

Disability Ministry Includes Those with Invisible Chronic Illness

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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Lisa Copen, Rest Ministries' Executive Director, will be speaking on "Chronic Illness and Your Church: What Pastors and Leaders Need to Know" at the Christian Council on Persons with Disabilities' *Strength for the Journey national conference*, April 20-22, 2001. The conference will take place at First Evangelical Free Church in Fullerton and the keynote speaker is Joni Eareckson Tada, a leading disability ministry advocate.

"People who live with chronic illness or daily physical pain often feel as though no one understands what they are going through," shares Copen, who joined the CCPD Board of Directors in 2000. "Even churches that outreach with emotional warmth to the disabled population often do not realize that the needs of the chronically ill within the church are not met by 'get well cards' and an occasional casserole. I am eager to see chronic illness become a part of the outreach the disability community makes to churches and individuals. Too often those with invisible disabilities are forgotten or their handicaps are taken too lightly."

With one in three Americans living with chronic conditions¹, church pews are filled with thousands who suffer silently with complications of diabetes, cancer, lupus, fibromyalgia, heart disease, Crohn's disease, and many more. Copen's presentation will offer steps on how a church can reach out to members of their

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church and community, offering strength for the illness journey and how to restore faith and hope, even when healing does not occur. Copen will also explain how to start an effective chronic illness ministry within one's church including a HopeKeepers group, a small group outreach program of Rest Ministries.

Rest Ministries is a nonprofit Christian organization that serves people who live with chronic illness or pain. Rest Ministries began in 1997 when founder, Lisa Copen, who lives with rheumatoid arthritis, saw the need for Christian support while living with a chronic illness. Rest Ministries now serves thousands daily through HopeKeepers groups and their website, which includes free online daily devotionals.

HopeKeepers groups exist in over 130 churches in three countries, including First Evangelical Free Church in Fullerton. For information about Rest Ministries or to see if a HopeKeepers group is in your area, call 888-751-7378 or visit the website at www.restministries.org.

For information about attending the CCPD conference, call 414-357-6672. Non-CCPD member conference cost is \$105 and includes one-year membership. Discounts apply for additional attendees from one's church or family or attendants.

Rest Ministries will also be exhibiting at the conference.

CONFERENCE LOCATION:

First Evangelical Free Church of Fullerton

2801 North Brea Blvd.

Fullerton, CA 92835

714-529-5544, contact Connie Hutchinson

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ⁱ *Chronic Care in America: A 21 Century Challenge*, a study of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.