

Call to Justice: “JusticeGram” of the Salvatorian Family USA

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Another “-ism”

Racism. Paternalism. Nationalism. Eurocentrism. Colonialism. Fascism. Sexism.

These “-ism”s are well known.

This issue of JusticeGram explores yet another -ism. **Ableism.**

Never heard of it? It’s so common in our U.S. society as well as worldwide. Yet, it is often invisible.

Ableism refers to discrimination and social prejudice against people with disabilities based on the unexplored



attitudes
stereotypes
barriers
misconceptions
ableism

belief that typical abilities are superior. It is the assumption that able-bodied bodies are the “norm” and all others are inferior.

Ableism is similar to racism, where Whiteness is the “norm” and privileges accrue to White people just because they are White. Ableism reflects the fact that our society is designed for able bodies.

Moreover, our society believes that a disability, whether physical or mental, is a defect that makes a person broken. It is perceived as sad, bad, pity-producing, and negative. Disability, and the 61 million adults in the US who are “PWD,” are perceived as problems to be fixed. In truth, disability is just another way for a mind or a body to be. It is a normal, inevitable part of the human experience.

Did you know?

“PWD’ is frequently an abbreviation for ‘persons with disabilities.’ One in four adults in the US is a PWD, with disabilities that impact mobility, cognition, independence, hearing, vision, or self-care. In 1990, PWD in the US finally acquired the same civil rights as TABs.

(TABs are people who are *Temporarily Able Bodied.*)

S. Patrice Colletti, SDS

What does disability mean on a personal level?

The all-purpose “It depends...” answer is a perfect response!

Lay Salvatorian Mary Frontiera says that the word "disability" wasn't even in her vocabulary as a child. Though in later years she was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, her visual impairment has been her main challenge in life. As a child she faced teasing and poor self-image due to her thick, ugly glasses. She gained wisdom



Mary



S. Lisa

and courage as the years went by, learning how to advocate for her own needs, despite the discomfort in doing so.

Mary says that independence is important to *all* people with disabilities. Examples of her self-advocacy are her asking her parish to use larger fonts with better contrast in communications, such as on screens during liturgy. Her wisdom

has taught her that it's her own responsibility to inform others of her needs and also to find and utilize available resources. Last, but not least, it is the individual's responsibility to deal, in a

healthy way, with feelings of anger, resentment and fear as they surface. That might require professional help. Courage is required during these times.

Sr. Liza Segleau also faces disability with positive assertiveness. She is deaf bilaterally and uses cochlear implants to access the world of sound. Unable to walk long distances, she uses a power wheelchair. She also deals with migraines and with a digestive disorder requiring a specialized diet. Sr. Liza has noticed that in our Salvatorian Family, members respond to disability in diverse ways. “... if they are nurses, one way; if they are educators, another. It all depends on a person's understanding of disability...”

Let Us Pray:

- ◇ For courage to build bridges of understanding among all people.
- ◇ For patience to accept human imperfections, and for humility to envision a world of justice for all.
- ◇ For those who assume brokenness, shame, and “I can't” are existential components of a disability.
- ◇ For all who fear life in a body that's different.
- ◇ For our global, national and local leaders and all those who work to create public policy- - that all are willing to work together to support the common good.



Like Mary, Sr. Liza's life experiences have taught her much. She advocates for societal changes like improving airline accessibility (<https://allwheelsup.org/>). She has a YouTube channel to help wheelchair users develop self-advocacy, independence,

and problem-solving skills. Sr. Liza knows active involvement is essential. "The one thing I would want society to work toward is to integrate us into the general society, no matter what it takes. We *all* have something to contribute to family and society."

Invisible by Exclusion

"It would cost only about \$200 to put in a ramp so that those using wheelchairs could join their families and their community in worship."

But the pastor said, "We don't have anyone who uses a wheelchair so why would we want to add a ramp?"

I wonder— did the pastor realize that the *reason* no one using a wheelchair ever came to church was that they could not get IN to the church itself?

"You should really try to use a walker. Don't be confined to a wheelchair. You don't want to become dependent upon it," said one elder to another while waiting in line at suppertime.

I wonder— did they realize that people are not "confined to a wheelchair?" Wheelchairs are tools that give freedom... free-

dom to decide where to use one's limited energy. Freedom to use the city bus. Freedom to go shopping, enjoy a meal out, or take in a movie. What would happen if we changed "confined to a wheelchair" to "uses a wheelchair?"



"Disability is any physical or mental condition that limits a person's movements, senses, or activities. It has a huge stigma. Psychological or mental illness disabilities carry even stronger stigmas. Just because I have a mental illness doesn't mean I am violent or dangerous. In fact, people with mental illness are far more likely to be *victims* of violence than to be perpetrators. But if I mention my disability or need to accommodate it,

I'm disrespected. Everyone believes I am not able to contribute to the world... that I take more than I give... that I have less inherent value and potential than a person without a disability. They want me to be 'fixed.' I am a whole person. My disability is simply part of who I am."



Did you know? People with disabilities had no federal guarantee of equal rights until 1990, when the ADA, Americans with Disabilities Act, was passed. People with disabilities continue to experience discrimination and often have to fight for their equal rights.

15% of the world's population has a disability.

"Disability" is the only "minority group" one can enter at any point in life.

World Health Organization and World Bank estimate, 2011 *World Report on Disability*

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You're Reading a Salvatorian Family Publication



In response to our JLG call to focus on Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC), we produce this quarterly newsletter for members of our SDS Family. We invite our members to **talk, pray, and act** on the issues we highlight. Please use the links to learn more.

Learn More

- ◆ Facts and Figures: <https://tinyurl.com/4js4b6vk>
- ◆ ADA National Network <https://bit.ly/3b8ARBK>
- ◆ Films involving characters with disabilities: <https://tinyurl.com/4vvck3s5>
- ◆ Disability Voting Rights (mostly Wisconsin) <https://disabilityvote.org/>
- ◆ A to Z of Disabilities and Accommodations <https://askjan.org/a-to-z.cfm>
- ◆ Sr. Liza's YouTube Channel: <https://tinyurl.com/27fmdnxz>
- ◆ [*My Body is not a Prayer Request: Disability Justice in the Church.*](#) Amy Kenny