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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Joni and Friends Christian Institute on Disability celebrates 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Americans with Disabilities Act Furthers work of Act by influencing attitudes**

**AGOURA HILLS, Calif., July 15, 2010** – As the U.S. prepares to mark the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act and all that it has accomplished toward accommodating individuals with disabilities, the [Joni and Friends Christian Institute on Disability](#) (CID) furthers the work of the 1990 legislation by educating and influencing opinions and attitudes about individuals with disabilities, which is where real change must come in order to have true equality.

Joni Eareckson Tada, a quadriplegic herself and founder of the [Joni and Friends International Disability Center](#) and its CID, was among the team called upon by President George H.W. Bush to research and make recommendations regarding disabilities legislation. While Tada was honored to be part of that group and recognized that making these physical accommodations was a necessary step in the process, she also knew that it would only be a part of the journey toward true equality and acceptance of individuals with disabilities.

“The Americans with Disabilities Act was a landmark law that safeguarded the rights of people with disabilities in the U.S.,” Tada said. “The law guarantees equal access to employment, as well as accessible ramps and Braille notices, but you cannot legislate peoples’ attitudes and how they feel toward people with disabilities. That’s the mission of the Gospel. And this is why our efforts through the Christian Institute on Disability are so key and critical in ensuring the long-term success of what the ADA originally launched 20 years ago.”

Joni and Friends established the CID in 2007 in an effort to respond to what Tada observed as a growing culture of inequality and respect for all human life. As a society, we search for cures at the expense of life through embryonic stem cell research, and children who might be born with disabilities are instead routinely aborted. Designer babies and cloning seem just around the corner. The CID’s mission is to educate and influence public opinion about the value of all life, whatever its level of ability.

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“When Americans can see all life as valuable, we’ll no longer have to legislate equality,” said the CID’s newly-appointed director of academic studies Kathy McReynolds, Ph.D. “We at the CID try to help people understand God’s design in disabilities – it’s this biblical view on disability that ultimately will transform society’s attitudes toward people with disabilities. Besides, individuals with disabilities have learned much about grace and suffering that they can teach us, if we can get beyond our fear and awkwardness and come to know them personally and individually.”

Part of the work of the CID includes the development of college and seminary courses on “The Theology of Suffering and Disability,” helping to educate young adults and future ministry leaders regarding what can be learned from individuals with disabilities. Several mainstream and Christian universities are already offering the courses, or will do so in the near future.

“Joni and Friends observed a real need for this kind of education, which contributed to a real lack of ministry and service to the disability community,” McReynolds said. “We want to educate whole generations of young adults about the value to them of having people with disabilities in their lives.

“In addition, we need the Church to take the lead in reaching out to the disability community, and it can’t do so unless it knows how,” McReynolds continued. “That’s the kind of training the CID courses provide, and exactly the kind of attitude-changing knowledge that our culture needs in order to accomplish the full intent of the Americans with Disabilities Act.”

The CID functions as a resource for the Christian community regarding life issues in a day and age when the lives of the most vulnerable are under threat. Joni and Friends is passionately concerned about the many issues currently being debated in the medical arena, such as health care reform, stem cell research, reproductive technologies, and end of life care. The CID exists to educate the church on these important ethical concerns.

For more than 30 years Joni and Friends has worked to accelerate ministry to the disability community, offering a wide array of life-affirming ministries to people with disabilities around the world. Joni and Friends does this through the International Disability Center; the CID; international radio and television programs filled with inspirational stories; Wheels for the World, which every year sees thousands of individuals receive wheelchairs and the life-giving message of the Gospel; and Family Retreats held in the U.S. and around the world, where families affected by disability learn that they are not alone. More information can be found online at the ministry’s website, [www.joniandfriends.org](http://www.joniandfriends.org).