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# news release

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **Joni Eareckson Tada to Lead Chapel at Ozark Christian College Occasion to launch Theology of Suffering course for spring semester; also speaks to conclude Disability Ministry Expo at local church**

**AGOURA HILLS, Calif., Jan. 17, 2010** – Joni Eareckson Tada, founder of the Joni and Friends International Disability Center whose vision is to accelerate Christian ministry in the disability community, will serve as a Chapel speaker at Ozark Christian College (OCC) on Feb. 4, 2011. The occasion marks the launch of a new course being offered at OCC, “A Theology of Suffering and Disability,” developed by Tada’s organization and being implemented at universities around the country.

A diving accident in 1967 left Joni Eareckson, then 17, a quadriplegic in a wheelchair, unable to use her hands. After two years of rehabilitation, she emerged with new skills and a fresh determination to help others in similar situations. [Joni and Friends International Disability Center](#) was founded in 1979 as she and her friends responded to the many questions and needs pouring in from families affected by disability who had read Joni’s books or had seen the movie of her life.

Through its [Christian Institute on Disability](#) (CID), Joni and Friends has developed this university level course, which examines suffering and disability through the lens of theology. It has been adopted by several universities around the country, and will be offered at OCC for the spring semester 2011. The course will be taught by Joni and Friends Vice President Steve Bundy and CID Director of Academic Studies Kathy McReynolds, PhD.

“People often ask how a good and loving God can allow evil and suffering in the world,” Bundy said. “This course helps us understand that while suffering exists, God in his goodness brings hope in the midst of suffering. People affected by disability are often more attune with their own brokenness and need for God. In ministering to those with disabilities, the church not only blesses this population, but is blessed in return by the richness of relationships that are developed.

“With more than 650 million people worldwide living with disability – roughly 10 percent of the world’s population – this is considered one of the world’s largest underrepresented and unchurched groups,” Bundy continues. “It is vital that more students become trained in reaching out and ministering to the disability community, and that the Church as a whole grow in its understanding of our obligation to do so.”

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McReynolds adds that it is unfortunate society as a whole isn't engaged with this community. "People affected by disability have much to teach us about spiritual transformation," she said. "Their plight – suffering both personally and publically – mirror the human condition and the Christian journey in many unique ways."

Bundy and McReynolds will travel from California to OCC over two weekends during the semester to hold intensive course discussions, overseeing from afar the students' independent studies the rest of the time.

To "kick off" the course launch at OCC, Tada will speak twice in the Joplin area the weekend of Feb. 4-5: Friday at 10 a.m. for OCC Chapel at the campus' multi-purpose facility, and Saturday at 6:30 p.m. to conclude College Heights Christian Church's Disability Ministry Expo also being held that weekend. The church is located at 4311 East Newman Road in Joplin. The public is invited to attend either of these events.

Joni and Friends established the CID in 2007, realizing the Christian community needed a resource regarding life issues in a day and age when the lives of the most vulnerable are under threat. The CID exists to educate the church on these important ethical concerns, as well as train leaders in the area of suffering and disability ministry.

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 new website, [www.joniandfriends.org](http://www.joniandfriends.org).

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**Note to Editors: For more information or to arrange an interview with Joni and Friends representatives, please contact Melany Ethridge of A. Larry Ross Communications at 972.267.1111 or [melany@alarryross.com](mailto:melany@alarryross.com).**