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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **JONI AND FRIENDS DISABILITY MINISTRY CELEBRATES 30<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY: Founder Joni Eareckson Tada Also Marks 60<sup>th</sup> Birthday**

**Agoura Hills, Calif., Aug. 25, 2009** – As Joni Eareckson Tada observes her 60<sup>th</sup> birthday in October, this year also marks the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ministry she founded to provide support and outreach to individuals with disabilities and their families – inspired from her own experience as a quadriplegic trying to adapt and survive in an inaccessible world.

Tada became a quadriplegic at the age of 17 as the result of a diving accident. As part of her rehabilitation, she learned to paint beautiful pictures with her mouth, which she showed at local art fairs. She was featured on a local television program, after which NBC's "The Today Show" booked her for an interview with Barbara Walters.

"After that interview, things kind of exploded," Tada said. "A publisher asked if I would write a book (I did and it's called "Joni") and the Billy Graham film ministry did a story on my life.

"This resulted in thousands of letters from disabled people," Tada continued. "These letters inspired me to begin this important ministry, responding to people seeking advice and encouragement."

Joni and Friends (JAF) was established in 1979, in Burbank, Calif., and Tada began the now-internationally-syndicated radio program "Joni and Friends" in 1982. The ministry grew and moved to a new location in Agoura Hills in 1986.

One of the ministry's best-known programs is Wheels for the World, providing wheelchairs for individuals with disabilities all over the world. Family Retreats are another renowned JAF outreach, during which individuals with disabilities and their entire families are encouraged and given a real respite during a week-long "summer camp" atmosphere.

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As JAF has moved from a personality-focused programming ministry to a vision-driven movement, it has engaged in the bio-ethics debate, with the establishment of the Christian Institute on Disability. This development has helped prepare JAF to lead the Church into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as technological advances outpace Christians' engagement in science and culture.

A critical development in this growth and transition has been the addition of Doug Mazza as president and COO (Tada continues to serve as CEO). Mazza came to JAF in 1999 as executive vice president, moving to his new role in 2004. Drawing on his years of corporate management experience, Mazza helped initiate the transition from "Joni" to "Joni and Friends," and encouraged a more collaborative and integrated organization.

Billy Burnett, vice president and chief financial officer, oversees financial and administrative systems at JAF, and along with other ministry leadership, is amazed at how God has blessed and grown JAF. The organization recently completed construction on a large, new hi-tech headquarters building – a model of accessibility for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

As the ministry turns the corner on this its 30<sup>th</sup> year, it continues to fulfill Tada's vision of accelerating ministry to those with disabilities. "If churches around the world would grasp the revolutionary truth that Christ's transforming power always comes through sacrifice and weakness, it would dramatically alter the landscape of the global church," Tada said.

In celebration of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary, JAF has established a special gold seal for use in all literature and communications. It serves as a reminder of how far the ministry has come, Mazza said, but is just the tip of the iceberg in how JAF plans to continue to grow and serve in the future.

"While we pause in appreciation of the past, we look forward with more excitement than ever, as we continue to see so many opportunities ahead," Mazza added. "Because of Joni's vision and foresight, JAF is poised to lead the Church in meeting the challenges of a new era – a time when technology has advanced and life has been devalued so that those with disabilities and those without a voice need a champion more than ever."