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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Joni and Friends Chicago Hosts Midwest Disability Ministry Summit

**Churches showing new interest in reaching congregants and community
members with disabilities**

AGOURA HILLS, Calif., Sept. 20, 2010 – As the Midwest Regional Office for [Joni and Friends International Disability Center](#), Joni and Friends Chicago will host the Midwest Disability Ministry Summit at Trinity Christian College in Palos Heights, Ill., on Saturday, Oct. 9. Anyone interested in working with individuals with disabilities will benefit from the day-long seminar, with sessions on topics such as “Autism within Your Church,” “Don’t Forget the Siblings,” and “When Social Services Abandon Families.”

Seminar presenters are all experts in their fields, and the summit will start and conclude with a keynote address by Erik W. Carter, Ph.D., author of “All Things are Better When We Travel Together” and “Including People with Disabilities in Faith Communities.” As associate professor in the department of rehabilitation psychology and special education at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Dr. Carter’s research and teachings focus on strategies for supporting meaningful inclusion and promoting valued roles in school, work and community settings for children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

“We just celebrated the 20th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act, but I think most people would agree that as a society we still have a long way to go in recognizing people affected by disability as full participants in the workplace, the church and in public discourse,” said Joni and Friends Chicago director Sandy Hay. “It will take a change in hearts and minds for us all to recognize the individuals behind the disabilities, and their worth in society. This summit is one way we can help accomplish that, by training churches to lead the charge in being inclusive of those with disabilities, while understanding their great value to the Church, church ministry and church community outreach.”

The Midwest Summit follows the West Coast Disability Ministry Summit, held in Southern California earlier this summer, which has seen perpetual growth every year, pointing to increased interest in this field and recognition of the need. Through its work helping churches establish disability ministries, Joni and Friends has observed that most churches do not have any outreaches or programs for individuals with disabilities.

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“When you couple that fact with the realization that 17 percent of the U.S. population is affected by disability, you can see that the need is great,” Hay said. “We hope to help equip as many individuals as possible in all aspects of this vital area of ministry.”

Joining with Joni and Friends Chicago in hosting the conference are the Church Connection Initiative at Trinity Christian College and the Christian Reformed Disability Concerns. Their contributions help to keep costs reasonable, with a \$45 individual registration rate, or \$35 each for groups of three. Registration at the door is \$55 each. Lunch is included, and for each group of three, a fourth free registration is offered for groups to invite their pastor.

For more information or to register online, please visit <http://www.joniandfriends.org/church-relations/midwest-disability-summit/>, or those interested may call Joni and Friends Chicago at 630.573.2900.

Joni and Friends maintains 21 offices across the U.S., including a local office in Chicago. The Chicago office works with local churches and organizations, forming outreach programs throughout the community and ministering hope and the message of Christ to those who face the daily challenges of life with a disability. The Chicago office is committed to reaching individuals and families affected by disability throughout the Midwest region with the love of Christ.

Joni and Friends International Disability Center serves the disability community through a wide array of life-affirming ministries to people with disabilities around the world, including international radio and television programs featuring inspirational stories. Wheels for the World enables thousands of individuals to receive wheelchairs and the life-giving message of the Gospel. Every year families affected by disability learn that they are not alone when they attend Family Retreats across the U.S. and around the world. The Joni and Friends Christian Institute on Disability equips the Christian community to engage in bioethics and value of life issues. More information can be found online at the ministry’s new website, www.joniandfriends.org.

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Note to Editors: For more information about Joni and Friends, please visit www.joniandfriendsnews.com. To arrange an interview with Joni and Friends representatives, please contact Melany Ethridge at 972.267.1111 or via e-mail at melany@alarryross.com.