. Living with a disability in the DRC is compared to living in hell. I experienced it.

DAVE: As an adult how did people treat you because of your disability?

DANIEL: There were people who helped me a lot, but disability integration has been a big challenge. I remember being asked by classmates at university, “what will you do with your university degree when you get it? You’re sick, your place is in the hospital.”

DAVE: Why do you think they treated you this way?

DANIEL: In Africa, particularly in the DRC, people believe that disability is a curse. In some families, children with disabilities are hidden. Parents are ashamed of them. They spend their entire lives living in the back rooms of the home rarely coming out to interact with people outside the family.

DAVE: How did you come to Christ?

DANIEL: I was born in a Christian family and attended church from an early age. But I didn’t receive Jesus Christ personally until after experiencing disability during the war in the east of the country. One day I pleaded with God to deliver me from the trauma and anguish that crushed me. It was here that I personally experienced the grace and the love of the Lord. Joy invaded my heart. Since then, everything has changed in my life. The anxiety has changed into immense joy. Since that day my disability has stopped oppressing me. Finally, I experienced true freedom in Jesus Christ when I received him as my Lord and my Savior. I was soon baptized and eventually became an evangelist, then a pastor.

DAVE: How did you find the opportunity to go to school, get a doctorate, and become a pastor, evangelist, university professor, and denominational leader?

DANIEL: I am truly a beneficiary of God's grace. My disability should have kept me from these leadership roles. But my family members and friends supported me during my studies. For my doctoral program, I was awarded a scholarship. A supervisor persuaded me to use my giftedness in teaching to serve my country. In God's plan, I was eventually selected to be a denominational leader. The Holy Spirit helped me a lot as is written in the prophet Zechariah:

“Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,” says the Lord Almighty”—*Zechariah 4:6 (NIV)*

At a national synod, the pastors of our denomination decided to entrust me with the duties of leading the church after the death of our bishop. Not long after that, I was selected to be a denominational leader.

DAVE: Has the Lord used anyone in your life to help you respond to His call and develop your giftedness?

DANIEL: Yes, there are people who have helped me. But I would like to mention one: He is the former dean of the Faculty of Economics and Management at the University of Lubumbashi, Professor Mbayo Musewa Laki Maurice. Like me, he has a physical disability. For this reason, his help was very precious. He even paid for my studies at the University. Today he is still my scientific supervisor.

DAVE: What impact will having a disability have on your new leadership role in the church?

DANIEL: I have reduced mobility. This makes it difficult to visit all the Lord's sheep. I love His sheep. Daily, I must

overcome the challenges of my disability in my role as a church leader.

DAVE: Has your disability given you any advantages as a leader? If so, in what ways?

DANIEL: Yes, it certainly has. My disability has shaped my character. I have had to become tenacious, creative, and persevering. I am committed to finding solutions where it appears there are none. Although not commonly talked about, this is the positive side of disability. You must learn to make life work by God's grace.

DAVE: How will your disability affect the way that you assist and support other people with disabilities in your ministry?

DANIEL: Crucially, my research for the doctoral thesis is oriented towards the professional integration of people with disabilities. What is more, I was elected 2nd Bishop of the 1st Community of the Church of Christ in Congo, on 25 July 2019. I will be crowned in Lubumbashi at an unforeseeable future date determined by the COVID-19 conditions in our region. This leadership role will give me unprecedented opportunities to help other people with disabilities find space to serve in Christ's church; some who are called and gifted will serve in leadership roles like I do and some will go out on mission. A new day has dawned on people with disabilities in the churches of the DRC.

On a practical level, I am committed to helping other people with disabilities. For example, I talk to them about the love of Christ and even train them in entrepreneurship and business management since I'm an entrepreneurial trainer from the University of Maastricht. When I meet them, they are surprised that I talk to them with love because they are usually rejected due to their disability. They consider me to be their brother in Christ. Like everyone else, they are looking

for hope in life. This is especially true because the majority of them live in desperate conditions. The love of Christ can give them the joy of living despite all the difficulties they face.

DAVE: Will you try to help other people with disabilities become leaders like you, particularly missionaries?

DANIEL: The Lord has given me the responsibility to lead in his local church. Along with this leadership responsibility, I desire to make training people with disabilities one of my priorities as well as sending them out. My most passionate dream is that the Lord will use me as a channel to train people with disabilities who will draw crowds of other people with disabilities to Jesus Christ and make them disciples. The specific goal that I have set for myself is to produce 10 Christian leaders and disciples of Jesus Christ with disabilities in the Democratic Republic of Congo in the next 10 years.

DAVE: What would you like to say to people who are amazed that you are a pastor, evangelist, professor, and denominational leader?

DANIEL: Yes, I am a pastor, an evangelist, a professor, a denominational leader, and an entrepreneur. The love that I have for others empowers my multiple responsibilities. In addition to evangelizing, discipling, and training people with disabilities, I hope to help make life better for them. My love for my neighbors with disabilities steers all of my efforts in the right direction. It does not come from me, it's the gift of the Holy Spirit.

DAVE: What would you say to other people with disabilities to encourage those who are called and gifted to pursue mission and ministry leadership?

DANIEL: The message I can give to other people with disabilities who aspire to become leaders in the Christian world is this: The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ enables us to come into connection with the power of God. Our trust must rest on the Lord who has the power to make us strong beyond our human imagination. In the eyes of the Lord, there are neither weak nor strong. Only his spirit makes us strong (Zechariah 4: 6). The Lord does not need our strength. He just needs our availability. As soon as we are available for him, he gives us his strength.

DAVE: Thank you for sharing your testimony and life story with us, Daniel. God has amazingly applied his grace to your life in so many ways. Is there one final message you would like to send to those who want to understand and appreciate the significance of you becoming a leader who, by God's design, has a disability and has suffered as a result?

DANIEL: People with disabilities need to know Jesus Christ. Regardless of whether we are in the Congo or somewhere else, the best thing we can offer them, and the world is the love of our Lord in the gospel.

Dr. Daniel Kyungu's story pulls together two powerful Disability in Mission themes; Daniel's personal tenacity and innovation rooted in his commitment to Christ, and the hand of God supporting Daniel through the agency godly leaders. This support is not charity. In fact, it is no different than we might expect from any mentor to mentee relationship. Can called and gifted people with disabilities participate in missions? Yes, they can.

Our LDCN role in God's disability story continues

LDCN appeals to Christian leaders globally to find, train, support, and place people with disabling conditions in ministry leadership roles including mission. In so doing, the satirical impact of disability could be significant. The LDCN is grateful for this opportunity to tell our ministry organizational story as well as Daniel's Kyungu's personal story, and to make our appeal to our colleagues. Thank you for your attention.

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