

Appropriate Independence

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Preface:

Crafting a biblical philosophy of ministry is foundational to any church endeavor. **Appropriate Independence** establishes a biblical blueprint for ministry that begins with a proper view of people and ends with practical action strategies to assist individuals with disabilities in fulfilling the purpose for which they were created. Emphasizing God's design and scripture's emphasis on community, **Appropriate Independence** outlines 4 principles that establish a firm base for the development of ministry initiatives. Secular solutions proposed by industry experts must always be examined through the grid of a Christian worldview. **Appropriate Independence** provides such a filter. **AI** also challenges the notion of benevolent care-taking and offers a more robust alternative. In an effort to reverse the tragedy of unrealized potential among people with disability, the **Shepherds Way** model of ministry is captured in the concept of **Appropriate Independence**. Assisting people with disabilities in reaching their potential requires intentional strategy. Focusing on both attitude and action, the principles of **Appropriate Independence** can assist individuals and organizations in the pursuit of such a strategy.

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Introduction

We love top performers; they entertain us, challenge us and awe us with their exceptional skills and athletic prowess. At times, admiration borders on idolatry and our society, particularly the young, fawns over these superheroes. Our culture loves winners. We have little regard for the runner-up. "We're number one!" has become the holy mantra, chanted in arenas and stadiums throughout our land.

But what of the under-performer? What about those who never make the team, never get to start, never catch the go-ahead touchdown or sink the game-winning basket? How do we as a society perceive those who cannot perform because of disability?

In a world obsessed with superstars, the needs of people with disabilities often go unnoticed and when the spotlight does, finally, find its focus on the plight of "the disabled," the attention garnered is typically misdirected.

Several distortions tend to characterize the sensationalizing attempts of media as they get up close and personal with someone who has a disability.

Perpetual Dependency

Emotional manipulation serves many ambitions. As heart-strings are tugged and as eyes well up in sympathy, we whisper, "those poor souls, they need our help." So money is raised, homes are re-modeled, wheelchairs are purchased, and the benevolent benefactor, while well-intended, unwittingly perpetuates the demeaning cycle of dependency that haunts and ultimately hinders the lives of the very people they desire to help. When we respond to need out of emotion, our gift serves the purpose of easing our own angst rather than discerning true need. Furthermore, we give to dissipate our discomfort as quickly as possible, rather than contemplate the long-term impact of our help. Do people with disability need help? Of course, but the nature of that help requires close attention if it is to prevent the propagation of stereotype and bias. What constitutes true helping? How can we support in a manner that fosters growth, freedom and self-sufficiency, rather than perpetual dependency on the gift?

Standards of Comparison

There is another subtle effect that can inadvertently develop from unthinking compassion. Admiration for the one who overcomes vast and seemingly insurmountable obstacles is only natural. We marvel when people do things that appear impossible. The blind skier, legless marathoner or quadriplegic artist all stir us with hope and give evidence of the indomitable human spirit. But their success rivals, if not exceeds, our own and therein lies the flaw. We are impressed when people with disabilities match or surpass the standards of normal society. But what of the man who has both arms and legs yet struggles to tie his shoelaces? Do we leap to our feet in ecstatic celebration over the tying of a simple knot? What of the woman who can see but cannot read? When she cautiously pronounces the very

difficult word, “C-A-T,” do our hearts soar with admiration and excitement for her performance?

Imagine a place where such cheers are heard on a regular basis. A place where performance is measured proportionately and worth is offered unconditionally. It is a place where stereotype and prejudice are confronted, where people are seen as people, not as “disabled” people. It is an imperfect place full of imperfect people, but it is a place where the love of God has found vibrant expression in that very imperfection. A place where potential is realized and purpose fulfilled.

As we serve our Lord in ministry to people with intellectual disabilities, we have discovered, by God’s grace, a perspective of people that, we believe, captures the very heart of effective ministry. We have come to realize that this perspective marks a very real distinction between our way of ministering and that of other social service organizations.

Our journey of discovery is born out of intimate conversation and personal encounter with men and women who carry the label of cognitive disability. It has been woven by men and women committed to service, evidenced by their sacrificial commitment to this ministry.

The philosophy we propose has been filtered through the pages of Scripture. We believe it is the Shepherds Way.

This manuscript is an attempt to document the principles and practices of Shepherds Ministries. We offer it as a template for effective ministry, not only to people with disabilities, but to people in general. We believe the concepts presented will have broad application for all who seek to minister the Shepherds Way.

Overview:

Chapter Two **Confronts the Problem** of care for people with disability. It challenges the limited notion of benevolent care-taking and addresses some of the stereotypes placed on people with disabilities.

Chapter Three **Challenges the Secular Solutions** offered by our society today. Advocates often promote independence at the expense of righteousness. Ai rejects this notion.

Chapter Four is entitled, **Crafting a Biblical Alternative**. Here we offer an alternative to the secular solutions of the day. We believe Appropriate Independence is the Shepherds Way.

Chapter Five focuses on **Creating Impact with Appropriate Independence**. The practical application of this philosophy is expressed in several initiatives. The Priority Cubed emphasis asserts the priority of people and addresses the tension sometimes experienced between the needs of people and the needs of a program.

Aligning attitudes and actions with the Ai philosophy is achieved by asking 3 Questions and by walking down the Shepherds PATH.

Chapter Six articulates the **Four Principles of Appropriate Independence**. The Ai Quadrant is founded on the premise that the proper view of people will lead to the right response to their needs. These four principles are:

1. Designed On Purpose, For Purpose
2. Created As an Individual, For Community
3. Train for Life
4. Empower to Serve

Confronting the Problem

There can be no greater tragedy than that of unrealized potential. To fall short of becoming all that our Creator has designed us to be would seem a loss for both individual and community.

The Divine Potter's workmanship has purpose and intention. To neglect, or even worse to sabotage, that holy ambition would be a travesty. Sadly, we come dangerously close to accomplishing such a tragic end when we fail to identify and excite the God-given potential within those who have disabilities and handicaps. We settle too soon, give up too quickly, and accept limitations too readily. We rationalize that broken people need our care and compassion and so, in the name of charity, we create dependencies that soothe our need to be needed, yet undermine the potential impact a person with disabilities can have on this world. Small victories and tiny steps toward independence are benevolently smothered in compassionate care-taking.

Christians should be characterized by the love and compassion they show towards others. Unfortunately, many "caring" Christians have inadvertently perverted the inspiring truth that people with disabilities can "do all things through Christ." They have substituted instead the self-serving alternative that "I can do all things for people with disabilities through Christ." Such an attitude is easily disguised in the cloak of love and compassion. But is it truly compassionate to help someone so much that they become dependent and powerless? Have we confused love with enabling? Yes, let us help the helpless. But are people with disabilities helpless? Without question there is a real and tangible need for help, but the manner of assistance we offer should seek to release the God-given potential within every individual, no matter how limited.

People with disabilities are not helpless. Dr. Wood, stated it clearly and concisely when he declared, *"Never do for people what they can learn to do for themselves."* It is a simple, yet profound statement, a statement that characterizes Appropriate Independence.

Jesus told a parable about a rich ruler who before leaving on a trip left varying amounts of money with three of his servants. Upon his return, he demanded an accounting. How had the servants managed what was entrusted to them? What did they do with their talents?

The principle of stewardship that comes from this passage can also be applied to serving people who have disabilities. We have an opportunity to help such individuals wisely invest and use what they have been given. Is this not our charge? But there is a quandary. Will we risk burying the God-given potential of others for fear they might fail or make a mistake? Should we encourage those who by the world's standards have been short-changed in the distribution of skills and assets to

accept their limitations and do nothing? Or do we challenge them to use what God has placed in their lives for His glory?

Compassionate care for people with disabilities has somehow tragically regressed into a benevolent care-taking that fosters dependency and stifles self-sufficiency. By breeding dependency, we insure institutional necessity. By establishing ourselves as the welfare agent, we strip people of dignity and displace them from their God-given place in this world. Doing so does, however, prolong the life of a program or organization, even if it deadens the potential of those supposedly being served.

Do our helping interventions truly help or do they serve some other intention? If, in the name of Christian compassion, we sincerely desire to meet the needs of individuals with disabilities, it is important that we first confront the attitudes and influences that are sabotaging God's design for this special population. Several are highlighted for consideration because failure to identify these barriers will undermine God's best for those we have committed our lives to serve. It behooves us to pay careful attention to these obstacles so that we can recognize their influence in the day-to-day interactions with our clients and with our family members. As these contrary attitudes and assumptions are revealed, we must challenge them with an argument that replaces error, even well-intentioned error, with truth. With truth comes freedom and with freedom comes appropriate independence.

Distinctions

How easily we lump people with intellectual disabilities into one global category. While the distinction between someone of normal intelligence and someone who is cognitively impaired may be obvious, it takes only a second glance to discover two things. First, while there is a distinction, we are actually more alike than we are different. Those who cannot appreciate this reality have either not spent enough time with people who have disabilities, or have done so with their eyes and ears closed by preconceptions.

Secondly, there is a vast difference in potential and capability among those who fall into the category of intellectual disability. To assume that people with cognitive limitations are all alike is at best naiveté and at worst, bigotry. They are not the same. They differ in likes and dislikes, skills and abilities, values, goals and dreams. Yet, in spite of these differences, we design programs that convenience the organization rather than the individual. We seek uniformity rather than uniqueness. We prefer the one-size-fits-all factory approach rather than the handcrafted, individually tailored design of the Master Artisan. And the Potter must weep.

Benevolent care-taking is often defended because of our concerns for the safety and security of those in our charge. Well meaning parents have struggled with this dilemma throughout the ages. The dangers are real and must be addressed. This is a fallen and, therefore, unfriendly world for the child of God. The most vulnerable of

His children are those with disabilities and handicaps. It is our duty to protect those who cannot protect themselves. But how is it that protection has become confused with isolation or separation? When do external boundaries negate the need for internal restraint and discipline? What happens when tallest walls are scaled or the gate is accidentally left open? Do we adequately prepare those in our care for the realities of this world when we create an artificial world of apparent security and safety? Must safety concerns preclude opportunity and risk-taking? Are we willing to allow failure in order to achieve success? Must growth be stunted in order to maintain reputation or appearances?

Every parent beams with pride when their child succeeds and cringes when they fail. The two outcomes are, nevertheless, inseparable. In fact, one flows from the other. Success can only occur in the context of risk and failure. The challenge facing people with disabilities is to allow their failures to be a catalyst for growth and maturity rather than an excuse to withdraw opportunities and settle for mediocrity. But individual failures bring corporate criticism and controversy. The organization is measured not by what they've done right, but by what they haven't done that might be wrong. In the end, creativity, flexibility and person-centered objectives wither only to be replaced by mandates for uniformity and control.

Independent Spirit

There is another danger, far more subtle than the temptations found in the world's attractions. It is the danger of pride - an independent spirit. Pride, from a Christian perspective, is a spiritual cancer with deadly consequences and people with disabilities are not immune. Some would argue that to encourage growth and potential is to foster this very attitude and so, in a well-meaning crusade to crush pride's ugly head, we find resistance to programs that seek to promote independence within our community.

To allow choice requires us to respect individual freedoms and such liberty can be controversial. To allow independence may appear to be an excuse for license and so there will be resistance.

The root of the issue, however, goes deeper. Pride is fundamentally an issue of control. The proud insist on having it. Control may be expressed subtly or overtly. It may be an angry power grab or a passive-aggressive manipulation. The motivation is identical - control.

Every community grapples with the issue of control. Those who have it refuse to surrender it. Those who seek it are quickly rebuffed. The benevolent big-brother decides for you and justifies it in the name of love. We know better. We've decided that's not an option for you, no more conversation.

Is being released from the controlling grip of even a well-meaning caregiver an act of rebellion? Is the freedom to make decisions, even wrong decisions, an excuse to

throw off all restraint? Are we promoting immoral behavior by even discussing the issues that face our clients? These questions merit serious consideration. Bias toward people with disabilities can be both overt and subtle. Unchecked assumptions are often masked by good intention. Such stifling benevolence expresses itself in an attitude of “can’t” rather than “can” and demands proportionally higher levels of performance before freedoms are granted.

For example, should an adult with intellectual disabilities be allowed to vote? Those who resist the automatic “no” still insist on proof. Is the standard for one with disabilities higher than that placed on a so called normal adult whose civic-minded inclinations may, in reality, be suspect or even, dare I say, retarded? (*see our discussion of the “R” word in Chapter 6*)

Can or Can’t?

When the instinctual response toward people with disabilities is “can’t,” potential is suppressed and enthusiasm squelched. Life is about growing, not existing. The right to live life as God intended, and for the purpose He designed, extends to people with disabilities. The “can’t because they are disabled” attitude has no place in Christian ministry.

Even the word disabled suggests bias. The emphasis is more on what one cannot do, rather than on what one can. Such a focus highlights how one is different instead of recognizing the many things we might have in common.

As Christians we recognize that this world is a broken and blemished place. We acknowledge that our humanity is flawed and imperfect. The scar of sin deadens our sensitivity to a holy God and makes us unable - disabled you might say - when it comes to pleasing Him. We recognize that while we are equal in essence, we differ in function and capability. These differences are a result of a combination of many variables such as genetic construction, environmental toxicity, social influences and access to resources.

Yet in spite of these limitations, be it social or environmental, we encourage the pursuit of excellence in all that we do. The emphasis is on what can be done in spite of obstacles -unless you have a disability. If you are disabled, then someone must do it for you. In reality we are all disabled to varying degrees and in varying capacities. The myopic find normalization through the support of spectacles or contact lenses. The diabetic requires the support of insulin in the pursuit of normalization. The mechanically challenged are disabled when it comes to changing the oil or replacing a spark plug in their automobile. Whole industries have evolved to compensate for such limitations. Such limitations are not, however, seen as social stigmas. Furthermore, adaptation or compensation is acceptable.

While it is true that one must have adequate eyesight in order to drive an automobile, one is not required to pass the eye exam without the help of a support, namely eyeglasses. Only when supports are not adequate to meet the standard is

the right to drive denied. Why is it that the efforts of people with disabilities are seen as suspect unless they are achieved without help or support? Others may benefit without questioning from the support of a prosthetic or a medication. But people with disabilities, particularly those with intellectual disabilities, must achieve without prompts, without supports, without training wheels. An asterisk always follows their score, noting that the accomplishment was artificially enhanced by a support. It is demeaning and demoralizing. It needs to change. These are a few of the attitudes and assumptions that challenge those who seek to minister effectively to people with disabilities. They are real problems in search of real solutions.

Points to Ponder:

- Assumptions about people with disabilities are legion. None of us are immune to these subtle attitudes. Think about some of the toxic assumptions to which you have been exposed.
- How much support is appropriate for assisting someone with a disability?
- Can you think of a situation when supports would NOT be appropriate?
- Is using a support cheating?

Challenging Secular Solutions

The problems facing people with disabilities have been noted and addressed by our society. Their approach to assisting people reach their potential has, unfortunately, been tainted by the fallen nature of humanity and subsequently, by the culture in which we live.

Two extremes characterize historical and contemporary solutions.

Dependence

For those familiar with the historical treatment of people with developmental disabilities, the legacy of abuse characterized by Willowbrook-like institutions arouses revulsion and consternation. While the hallways of such facilities are now empty, the ghostly echoes of tormented screams and plaintive whimpers still remain. Their citizens, once held captive by the restrictive bias of misunderstanding and prejudice, now find liberty and peace in a more open and tolerant world. Gone are the leather straps that restrained without reason. Gone are the experiments that butchered and violated those whom genetics had already left bruised and disadvantaged. The abusive past of institutionalization is well documented and represents a holocaust of sorts for people with disabilities. The overt nature of such abuse, however, overshadows the greater tragedy of forced dependence generated by the institutional model. In the best-case scenario, institutions reinforced a mindset of “can’t” and perpetuated the dependent status of its wards. It was the way it was. We will care for you because you cannot care for yourself. You are the dependent; we are the benevolent caregiver. We will decide for you; you will comply.

Regardless of one’s limitations, fostering dependence serves no advantage. Models of care that reinforced such a posture were ineffective and have, for the most part, been abandoned. The pendulum now swings toward independence as a superior solution to the challenges faced by people with disabilities.

Independence

Americans love the idea of independence. It is rooted in our history. But what began as a noble quest for liberty has seemingly degenerated into the exaltation of individual freedom without accountability to authority and without consideration of community. The greatest love is now to love ourselves. The greatest tragedy is to have our impulses restricted, our passions restrained.

The pursuit of freedom has set into motion the inevitability of our moral and cultural demise. As citizens we prize our freedoms; we willingly die to preserve them; we defend our right to exercise them. Yet, as our society loses its spiritual anchor and drifts into relativism, the church, seems determined to follow. Seduced by the power of self-sufficiency, Christians unwittingly embrace the philosophies of

this generation and allow children and families to become the pawns of educators and philosophers who reject any accountability to the Creator. This also impacts people with disabilities.

Advocates for the rights of people with disabilities have offered solutions that range from common-sense training techniques for skill development and mastery to the overt promotion of immorality. At times their insights and strategies are excellent and set a standard for attainment. How disappointing that the church did not lead the way. At other times their proposals blatantly encourage freedom at the price of righteousness and independence at the cost of responsibility. How sad that the Church offers no alternative.

Independence is a strange concept. It can easily be argued that the concept has no tangible expression in real life. We speak eloquently of fighting for our independence or becoming independent, but can a nation or an individual be absolutely independent?

Independence is a misnomer. To assert total independence without regard to all who have made such an assertion possible is the epitome of arrogance. No man is independent in the absolute sense. Secular society often fails to appreciate this distinction. Remember, our nature has its roots in the ultimate declaration of independence uttered by Lucifer himself when he insisted that he would *"be like the Most High God."* To demand equal authority with the sovereign God of the universe is pride exposed. To assume total independence from any authority is pride expressed.

This is the underlying motive that propels the movement toward independence that is encouraged by many secular agencies today. Their advocacy for personal rights and freedoms is distorted by this bent. What begins as a well-intentioned effort to encourage growth and potential, warps into a demand for unfettered rights to pursue one's own interests regardless of moral merit or social impact. Independence, like many other concepts, must be balanced with other values and limitations in order for it to be a profitable ideal. Without the balancing truth of Scripture and a proper understanding of authority, responsibility and humility, independence becomes another subtle trap of the enemy. Ironically, the pursuit of absolute independence brings ultimate bondage. This is what the world offers.

Points to Ponder:

- It is easy to be intimidated by what appears to be the professional and scientifically supported strategies of the world. How can we challenge those solutions that run contrary to God's Word and still maintain our professionalism and scientific credibility?
- There is a delicate balance between self-sufficiency and pride. How can we encourage clients to move toward independence without fostering arrogance?

- What secular solutions would you embrace as being constructive and consistent with biblical values? What secular solutions would you reject and why?

Crafting a Biblical Alternative

Shepherds is committed to the principle of Appropriate Independence.

Appropriate Independence (Ai) is both a philosophy and an attitude. It is both conceptual and strategic. It provides a standard against which progress can be measured, the progress of the individuals we serve and the progress of this ministry. Ai is a principle that is biblical in foundation and expression. It is a value that was promoted at the genesis of this ministry, but was subtly and sadly undermined by benevolent caretaking.

Now, under Dr. Amstutz's leadership, Ai has been restored to its rightful place as a guiding philosophy that captures the essence of the Shepherds Way. We reclaim our heritage by putting into practice a philosophy of ministry that sees and exercises the potential that God has placed within every individual. The Shepherds Way is the path toward Appropriate Independence.

Dr. Amstutz has proposed the concept of Appropriate Independence as a biblical alternative to the secular solutions advocated by professionals in the field. His definition is clear:

Appropriate Independence is graduated responsibility with full accountability consistent with the Word of God.

Responsibility

We would suggest that those who are appropriately independent must be granted the responsibility and authority to make decisions. Furthermore, such individuals should be encouraged to continually develop the skills that directly impact their lives and help them reach their God-given potential. This gradual process must allow for real-life opportunities to demonstrate the skills that have been learned. With such opportunities must also come a comprehension and acceptance of the consequences of such actions. For people with disabilities, understanding may vary in degree or capacity, but there must be full accountability. Realizing that the Bible is the central test for all actions, we will insist that such freedoms and responsibilities be exercised within the authority structures established by God.

Responsibility implies a reasonable understanding of the consequences of an act and a willingness to bear the outcome - positive or negative. An individual may know, for example, that an extra helping at dinner will mean more calories and perhaps a larger waistline. Such knowledge may not necessarily inhibit the act, however, it will be an act for which the individual is responsible. It may not be a wise act but the actor owns the outcome.

Responsibility must be grounded in a moral comprehension of the impact of one's decision. This is the right and wrong of a decision. It is absolute yet requires an understanding of context. The legalist applies the rule without regard to context. The letter of the law overrules the spirit of the law. The relativist bends the rule to suit the prevalent whim. Ai does neither.

Ai insists that individuals act responsibly. Responsibility can be simply defined as “response-ability.” It is the ability to respond appropriately in a given situation. The responsible act requires two conditions: “can I” and “should I.” Both are necessary. “Can I” involves the actual skill or ability. “Should I” involves the moral rationale that inhibits or propels the act. Both ingredients are necessary for appropriate independence.

Ai seeks to establish in the mind of the individual a moral foundation for the choices they make. But Ai also equips individuals with the skills required to exercise the behavior triggered by the choice. Again, the “can I” speaks to ability or skill. For example, the fact that I “can” make myself a sandwich precedes “should” I make a sandwich since dinner will be served in half an hour. Knowing how to drive a car precedes driving under or over the speed limit. Without ability there can be no response-ability. But, without a guiding morality there also can be no response-ability. Ai emphasizes both.

If I teach Tim how to turn on the TV by himself I have granted him one level of Ai. He is no longer dependent on me, the benevolent caregiver. He now has the ability to respond. With this new response-ability, however, come new responsibilities. Ai will also teach Tim how to appropriately use his leisure time, as well as assist him in discerning what viewing material would be suitable. Now that Tim knows how to turn on the TV, will he bother his roommate by watching late into the night? Will he make responsible viewing choices? Ai will continue to assist in Tim’s journey of ever increasing responsibility.

I always smile when I read this quote from G. K. Chesterton. *“The word ‘good’ has many meanings. For example, if a man were to shoot his grandmother at a range of five hundred yards, I should call him a good shot, but not necessarily a good man.”* Ai recognizes that some skills may be used improperly. That is the risk of independence. Ai insists, however, that skills be couched in biblical principles and values. This is the context for responsibility.

Accountability

Responsibility requires ownership of outcomes. Yet, to be responsible for an outcome one must be granted the power to control one’s resources in order to make such a choice. Ai implies that we are willing to grant authority to the decision-maker. Without the power to choose, one cannot be appropriately independent. Granted, giving power to another brings risk, yet without such power can one truly be held accountable? The right to hold someone accountable for an action implies that they had the power, the actual ability, to act independently. Without opportunity to choose there can be no credit or consequence for one’s action. This path toward responsibility is a gradual gradient. It is a process, a journey, a step-by-step sequence of learning, practicing, choosing, failing, succeeding, raising the bar and trying again. As an individual demonstrates competency in a particular skill, the restraints, restrictions and supervision associated with that activity should

be gradually lifted. With responsibility comes more opportunity. While more opportunity may bring more risk, it also brings greater potential for growth, maturity and independence.

When Joe is given keys to the greenhouse it is because of a demonstrated history of graduated responsibility. Ai does not grant such responsibility without first establishing a sequential path of ever increasing challenges which, if met satisfactorily, bring ever increasing freedom. Ai is also willing to risk failure in granting individuals like Joe the opportunity to choose, realizing full well that such freedom includes, at least for the moment, the freedom to choose wrongly. Wrong choices are met with full accountability for the consequences, but they do not prevent further opportunity in the future. How can one learn if not given multiple chances? Granted, some acts bring severe, even tragic, consequences. The opportunity to engage in such acts is unlikely to be offered unless there is reasonable evidence to suggest that the outcome will be positive. As with any learning process, small mistakes early in development are superior to huge mistakes later in life. The consequence for a youngster who leaves his bike outside is far more bearable than those that would follow should an adult leave an infant inside a locked automobile on a hot summer day. Graduated responsibility assumes proportional opportunity relative to experience and skill. As skill increases so too do responsibility and freedom. This is Ai in action.

The Ai attitude bubbles with possibility and optimism. It is energized, not thwarted, by obstacles and limitations. It never assumes something is beyond reach just because of a disability or handicap. It rejects biased assumptions that people with disabilities “can’t” and asserts instead “why can’t they.” This is not a challenge to authority; it is striving toward a noble goal.

Note that the question is not “should I,” but rather “can I.” Assuming for the moment that the goal is not sinful, “can I” becomes an important and compelling question. If I can’t, is it because of artificial restrictions put in place because of the benevolent bias of caregivers? If, on the other hand, “I can’t” is because of a physical limitation are there mechanical supports available to achieve the desired ambition? If I can’t is due to skill deficits, certainly there can be training. If I can’t is because of a lack of opportunity would it not be reasonable to open the doors and let them try? Only after having exhausted all possible options should “can’t” be accepted as necessary limitation. Ai aggressively pursues every possible alternative to support individuals in reaching their potential and fulfilling their purpose. Only when there is no other alternative will the Ai advocate accept the limitation as part of God’s plan for that individual.

The Ai process also requires that one be given the opportunity to take what has been practiced into the real world. Imagine the frustration of the athlete who trains for an event but is never allowed to compete in the meet. Imagine spending hours at the driving simulator but never being given the keys to the car. Or, to paraphrase Dr. Amstutz, “always a dress rehearsal, never opening night.”

Training for life assumes the opportunity to put into practice the skills one has learned. We can teach telephone use, but will we allow a personal cell phone? Will money skills eventually result in a personal checking account? Does the political discussion and debate that erupts from watching the news or campaign advertising blitz ever express itself in a voting booth?

The issues may be monumental or trite - but that is life. Ai strives to create opportunities for living and in so doing there are risks. Poor choices are inevitable, maybe even necessary, as they provide the foundational experience necessary for good choices. The poor choices of an individual will invite criticism of an institution; nevertheless, Ai defies the institutional mind-set and establishes in its place a person-centered ministry that chooses life. Criticism is inevitable and will be good evidence that there is a power-shift in progress.

It can be argued that the ability to choose is our most God-like feature. It is also choice that gets us into the most trouble. But can you imagine a world without choice? It's Crest, never Colgate. It's Coke, never Pepsi. This is the essence of institutionalization. A case or a carton of a product is purchased because it is less expensive and then everyone is allowed to choose - the same product. It's the one-size-fits-all mentality that stifles the uniqueness of God's creation.

The economics behind such decisions are understandable. Sometimes it is the deciding factor. A shoe that does not fit is better than no shoe at all. But if size 10 costs no more than size 7, the only other possible rationale must be that it is just more convenient for the provider to insist on uniformity. It is a lazy justification. It places the servant above the one being served and it violates the spirit of appropriate independence. Ai allows the individual to control his resources. If John chooses to buy his preferred brand even when I might prefer an alternative, he is allowed to do so. His rationale may be different than mine, less sophisticated than mine, but unless it violates a clear biblical principle it is probably his right. It is most certainly his responsibility.

Consistent with the Word of God

In this journey toward appropriate independence, the Word of God must be both compass and map. By definition we assert that all acts of appropriate independence should be "consistent with the Word of God." Ai affirms that Scripture will be the central test for the exercise of all freedoms. Ai by definition can only occur under the authority structures established by God. To remove such protection would encourage license and contradict the values inherent in the philosophy of Ai. Independence from divinely established authority would not be appropriate independence. This is the independence promoted by the world. It is the "I'll do it my way" and "me first" philosophy of our culture that is inconsistent with a biblical world-view. Christianity is an other-centered perspective on life that does not view submission and authority as mutually exclusive principles. An emphasis on

independence without the constraining balance of responsibility to authority would be unwise and is rejected by advocates of Ai.

If independence is not balanced with biblical principles it becomes the arrogant assertion of self-sufficient man. Absolute independence is the expressed aim of those who would deny accountability to a sovereign God. As such, it runs contrary to the notion of appropriate independence. Biblical freedom is not the right to do as I wish; rather it is the newly found power to do as I ought. In this vein, Ai attempts to cooperate with the Divine Design and see released in every child of God the capacity to be what God desires - to be righteous, loving, discerning, holy, above reproach, a worshipper, a part of the family and a member of the body, working, fitting, and accomplishing all for one purpose - the glory of God.

God's design is one of interdependence. We see it in the metaphors of Scripture. We are members of one body, differing parts, differing functions, each one needing the other. One cannot say to the other, "I have no need of you." This is interdependence. It recognizes that who I am today is a direct result of the contributions of others - parents, teachers, and mentors. It realizes that we are all part of the team. Some will sow, others harvest; each has a role and a responsibility. One cannot succeed without the other. This is the model that Ai promotes. It is what makes independence appropriate.

Scripture exhorts us to "press on to the mark of the high calling of Jesus Christ." We are to "set aside every encumbrance." We are to be what God has called us to be. Ai is the natural expression of this intent. It is not new; it is ancient. It is not a vain philosophy. Rather, it is loving our neighbor as Christ commanded. It is not love as the world defines it - permissive, conditional, without accountability. It is love as Jesus defined it - helping by doing for others only what they cannot do for themselves, loving them by teaching them to do it by themselves. You have heard the saying so often it may seem trite. In reality it is profound. "Give a man a fish and he eats for a day. Teach him how to fish and he eats for a lifetime." Is this not love in action? Is this not compassionate Christian care as it was meant to be? Shepherds Ministries is enthusiastically committed to the philosophy and strategy of appropriate independence. It is a path that requires constant scrutiny and appraisal. It is a path that seeks God's individual best for each of our clients. Ai challenges the secular notions of independence and offers a biblical alternative. It counters the barriers faced by people with disabilities in our communities and offers them hope for realizing their individual role and responsibility in God's grand purpose. The Shepherds Way is the way of Appropriate Independence.

Points to Ponder:

- Identify some examples of graduated responsibility. Explain the relationship between risk, opportunity and learning.
- How does the "can" vs. "can't" attitude impact growth and maturity?

- Who are the mentors, teachers and role-models who helped you become independent? Comment on the relationship between individual and community.

Creating Organizational Impact with Ai

The value of philosophy rests not in its eloquence or intellectual stimulation but in its practical application. Theory must translate into practice and practice must be significantly improved if a concept is to be of value. Practical impact ultimately determines the saliency of any theoretical perspective.

The practical application of Ai in an organization can be seen in two key arenas - personnel and programs.

Any organization thrives or falters in proportion to the effectiveness of its personnel. The right people in the right place, doing the right things in the right way and with the right spirit bodes well for corporate excellence. Staff is critical to an organization's success.

An organization must be committed to selecting personnel who demonstrate the Ai philosophy in attitude and action. The interview process must screen carefully for such attributes. Seek those who see ministry as an opportunity to bring out the best in those they serve, who place people above task and can visualize the possibilities placed within each individual by their Creator.

Selection, however, is only one part of the process. Managers must emphasize the Ai way through coaching, training and incentives. Recognizing staff members when they demonstrate the Ai philosophy, effectively communicates both values and expectations to employees. The specific behaviors that capture the Ai philosophy should be identified and communicated to all staff whenever it is noticed. It is important that leadership identifies those attitudes and actions that are expected to be demonstrated by staff. Managing through the filter of the Ai philosophy keeps personnel in tune with Ai values and expectations.

Application of Ai can occur at an even more basic level. A manager set the example by sharing a simple strategy. She makes it a point to regularly ask each of her employees the following question. "What has (client) accomplished this month that he/she couldn't do last month?" A straightforward question that captures the essence of the Ai philosophy - realized potential. Managers are encouraged to emulate this example. Doing so spreads the Ai philosophy throughout the organization.

Priority3

Programming also must reflect the Ai way. Three key concepts express this priority. The objective is to design programming that is person-centered, potential-focused and process-oriented. This is the priority cubed emphasis.

People not Programs

Person-centered programming places the person and his or her individual needs above the convenience of the organization. Doing so places a priority on discovering the unique abilities and aspirations of the individual and creating

strategies to realize their potential. Note the emphasis on unique. This contrasts with the one-size-fits-all mentality of the institution. It resists global assumptions about capability or capacity. Such an attitude asks “why not” rather than assuming that people with disabilities “cannot.”

Person-centered programming encourages individuality and uses the resources of the organization to achieve that ambition. For example, staff to client ratios reflect where an organization places its priorities. Higher ratios benefit the corporate bottom line but neglect the needs of the individual. Purchasing decisions also reflect either institutional or individual importance. It is easier for the organization to purchase in bulk, use one type of light that takes one type of light bulb, have identical beds with identical mattresses and pillows, paint the wall with the same generic color and so on.

To redirect the priorities of the organization to meet the needs of the individual requires a careful integration of fiscal responsibility and client sensitivity. To argue that the color of a wall or the firmness of a mattress is irrelevant because the recipients are intellectually disabled is offensive and bigoted. Such bigotry makes two assertions: people with developmental disabilities are very different from us and they are all alike. Both conclusions reflect ignorance and insensitivity. As has been previously asserted, people with disabilities are more like us than they are different from us and there is a vast range of differences within the population labeled disabled. Person-centered programming recognizes these similarities and these differences and plans accordingly. As Ai filters through each level of an organization, even purchasing decisions will be impacted.

Person-centered programming serves the individual rather than expects the individual to adapt to the institution. For example, a staff member is faced with the expectation that all beds in a unit be made by a certain time. Ai would desire that individuals be responsible for making their own beds. Remember, responsibility involves two components: can I and should I. The ability to make a bed requires training; the willingness to consistently make a bed requires motivation. The staff member must address both with their clients, each of whom may vary in their progress along the continuum of responsibility.

But there is another variable at work. The staff member is expected to have the task of bed making concluded according to schedule. The dilemma created places the needs of the institution against the needs of the individual. The staff member may be tempted to rationalize that it would be easier to make the beds for the client and meet the time deadline rather than risk being penalized for having the task unfinished. If time is taken to instruct the client, the task may not be completed as efficiently or in as timely a manner. Which priority is greater - task or training? Ai leans toward the person and therefore would be willing to tolerate unmade or improperly made beds if the client was being encouraged to move toward increased skill development. The priority is not the efficiency of the organization but the effectiveness of the individual. Corporate needs are subordinate to individual needs

whenever possible. Now there are practical realities faced by any organization that may preclude this ambition. Nevertheless, the value is clear and should be pursued whenever possible, even when inconvenient, even when more difficult. Unless such an emphasis places the greater needs of the community at risk, the emphasis on person-centered programming should take priority.

Potential not Perfection

Complementing an emphasis on person-centered programming is the importance of potential-focused programming. It is here the subtle danger of settling is challenged. Instead of assuming there are limits, Ai dares to dream beyond assumed limitations. To assert that something cannot be done just because one has a disability is to accept unnecessary restrictions. Ai only accepts limits when it is clear that all alternatives for support or training have been exhausted.

With this in mind, the development of individual goals (ISPs) is designed with real life ambitions in mind. Ai trains not for “busy-ness” but for “business.” Our vocational programs do not assume that something can’t be done because of a disability. Instead we discover creative techniques for making such tasks a possibility.

Our goals also reflect real-life objectives. The Shepherds Way is not about learning how to play at life; it’s about learning how to live life - regardless of limitations. This is the key to potential-focused training. We look at what it takes to live life to its fullest, as God intended it to be lived - to be an active contributor to both church and community, to give and not just receive, to find one’s place in ministry, to have meaningful work and to be part of a family. This potential exists for all, including people with disabilities.

Ai attempts to design strategies that will help our clients live real life and in so doing will not settle for the limitations of stereotypes. Ai sees the God-given potential within each of His creatures and develops programming that pursues that ambition.

Process not Product

Process-oriented programming recognizes that life is a journey and personal growth varies within and among individuals. If person-centered programming identifies the priority and potential-focused programming sets the objective, process-oriented programming characterizes the methodology. Training objectives acknowledge that individuals begin at different levels of ability and progress with fluctuating rhythm and pace. An emphasis on process concentrates more on the how than the what. It places a priority on the way in which something is accomplished rather than just focusing on whether or not the task is accomplished. If product were the priority, it would be easier for staff to do it themselves. If the goal is getting the job done, we will become impatient when behavior lags or when comprehension is not immediate. The Ai Way does not neglect outcome. The end result is important. But perfection is not the aim - learning and growing is. The application of Ai in programming strategies reveals itself in an emphasis on gradual improvement

proportional to potential and ability. The path towards normalization can be an uneven one. There must be a commitment to assisting those served in pressing on toward the goal of realized potential. One must recognize that this is a journey, a gradual unfolding of purpose that involves stumbles as well as success. This is a commitment to process-oriented programming.

Without application, Ai stagnates and finds itself relegated to the category of intriguing ideas - nice sounding but of little value. As Ai is put into practice, one can expect vibrant changes for the better within an organization and for the client community.

3Q

It is often in the application of an idea that errors are made. Without application ideas have no value, but inappropriate application can be equally damaging. An idea is most vulnerable to criticism when its tenants are misapplied – often by well meaning followers. In order to guard against the misapplication of the principle of Appropriate Independence we pose 3Q – or the Three Questions.

Three questions demand our attention if we wish to see those we serve achieve appropriate independence. Three questions must preface every decision made by administrators and staff alike in order to promote appropriate independence. Values must find practical application if they are to have impact and we have found these three queries to be crucial.

The challenge is simple. Before every act of compassionate care, every act of helping or ministry, these 3 questions must be considered. When staff filter their actions through these value-laden questions, appropriate independence will flourish. Failure to screen decisions and actions through these questions will undermine or distort the best expression of appropriate independence.

Question 1:

“Is this for me or for the client?”

Our natural instinct as caregivers is to help, but sometimes helping is more for our own convenience than for the benefit of those we serve. Serving others demands that we align our personal objectives with the needs of those we serve. Even caregiving can be selfish in motivation. In order to preclude such intent, we ask employees to preface their decision-making with this critical question. “Is what I am about to pursue for me or for my client?” Cascading from this question flows supporting inquiries:

- Am I doing this to make my life easier or to improve the life of my client?
- Am I doing this because it makes me feel good or because it is in the best interests of my client?
- Who benefits most from this decision?
- Am I treating my client as an adult?
- Am I providing a choice for my client?

An honest evaluation of motivation will insure an environment that fosters Appropriate Independence among clients.

Question 2:

“Am I about to do for the client what he/she could learn to do for themselves?”

It is a simple question. It is a question that challenges the essence of benevolent caretaking. It is almost always easier to do a job yourself than to try and get someone else to do it. Ask any parent. How often has a mom resigned herself to just getting it done, rather than attempting to persuade uncooperative children to do it for themselves? Doing so, however, sets a dangerous precedent as it subtly instructs children to wait until exasperation overwhelms instruction. Such action gets the job done “right” but fails to assist the child in developing skills and responsibility. No child benefits when a parent yields to this temptation. The job of parenting is far greater than a clean room or washed dishes.

The same principle applies in the world of adults. A manager may hesitate to delegate responsibility for fear the job may not get done right or because it is easier to do it independently. Regardless of motive, subordinates are deprived of the opportunity to demonstrate competency or learn new skills. The end result serves the manager, not the employee and, in the end, everyone loses.

In order to insure that staff prioritize their mission, they must be encouraged to place the person before the task. This is reflected in person-centered programming. To reinforce this orientation staff should be challenged to qualify each action with a simple question: “Is this for me or for the client?” As mentioned previously, task takes a back seat to the needs of the person. If the job doesn’t get done because staff are helping clients learn to do it for themselves, there can be no performance penalty. In fact the job is getting done, that is, the job of seeing our clients achieve appropriate independence.

Question 3:

“Does this honor God?”

Independence without the “Appropriate” qualifier, leads to license not liberty. The mission is not served if behaviors that violate the principles and standards of God’s word are ignored. Subsequently, evaluating our actions on behalf of clients with this question is critical.

Teaching a skill includes teaching responsibility. New abilities bring new responsibilities and both must be addressed simultaneously. Rights must always be balanced with responsibilities.

It is deceiving to assume that a Christian organization would not need the reminder reflected in this question. If we are serious about “Honoring God” we must demonstrate it consistently in our day-to-day conduct. To facilitate the application of this value we must go beyond posters and placards and engraft this priority onto

our very hearts. Just because I am working in a Christian organization does not mean I am honoring God. I must filter every thought and action through this criterion. Doing so increases the potential for God-honoring conduct among staff and clients alike. Appropriate Independence is consistent with the values and standards of God's word. Using Ai to encourage any action that runs contrary to this principle would be contraindicated and, therefore, rejected as inconsistent with the Shepherds Way.

The three questions are a management tool used to reinforce the principles of Appropriate Independence. As such they are only useful to the degree to which they are used by supervisors and staff alike.

Points to Ponder:

- Can you think of situations where the needs of a program have superseded the needs of an individual? Give examples where this might be appropriate, offer examples where it would not be appropriate.
- Do you have an example of the “give a man a fish he eats for a day, teach him how to fish he eats for a lifetime” philosophy?
- What are the greatest obstacles in implementing the Ai philosophy?

The Ai Principles

Lamborghini, Maserati, Ferrari – exotic words that evoke images of high-octane performance, the flashing blur of metal and rubber, glossy paint over smooth curved frames. Imagine having such a vehicle parked in your garage. For the auto enthusiast there could be no greater excitement. But now imagine only being allowed to drive this speedster up and down your driveway. What a waste you would say. How frustrating not to be able to let'er loose on the open highway. What a shame not to allow such an incredible creation to be used in the manner for which it was designed. Unrealized potential – what a tragedy, what a shame.

Imagine now a professional football team – say, the Atlanta Falcons. The starters have taken the field; the top-performers are in their respective places. Over on the sidelines, on the bench, sits a young, want-to-be quarterback. His name? Brett Favre. Not good enough to start, he becomes fodder for the trading blocks. Potential? Sure, but untested, undeveloped and unrealized. Now fast forward a Hall of Fame career later and ask the obvious. What if he had never been traded to the lowly, winless Green Bay Packers? What if someone had not seen his potential? What if the magic that had begun to inspire the Packer faithful just prior to his selection had been deemed to be enough and Favre's capacity had never been given a chance? It was an accident, an injury that gave Brett Favre the ball – the rest is history. Potential realized.

The values and attitudes reflected in Ai can be summarized in four essential principles. Each is critical to effective ministry. Because Ai is the backbone of our ministry, it is crucial that our staff comprehends and applies each of these four Ai principles. Success at Shepherds is predicated on being well versed in these concepts. We assert that without a proper grasp of Appropriate Independence, it will be impossible to impact our clients in a positive and productive way, the Shepherds Way. Ai is a fundamental principle that must permeate our organization.

Attitude Impacts Action

The four principles of Ai can be divided into two parts. Part one defines the way we see people; part two determines how we treat them. One flows from the other. Our perspective of people shapes our conduct toward them. What you believe about a person, your attitudes and the assumptions you make concerning them, will influence your actions toward them. Action is a by-product of attitude. Subsequently, it is of crucial importance that we have the right view of people. Without a proper view of people, our conduct toward them will be flawed. Ai is built on a biblical view of people. Note that there is no need to distinguish between people with disabilities and people in general. When it comes to our view of people, disability is irrelevant. To factor in the presence of a disability would suggest differing standards between people. Doing so would diminish the very humanity we are promoting and would be an unproductive and damaging distinction. People are people, and our basic assumptions concerning people must be applied equally to all, irrespective of impairment or limitation.

Jesus' Perspective of People

Attention is a selective thing. What one person overlooks, rivets the focus of another. We notice different things due, in part, to our preferences and our priorities.

When my wife and I enter a home we see different things. My wife has a sixth sense for babies. She sees babies everywhere. She can spot a bassinet from 100 yards and can pick up the whiff of baby powder like a bloodhound on the trail of a prison escapee. Babies are her passion and her eye is trained like radar to register their presence. Whether she is at the mall, a restaurant or the church foyer, my wife sees babies.

On the other hand, I'm more likely to notice what kind of computer my host has. I can spot a new MacBook Pro from fifty paces. I can tell a Dell from an HP by the sound of its whiney fan. And if it's not computers then it's digital cameras, iPads, smartphones, or a tablet PC.

We see differently. What catches our eye is usually a reflection of what is important to us. As Christians we need to notice the things that are important to the Lord. We need to gain His perspective on life and on those we serve.

Two verses in the gospel of Matthew give us a glimpse of the way Jesus saw people. In Matthew 9:36 we read:

And seeing the multitudes, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and downcast like sheep without a shepherd.

And then in Matthew 14:14 *And when He went ashore, He saw a great multitude, and felt compassion for them, and healed their sick.*

It should be of little surprise to us that Jesus saw things differently than His disciples. Both saw the multitudes; both reacted differently. When the disciples saw the multitudes, particularly the children climbing all over Jesus, they saw a nuisance, a bother, an irritant. Jesus chided them saying, *"Suffer little children, and forbid them not to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven."* (Matthew 19:14) Matthew tells us that when Jesus saw the multitude He felt compassion. What kind of vision stirs such compassion? What kind of perspective prompts an outflow of love and tenderness, grace and mercy? This is the perspective required of every believer. How can we "see the multitudes" in the same manner that Jesus saw them? What kind of perspective will prompt us to respond with compassion?

May I suggest three perspectives?

We Must See People

During a recent lunch with a pastor, I handed him a Shepherds brochure, pointed to a picture of one of our clients and asked him a series of questions.

- “What would you do if this man walked into your church service next Sunday morning? How do you think he would be received among your parishioners?”
- “What if three or four, or ten or twelve began attending your church?”
- “How would your staff and members view them?”

How would you reply? When you see a person who bears the physical manifestations typical of some forms of developmental disability, how do you respond? Is it with compassion or with sympathy?

When you see an individual with developmental disabilities do you see a person or do you see a problem? We must see beyond the surface problem and focus instead on the deeper, personal needs of those we serve. People are not problems to be fixed; they are people in need of a shepherd.

When Jesus saw the multitudes He saw them as “sheep without a shepherd.” He perceived their real needs; He saw their real condition. Instead of seeing people with problems He saw people with needs.

Jesus had a different perception when he looked at the “shepherds” who were missing in action. As His eyes pierced the pride of the religious elite, He spoke condemnation on the false shepherds who had abandoned their wards. Jesus showed compassion on the shepherd-less crowd and judgment on the false leaders. Our ministry was not named Shepherds by accident. It is a metaphor of Scripture applied to Jesus Himself. He is the good Shepherd and we would do well to follow his lead. At Shepherds we desire to see people through the eyes of Jesus.

We Must See Potential

The second key to gaining the divine perspective is to look at people not as they are, but as they are becoming. This compassionate perspective sees people as they can and will be. It sees their potential.

Sadly, that is seldom our focus. We tend to see the problem, not the potential. We look critically rather than compassionately.

Jesus modeled the right perspective for us when he looked at Peter. In John 1:42 we read: *“He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him, and said, “You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas (which is translated Peter).”*

A closer examination of the original language reveals that Jesus’ “look” was one of intensity; it was an earnest, concentrated stare. Jesus looked deep into the innermost being of Peter. In that gaze, unconstrained by time and space, Jesus saw flaws, failure, betrayal and pride; but He also saw potential. By giving him a new name, Jesus was making a statement about who and what Peter was to become. This rowdy, boisterous, impulsive fisherman was to be a rock.

Have you ever wondered what Jesus sees when He looks at you? Does He see all your flaws? Does He remember all your failures? Does He see you through your reputation, who you are based on past behavior? Or does He see you as you are becoming – by His grace, changing bit by bit into the very image of Christ? God, who has every right to view us in light of our past failure and who has the ability to accurately recount our every failure, chooses not to. We are comforted by the words of God that remind us that, *“Our sins are buried in the deepest seas...as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.”* (Micah 7:19; Psalm 103:12). When God looks at us, He sees us in the righteousness of Christ. This is the divine perspective.

What do you see when you look at someone? While we cannot know the heart of those we serve, can we make a commitment to see everyone in terms of potential rather in terms of the past – particularly if that past is a flawed and blemished past? Let’s look through compassionate eyes and focus on POTENTIAL.

The pastor I mentioned previously was asked one more question. It was unexpected and caught him off-guard. If this man with developmental disabilities began attending your church, would there be a place where he could serve? The query challenged his reflexive assumption concerning a person with disabilities. Our knee-jerk reaction is to assume we need to create a ministry FOR them. That is, we need to find ways to minister TO them. Actually we do need to find a ministry FOR them. We need to find a place where they can exercise their talents and abilities for the cause of Christ and the advancement of the kingdom.

Creating a special needs class is certainly a challenge. Finding compassionate teachers to meet the needs of this population can be a difficult task. But when we think of ministry TO people with disability may I suggest we also consider discovering ministry opportunities FOR them? Like any other human being, giving and receiving must be in tandem. They are balancing components of the Christian life. We are blessed when we receive needed support, care and comfort. There is a double blessing, however, when those who receive have the opportunity to reciprocate by giving to others.

The Dead Sea is dead because of a violation of this “give and receive” principle. It “receives” the fresh waters of the Jordan River, but because there is no outflow, no giving back, the compounding concentration of salts and minerals have rendered it “life-less.”

To deprive any individual of a place of service, an outlet, an opportunity to release the abilities placed within them by a purposeful God is to cast a sentence of death – a living death. This is a people principle, not a principle exclusive to those with intellectual disabilities. But it is a principle more easily violated with a population who, on first glance, seems only capable of receiving. We must not handicap people with disabilities by assuming they cannot give. Jesus saw potential. We must do the same.

We Must See Proportionally

If you want to see the multitudes with the eyes of Jesus you have to see the person not the problem, see the potential not the past, and finally, you need to see proportionally.

This principle is best illustrated for us in Luke 21:1-4:

“And He looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury. And He saw a certain poor widow putting in two small copper coins. And He said, “Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all of them; for they all out of their surplus put into the offering but she out of her poverty put in all that she had to live on.”

How intriguing that Jesus looked not at the amount that was given but at the amount in proportion to capacity. You and I would look at the two gifts and compare them on the basis of the total given. In this context, the widow gave very little; the rich man gave much. But God sees differently; He sees proportionally. He doesn't look at the amount written on the check. He looks at the balance in the checkbook after the check has been written.

The passage is about giving but does it have application to ministry to people with intellectual/developmental disabilities? I would suggest there is a principle that can be used when we evaluate and measure the performance of others.

The gifts were evaluated relative to the giver's capacity. Jesus did not compare them with one another; He compared them against themselves. It was an internal, proportional standard, not an external one.

Parents do this all the time. We know the difference between the child who barely studies and gets straight “A's” and the child who dutifully studies, tries his hardest and yet only gets a “C.” The world sees only the “A.” Mom sees things proportionally.

People with intellectual/developmental disabilities have been measured by the world and found wanting. They fall short. They seem to have less to offer – and that is true, if you measure by the world's standards. But God measures proportionally and Ai desires the same perspective. And so Ai applauds the tying of a shoe, the reading of a word because Ai sees things from a different perspective. Ai sees things proportionally. Ai delights in how far someone has progressed, irrespective of how far they still need to go. We will work on that tomorrow. Ai measures against a different standard and can honor and bless and commend effort, even when it falls short of what is considered “normal” or “average.”

You and I have been given a wonderful opportunity to see things from an entirely different perspective, a divine perspective..

Jesus said it so well in Matthew 13:16-17:

“But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear. For truly I say to you, that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it; and to hear what you hear and did not hear it.”

By seeing Jesus, watching Him in action, learning from Him, the disciples began to grasp the deeper spiritual truths He was communicating. The result was not just theological insight, but a new perspective of the multitudes.

When you *“see the multitudes”* – on the streets of Union Grove, Chicago, Moscow, Hong Kong – will you be moved with compassion?

Will you see the multitudes through the eyes of Jesus? Will you see a problem or a person? Will you see the past or the potential? Will you see the portion or the proportion?

A compassionate response demands that we see the multitudes through the eyes of Jesus. And so, with this in mind we have crafted a philosophy of ministry that tries to see people from the divine perspective. We believe, without reservation, that our attitudes about people shape our actions toward people. The Ai Model is built upon this premise

Principle One: Designed On Purpose, For Purpose

The first and fundamental assumption we make about people is reflected in Principle One of Ai. We believe that people have been created by God, “on purpose and for a purpose.” This “on purpose, for purpose” attitude challenges several stereotypes applied to people with disabilities.

It confronts the flawed perception that disabilities are an unfortunate accident, an aberration, an anomaly. It further challenges the reflexive conclusion that often follows when disabilities are assumed to be an accident. If disabilities are a mistake, then there can be no vital purpose for the “broken” product or, more bluntly, for broken people. It then becomes acceptable to discard such flawed people in order to perpetuate the artificially perfect, surgically enhanced world so coveted by contemporary society. Abortion becomes a selective screening device to ensure designer children. Every child becomes a “perfect” creation. Man the creator smirks in arrogant pleasure; the Potter weeps.

Designed with Disability

To insist that all people are created “on purpose” implies that disability is not an accident.

Ai proposes that people are “Designed with Disability.” This assertion challenges the notion that the Creator made a mistake when allowing some manner of disability.

Ai confronts the notion that a person with a disability may have been an accident, a mistake, a “slip-up” in the divine design. Ai affirms that all people are designed on purpose and that disability is somehow a part of God’s mysterious plan. While mankind’s physical and mental brokenness is a direct result of the fall, Ai sees no inconsistencies in attributing sovereign authority over the subsequent design – regardless of perceived “flaws.”

Scripture best captures this principle in the dialog between an insecure Moses and his Creator. Moses was given an assignment for which he felt inadequate and incompetent. The thought of being God’s spokesperson triggered doubt and prompted a questioning of God’s command. Our Creator’s response was revealing. *Exodus 4:10-11*

Then Moses said to the LORD, “Please, Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither recently nor in time past, nor since You have spoken to Your servant; for I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.”

The LORD said to him, “Who has made man’s mouth? Or who makes him mute or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD?”

No shirking of responsibility here. The Creator takes responsibility for the blueprint He has designed – “flaws” included. All of which prompts some serious questioning. Could the limitations we see as design errors actually be part of an intentional plan?

And how is it that this Creator has seemingly ignored our perfect plans and proposals? Could it be that God's plan and ours are in contradiction? Is it possible that the added or missing parts reflect an intention beyond our limited, flesh-bound perspective? And furthermore, could the resentment that stirs within us when we see His imperfect product be inappropriate and ill advised?

Perhaps Romans 9:20-21 puts things into perspective:

"On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, 'Why did you make me like this,' will it? Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use?"

Designed with Dignity

In addition to affirming the premise that we are "Designed with Disability," Ai would also assert that people are "Designed with Dignity." Every design carries the image of the designer. The fall, with all its implications concerning spiritual status, did not erase the image of God in humanity. Additionally, Ai would assert that individuals with disabilities do not have less of the image stamped upon them. The image of God in man is not dispensed in degrees. Physical, cognitive or emotional brokenness does not indicate less of the image of God. We are all created in His image and that image is not diluted or diminished proportional to physical or cognitive capacity. Given this proposition, Ai would assert that God's creative act bestows dignity even on those society might deem defective. The Ai philosophy is founded on a perspective of mankind that views people, all people, as the product of a loving Designer. Consequently, we believe that people are designed by God ON purpose.

Psalm 139:13-16 For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother's womb. I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; wonderful are you works, and my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from You when I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth; your eyes have seen my unformed substance; and in Your book were all written. The days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them.

Building on the notion of purposeful design, Quadrant One of the Ai model declares that people are also designed FOR purpose. Scripture supports this notion with its emphasis on the spiritual gifts of the believer. Furthermore, Ai sees God's interest expressed in every aspect of His creation. His creative intent finds best expression when His creation aligns with His divine purpose.

We see that purpose as twofold:

Exalt the Majesty of God

The catechism teaches that man's purpose is to "glorify God and enjoy Him forever!" Consistent with this fundamental premise is the Shepherds Way notion that we have been designed for purpose, primarily to "Exalt the Majesty of God." It is the

responsibility of all creation to glorify God, including people with disabilities. But the glory of God is achieved not only in our worship and praise, but also in the fulfilling of His will and purpose for our lives. When the clay yields to the Potter's hand, the product satisfies the divine intent. When we discover and use the unique gifts and abilities placed in our lives by our God, we bring Him glory. When we surrender to His will, we participate in both His agenda for our lives and in His global ambition for mankind.

Execute the Mission of God

People are also designed for a specific purpose and that purpose is to "Execute the Mission of God." We have the opportunity to join God in the work He is accomplishing in this world. He has designed us in a manner consistent with this intent. The invitation to participate in this holy mission is offered to all of His children, even those with disabilities. The principle of "On and For Purpose" in the Ai strategy supports this aim by insisting that people with disabilities have a divine function to fulfill irrespective of impairment or capacity. That function will, of course, be consistent with the design of the individual and proportional to capacity. It is not a lesser role; it is a complementary role, designed on purpose and intentionally placed into the Master's blueprint.

This premise is born out of two Scriptures. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus revealed one of the ways in which we glorify our Creator – through good works. *Matthew 5:16* "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."

This purpose is reinforced by Paul and extends to every child of God, including those with disabilities.

Ephesians 2:20 "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them."

We are "His workmanship," His "poem," uniquely constructed on purpose, for purpose.

Ministry, therefore, must facilitate this intention. We must deliberately look for the purpose, the "good work" that God has planned for those whom we serve.

It has been said that the two most important days in your life are the day you were born and the day you found out why. A profound statement. A statement reflected in our emphasis on discovering and fulfilling the purpose for each and every one of our clients.

People are designed by God on and for purpose. This foundational building block of the Ai strategy aligns our perspective of people with that of the Creator. When we see people through the eyes of Jesus, our actions will be consistent with His plan for His world.

Principle Two: Created As Individuals, For Community

The essential character of any stereotype is the loss of individual distinction. People are assigned prejudicial attributes that ignore the unique variation among people. Labels are indiscriminately applied to all in the targeted population. For people with developmental disabilities the labels are legion.

People with intellectual disability take great offense at the “R” word. While “Retardation” remains a legitimate diagnostic label, it has become a pejorative slur used by the socially challenged to ostracize and ridicule. The pattern has unfortunate precedent. Physicians have long grappled with the difficult task of assigning descriptive labels to the multitude of conditions that are the focus of study and treatment. The challenge has been particularly difficult when diagnosing people with intellectual disabilities. Sadly, the scientific purpose of labeling disease is often sabotaged by cruel and critical people.

It is surprising, perhaps even embarrassing, to acknowledge that the terms “idiot,” “imbecile,” “moron” and feeble-minded,” were once very legitimate terms for the diagnosis and classification of Intellectual Disability. But the fault is not in the words selected, nor in the motivation of those who assigned them. Words once considered scientific lost their clinical objectivity as they were usurped by those who sought to belittle and demean. This is the way of the world.

Abandoning these labels, the medical and educational communities offered “*Mental Retardation*” and differentiated degrees of impairment with the less offensive words, “mild, moderate, severe and profound.” But human nature cannot seem to resist the urge to elevate self by subjecting others and so the word “retardation” was twisted into “retard” and in so doing perpetuated the bias that “those people” are somehow less than human and therefore devoid of value and worth.

Today we are still struggling with appropriate words to describe people with disabilities. This battle is far more than an exercise in political correctness. It speaks to the fundamental worth and value of people and is a battle worth fighting. The use of labels is motivated by a desire to classify and type. It provides us a means of organization and differentiation. All of which is fine if we are speaking of jars of jam or manila file folders. The issue takes on a darker tone when it comes to describing people. At the root of the debate is the loss of individuality or uniqueness that is often an unforeseen consequence of such labeling. The logic should be obvious. Classification attempts to group things that are similar in nature or function. In so doing, the emphasis is on similarity not uniqueness. The benefit has a potential cost and that cost must be evaluated and challenged when it comes to the classification and labeling of people with disabilities. What do “people with disabilities” have in common? Is it not their disability? And that is the rub. Our focus now becomes disability rather than ability, and all other distinctions fade. Lost in the comparison is the very important word, “people.” The end result, whether intentional or not, is the promotion of stereotype.

This skewed view of people assumes that people with developmental disabilities all act and think alike. It assumes that individual preferences and personality are minimal at best. It is this notion that the second “attitude” principle of Ai seeks to challenge. We believe that people are created by God as individuals, for community. Seeing a person with disabilities as an individual is of critical importance. We see the individual, not the disability. While we cannot ignore the disability, it must not be our primary focus. Doing so fosters stereotypes and limits our capacity to see potential.

As Individuals

Created with Personality

As individuals we have personality and preferences, rights and responsibilities. The Ai model seeks to understand the personality of those we serve. Interaction with people who are intellectually disabled will reveal distinct personality and individual differences. Likes and dislikes, preferences, opinions and taste all affirm the uniqueness of personhood.

Ai attempts to not only acknowledge the personality of people with disabilities but also to measure and then integrate that information into support planning. The one-size-fits-all mentality has no place within the Ai organization. Our plans are individualized because we serve individuals.

As individuals, people with disabilities also have rights and responsibilities. Society affirms the rights of individual citizens and vigorously protects the rights of the most vulnerable. Inalienable, God-given rights are foundational to our government and should be no less important in our response to people with disabilities.

It is easy to neglect this principle. In the busy rush of day-to-day responsibilities there is a potential to see people with disabilities as wards to be cared for rather than as unique individuals with differing needs and interests. A commitment to reduce staffing ratios is motivated by a desire not to lose the individual in the crowd. Every institution struggles with this tension. The larger the ratio the easier it is for a “herd” mentality to supplant individualized care. By reinforcing the principle of “as individuals for community” we resist that subtle slide.

Created with Passion

Our unique design brings with it differing interests and preferences. Recognizing clients as individuals with personality also means recognizing their particular passion in life. Passion is the energy and emotion that drives us to fulfill our God-given purpose in life. It helps us know when we are living in concert with His plan. It also warns us when we have wandered from His priorities. Always vulnerable to abuse, our passions must be aligned with God’s plan and purpose for our lives.

For the individual with a developmental disability, passion seems to be of little consequence. And yet in recognizing people with disabilities as individuals we also desire that they experience the fulfillment that comes when life is lived on purpose. When passion erupts inappropriately, we have clear evidence of misalignment between God's purpose and our own purpose.

Most anger is triggered when we do not get our way. While a simplistic assessment, it nonetheless is more often accurate than not. Our emotions are a God-given component of our humanity. They provide crucial information about our goals and desires, our expectations and demands. We want people to be whole emotionally. As a result we want healthy emotions signaling compatibility with God's plan. When emotions are extreme or uncontrolled we seek balance and the re-alignment of our will with God's.

In recognizing that people with disabilities have been created with passion, we commit ourselves to ensure that we have identified what truly brings fulfillment and satisfaction into their lives. It requires us to look closely at their individuality and design opportunities for them that will be compatible with their particular interests. Created as individuals means the provision of individualized care - care that is crafted to the personality and passion of each person served.

For Community

The American spirit exalts the individual, at times to the neglect of community. Our natural penchant for self-promotion feeds this instinct and creates potential imbalance in our relationships. The individual must be placed in context. That context is community. The secular solutions offered to people with disabilities tend to emphasize individuality - and for good reason. The nameless, faceless status of people with developmental disabilities needs to be challenged. They, like us, are individuals. We vigorously support this notion but add to it the balancing principle of community.

Our Christian world-view springs from the images and metaphors of Scripture. Here we find the balance between individual and community reflected in Body-life principles. Yes, we have been created as unique individuals, but we have also been created to fit into a larger community.

Are people with intellectual disabilities a part of your community? As you proceed through the following points may I encourage you to apply this principle to the various communities to which you are connected?

Placed by Providence

The intentionality that drives God's creative purpose leads us to conclude that He has placed us in this world with great deliberateness. Therefore, we choose not to second-guess the details of His placement. Humanity, however, tends to resist the rationale behind His placement decisions. We argue with His timing, the family He assigns to us, or the siblings we find living with us. Significant distress has erupted from this line of questioning, all of it futile.

God's deliberate placement leads us to see every person who comes within the reach of our ministry as a divine appointment. Consistent with this line of reasoning is the assertion that because a person has been placed by providence, they BELONG here.

How reassuring to know that you belong. You are part of a community, placed in a cluster of people by a loving and sovereign God. That community may consist of people who are soothingly similar to you or frustratingly different. Regardless, you have a place in that mix. It is a truth we affirm for all people. You belong!

If it is then true that we have been placed by Providence, not only do I belong here but I am also NEEDED here. Like a missing piece that must be found in order to complete the puzzle, so too we assert that the people we serve are needed. They are needed, not just as part of a community, but also as part of the vocational community where they work and as part of a spiritual community where they worship. In each context they belong and are needed. Why? Because God has created them as individuals for community and to that end has deliberately placed them in their respective arenas of influence.

Reflect on the following Scriptures.

I Corinthians 12:12-27 For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot says, "Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. And if the ear says, "Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. If they were all one member, where would the body be? But now there are many members, but one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you" or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary and those members of the body which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable members become much more presentable, whereas our more presentable members have no need of it. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked, so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it.

What a wonderful picture of "as individuals for community." May I draw your attention to verse 18? "God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired." Do you see the intent, the deliberateness of His placement? From this we celebrate the truth that we belong and are a needed part of a greater

whole. We have been placed by providence into the body of Christ and as such must find our unique expression – not for our glory, but for His. Extrapolating from this principle, we would suggest that God has placed us deliberately in this world, in this job, in this family and in this community.

Positioned by Passion

Passion – a dangerous word in Christian circles, yet nonetheless, an important one. Life without passion is life without Jesus. It is not the presence or intensity of passion that causes alarm; rather, it is the impetus and object of passion that arouses concern. God's creative plan has woven passion into the equation. It stirs and motivates when we are aligned with God's holy ambition for us. Our flesh would seek to redirect its intensity to more selfish and trivial pursuits. However, as we submit to the Spirit's authority in our lives we discover a spiritual passion that is a reflection and confirmation of the gift God has placed in each of us.

The Scriptures teach us that every believer has a spiritual gift. While much has been written and argued concerning the extent of this gifting, little has been said concerning the giving of spiritual gifts to believers who are developmentally disabled. Does the distribution of gifts vary according to intellectual capacity? Does cognitive impairment preclude the receiving of such gifts?

On a broader scale, we affirm that as believers we are all members of the body, each with different roles and responsibilities. We agree that one part cannot say to the other, "I have no need of you." But where does a man or woman with intellectual limitations find their role? Yes, as believers they are part of the body, but are they a contributing part of the body? Do they exist solely to provide ministry opportunities for well-meaning caregivers? Or do they have a role to play?

We would assert that God has placed in every individual a passion consistent with personality and with gift. It is our responsibility as a supporting ministry to assist those we serve in discovering and expressing that passion. To that end we assert, "You FIT here!" Not only has God placed you here, he has also positioned you here according to your unique design. Like the missing puzzle piece, you are needed here, but we must also make sure you are positioned in the right place; we must make sure you find your FIT here.

Where you fit is determined in part by passion. What are the things that excite you? What makes you angry? What makes you cry? When emotions are stirred, passion is at work. When it is working right, we find energy for and fulfillment from the mission to which we have been called. When we are positioned by passion we start living life on purpose. Misalignment is often revealed by loss of passion or, at the other extreme, passion out of control. Nothing so discourages an individual as to be placed in a job that is incompatible with their basic priorities and passions. When a "people" person is given a task that has no opportunity for interpersonal contact, apathy or anger soon erupts. Just as we seek to position employees according to

skill, temperament and interests, so too we must ensure that people with disabilities are properly positioned in their respective jobs. We must align their individual passion where it can best serve their community. Positioned by passion – this is the Shepherds Way.

An outgrowth of this perspective touches a tender theme among people with disabilities. If you FIT here, you also have the right to be a MEMBER here. What does it mean to be a member? What does it imply and why is it important? Membership has great significance for any population that has been excluded from access to resources and opportunity. The political implications of membership for a disenfranchised population are monumental. Excluded and banned from participation because of race or creed makes membership a coveted goal for any minority. When we affirm membership for people with disabilities we affirm their right as human beings, we offer them the inalienable rights and privileges granted by our Creator and reflected in our constitution. Membership ensures a voice, a right to speak and a right to be heard. As we promote the best interests of people with disabilities we insist on membership for all because such status protects and supports those who are the least likely to be heard and often the last to be recognized.

Membership brings with it rights and responsibilities. The clamor for rights becomes suddenly silent when responsibilities are introduced, yet the two are inseparable. To insist on rights but to renege on responsibility is the height of immaturity. Inbred in the heart of every child is the desire for rewards without responsibility. We “want to have our cake and eat it too.” But proper participation in the human community demands responsible contribution in harmony with individual freedoms. One right I do not have is the right to violate another’s rights. Every organization should be committed to protecting and respecting the human rights of those they serve. At the same time, however, people need to experience the dignity and self-respect that comes from acting responsibly. The question is not just “do I have the right,” it is also, “is it right?” To this end Ai seeks to encourage responsible behavior. In order to act responsibly, however, there must be opportunity. Membership brings with it responsibilities and in so doing, brings respect and confidence.

The message is clear; you belong here, you are needed here, you fit here and you are a member here. If you have been placed by providence and positioned by passion what is the next step? You have found your place and been given rights and responsibilities. Do we stop here? Absolutely not, because the next steps in the sequence put these values into action. Having been placed and positioned, we now anticipate performance.

Performing on Purpose

Belonging to a team is a wonderful experience but it pales in comparison to contributing to a team. Having an impact, filling a need, working together toward a larger goal - this is where belonging finds expression and meaning.

Principle One declares that we have been designed by God on and for purpose. Consistent with this principle is the Ai emphasis on “performing on purpose.” Purpose leads ultimately to action. Purpose cannot be fulfilled unless it is translated into some form of behavior. A caution is, however, in order. Many of us have fallen prey to the misconception that purpose is discovered or earned through action. Quite the contrary; we do not find our purpose through effort, nor do we earn it through activity. Purpose is revealed first through thoughtful examination and exploration. We evaluate our own strengths and foibles, our passions and our interests, our dreams and our desires. Knowing oneself is a pre-requisite for discovering purpose. But perhaps more important is knowing the God who has designed us on purpose, for purpose. The world creates purpose; the Christian discovers it. We find it woven in the fabric of our personalities and our aptitudes. We see it played out in the circumstances of our lives, knowing that a sovereign God has detailed every component of our experience.

Having aligned ourselves with God’s greater purpose for this world and submitted to His specific purpose in our lives, we begin to act consistently with that purpose. This is performing on purpose.

Integral to performing on purpose is recognizing your role and your responsibilities. Having been granted membership coupled with rights and responsibilities, we now can expect behavior that is consistent and compatible with those rights and responsibilities. The message is clear, “you have a role here.” How important it is for us to assist those we serve in discovering what that role is. In times past it may have been assumed that the role of a person with disabilities was to be taken care of, to receive benevolent services and allow “us” to minister to “them.” But times have changed, and for the good. Instead of seeing people with disabilities as passive recipients of care, we can now see them as part of the community, the family, the team. Together we will find our place and our purpose. Our responsibility then becomes assisting people in the realization of their purpose and their potential. Now instead of caretaking, we become mentors, coaches, co-laborers in kingdom work. The strategic placement of people in roles that fulfill their purpose allows them to then perform on purpose. When one performs on purpose, one fulfills responsibilities. The two are inseparable.

And so we ask the obvious, are you performing on purpose? Are you contributing to the greater good, the mission God has for both you and this world? Such questions must be in the forefront of our minds as we seek to minister the Shepherds Way.

Pursuing Peace and Harmony

Conflict is inevitable in any organization, including those expressly identified as “Christian.” Not only is conflict inevitable, it may also be necessary. Without conflict there cannot be true peace. When people avoid conflict, artificial harmony is created. Ultimately, such peace collapses.

Romans 12:16 instructs us to, “*be of the same mind one toward another*” (KJV) or “*live in harmony with one another*” (NIV). In order to pursue peace and harmony, we are committed to work toward being of one mind. At this point the debate usually regresses into whose mind will be the one chosen? If you would just agree with me then we will be of one mind, simple solution. But it is the wrong solution. The challenge that confronts any ministry is to seek the mind of Christ in all things. A commitment to this objective requires that we not turn a blind eye to conflict but that we aggressively seek it out in order to resolve it.

Ai desires a peaceful life for people with disabilities. In order to achieve that end we seek harmony in two areas.

First, we want people to be in harmony with God’s plan for their lives. In order to accomplish this objective we must provide choices. “You have choices here” is a clear message we want people to grasp and act upon. One could create a false harmony by insisting on unthinking compliance with rules and regulations, however, Ai rejects external manipulation for the more difficult and challenging task of encouraging choice. That is not to say that rules and regulations should be abandoned. They serve a purpose, a community purpose, and for that reason Ai values rules. But our desire is for people to live in harmony with God’s plan for their lives. Achieving such harmony is an on-going journey of conflict and resolution, resistance and surrender. Ai is committed to assisting people on such a path.

In addition to harmony with God’s Plan, we want harmony with God’s People. To this end Ai states, “You have a family here.” Ai wants people to find their place in community, in family. Ai acknowledges that conflict can be a part of family life and is committed to achieving healthy harmony within every community. To be consistent with this commitment the typical question, “are you happy?” must be replaced with the more difficult question, “are you experiencing peace and harmony?” Finding one’s place in community is predicated on harmony with God’s plan and harmony with God’s people.

This is the message of community:

- You belong here.
- You are needed here.
- You fit here.
- You are a member here.
- You have a role here.
- You have a responsibility here.
- You have choices here.
- You have a family here.

How about your community? Is it a place where people with intellectual disabilities can belong? Is it a place where an individual with intellectual disabilities could have a role, fulfill a responsibility, be a full-fledged member?

Is your community a church? If I were an adult with intellectual limitations, would membership be an option? How about a place to serve, a place where I could give and not just receive?

Is your community a place of employment? Is there a place for me? Can I really be a part of the team?

Is your community a neighborhood? Can I live near you? How about right next door? What if I talk to your kids or walk on your grass? Is yours a community I can feel safe, secure and accepted?

Right attitudes lead to right actions. The foundational attitudes about people are reflected in the first two principles of Ai.

People are designed by God, On Purpose, For Purpose.

People are created by God As Individuals, For Community.

Flowing from these core attitudes come two action steps that we, as a ministry, are committed to pursue.

We will Train for Life, and

We will Empower to Serve.

Principle Three: Train for Life

*“Always a dress rehearsal, never opening night”
– Dr. William Amstutz*

Unrealized potential – the tragic outcome when attitude is not coupled with action. How unfortunate to have finally established a proper view of people, only to have such values undermined by a failure to apply such perspectives to real life. In some perverse way, the bias toward people with disabilities finds subtle expression in a failure to put into practice the positive and life affirming values we hold so dear. Without the action principles of Appropriate Independence, our Christian worldview toward people with disabilities is left impotent. We undermine Appropriate Independence when we fail to translate right attitude into right action.

Practically speaking, we make two fundamental errors in this application phase. The first is found in a lack of practical, real life preparation for people with disabilities. The second, is a hesitancy to release people with disabilities to express their strengths and abilities in real life settings. Principles 3 and 4 address these issues. Principle 3 is a commitment to “Train for Life.”

A “Train for Life” initiative is characterized by three priorities.

1. Training will be Practical, that is, life-relevant.
2. Training will be Continual, that is, life-long.
3. Training will be Eternal, that is, life-everlasting.

Practical

AI is committed to teaching skills that have relevance to life, real life. The torment of doing meaningless work applies to all people.

In World War II, the cruel captors of some American prisoners of war used this principle in a perverse way. POWs were assigned the task of moving a pile of rubble from one end of the camp to the other. It was exhausting work, taking most of the day. Bright and early the next morning the captives were given their new work assignments. The order was strikingly familiar. Move the same mound of rocks from this corner of the camp back to the other. Do you see the tortuous sequence and the sinister intent behind the directive? Day after day, prisoners moved the same load of rubble from one edge of the encampment to the other. It was meaningless work, deadly work. It was work that was deadly, not for the body, but for the soul.

The pledge to provide meaningful work begins with providing training that has relevant application to life. Coupled with this pledge is the willingness to allow people to actually practice what they have learned.

If I teach you how to use the bus, I must then allow you to take the bus. If I teach you how to make a purchase, I must then allow you to buy something with your own money the next time we go shopping.

The logic may seem obvious, but there is often a tradition of practicing for life yet never allowing people to live life. Training for life ensures people experience “opening night.”

Practical life-training is reflected in the approach Shepherds College takes when developing curricula for the students. They use the REAL acronym to guide the training experience. REAL stands for Relational, Experiential, Applicable, and Learner-Based.

Relational

Ministry flows out of relationship. If there is no relationship, there is no ministry, only a program. With this in mind, developing training that has a relational component is critical for effective learning. This includes trainer to learner interactions as well as learner to learner engagement.

Experiential

The Shepherds Way of instruction emphasizes the hands-on nature of learning that is particularly suited for people with disabilities. Just lecturing or talking does not facilitate effective learning. Discovery arouses curiosity and promotes learning.

Applicable

Every learner is asking the “what’s in it for me” question, whether they realize it or not. The effective trainer makes sure that every learning module answers this question directly. In a conversation with Tracy Terrill, the Executive Director of Shepherds College, I was struck by his absolute commitment to importance of application in the learning process. He adamantly instructs his faculty, “If it isn’t applicable, don’t teach it.” This is real life training.

Learner Based

Educators often make the mistake of becoming more enamored with the subject matter than with the needs of the student. Training is a relational process that takes into consideration the unique learning styles of each student. Allowing learners to approach material in a manner consistent with their preferred learning style enhances comprehension and skill development. The concrete nature of individuals with special needs requires attention if learning is to be effective. Finally, the role of autonomy in the training process needs to be appreciated. When learners are allowed to make choices, intrinsic motivation is stimulated, enhancing learning and retention.

Continual

Filling out forms is one of those little annoyances in life that seems unavoidable. These forms frequently ask us to provide the number of years of education we have attained. High School graduates mark "12." College graduates mark "16" and so on. When faced with such requests, I have often been tempted to pencil in my age. Why? Perhaps because I believe living life is an education in itself. It may not be formal education but it is certainly an education. How tragic to think that learning stops once school lets out. Learning is a perpetual journey that continues long after textbooks begin collecting dust on the shelves of a used bookstore. Every day we have opportunities to grow, to expand our awareness, to learn something new. Frankly, in today's economy we must be forever learning and improving our skills as technology and the corporate world demand more and more from us.

This emphasis is of critical importance at the organizational level. Everyone should be expected to be continual learners. Organizations insist on continuing education for professional staff and provide on-going internal in-service training. We must always be learning.

The same emphasis applies to people with disabilities. The commitment to Train for Life implies that there will be on-going, continual training. For some this may be remedial skill training for the purpose of preventing the loss of ability or function. For others it is developing new skills, building on previously learned competencies. Regardless, Ai is dedicated to continual, life-long training.

In this context, however, an important distinction must be made. The role toward an adult with disabilities is not that of a parent. A training emphasis does not attempt to replicate a parent-child relationship. Instead, the role is that of consultant or coach, providing a rich resource of tools and insights for those who would secure our services.

But what if you are a parent. Does the role ever change? This is a critical issue in many families touched by disability. Having been given the responsibility to care for a child with disabilities, many parents see the assignment as a life-long calling. Furthermore, the level of disability experienced by the child complicates the letting go process for the parent and potentially perpetuates a parent-child dynamic in the relationship. It is important to recognize that being the parent of a child, regardless of disabilities, is an ever adapting role in which the child's behaviors and needed levels of support are ever changing as maturity is achieved. The key error we make with our children is to create dependency rather than encourage the pursuit of Appropriate Independence. (For more on this theme, go to <http://www.shepherdsresources.org/letting-go.html>) Training a child is for the purpose of releasing them toward greater degrees of Appropriate Independence. As such, it is imperative that as the child develops, particularly as they reach adulthood, that our approach shifts from parenting to coaching. Now the continual emphasis on learning is not that of a fearful, hovering parent, but that of a facilitator and trainer.

For staff or volunteers working with this population, the parent-child dynamic must be ever monitored and, once recognized, quickly stifled. Historically, care-givers were given titles such as house-parent, further confusing the nature of the relationship. Assuming a parental style in one's interaction with a person with disabilities is disrespectful and encourages dependency. It also leads to a shift in the power dynamic between the two individuals. Acting as a parent perpetuates an authoritarian, control posture rather than the collaborative, facilitative style characteristic of the Ai attitude.

Ai seeks to influence and empower people with intellectual/developmental disabilities. Ai does not command; it counsels. Therefore, Ai recognizes the rights of people with disabilities to resist the training offered. Obviously, at some point there may be a parting of ways, however, the driving motivation is to provide support and guidance in a context of respect and appropriate independence.

Eternal

Knowledge is of little value if it does not lead to the knowledge of God. Ai's ultimate objective is to see people with intellectual/developmental disabilities come to know their Creator through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. For this we are unapologetic. Our training, therefore, has an emphasis on things that are of eternal significance.

Critical to this mission is truth in advertising. Those who consider the Ai philosophy must know that Christian faith infiltrates every aspect of the program. By clearly communicating this distinctive, we hope to avoid misunderstanding and resentment.

Evangelicals have long debated the merits of a social gospel. Historically, we have chosen to err on the side of theological purity to the neglect of the personal and practical needs of people. As we embrace the mandate of ministry to the whole person, we find there is a delicate balance between the spiritual and the physical. We are committed to train for eternal life.

The issue of evangelism and discipleship as it relates to people with disability is often the source of considerable debate and confusion. Does a person with intellectual disability need salvation? Do they get a free pass into heaven because of their disability? The answers must balance theological teaching with an accurate understanding of the diverse nature of intellectual disability. Failure to appreciate Principle 2 of Ai, "Created as Individuals, For Community," will distort one's response to the concern.

Given the conviction that God has created us as unique individuals with varying gifts and abilities, we must not assume a "one size fits all" answer. The label of intellectual disability often masks the unique and varied capacity of the individual. A

closer look at the distribution of intelligence, for example, suggests that 2.5% of the population falls within the designation of intellectual disability. An IQ of 70 is two standard deviations from the mean IQ of 100 and triggers the first qualification for a diagnosis of intellectual disability. While additional factors weigh into the diagnosis, for the sake of this discussion we remain focused on statistics and percentages related to the normal distribution curve. Parents, and those in the medical and behavioral sciences, recognize that a person with an IQ of 70 functions at a level distinctly different from individuals assessed with an IQ of 55, 40 or 25 (note 15 point differences consistent with the standard deviation of measurement used when interpreting an IQ along the normal curve).

The first error that many make when addressing the issue of salvation for people with intellectual disabilities is to assume that they all function at the same level. What many also fail to appreciate is the fact that those individuals who function at the higher end of the distribution curve (IQ's of 70-40 often labeled Mild and Moderate) most likely have the intellectual capacity to comprehend the Gospel message. Granted, those on the lower moderate end may have increasing difficulty with comprehension and would need to be more carefully assessed.

The key issue here is to not assume inability when it comes to understanding spiritual things. The assumption that people with intellectual disabilities are all the same and that they all are unable to cognitively grasp the message of Scripture is not only prejudicial, but risks neglecting the spiritual needs of this population. To compound the matter, 80 to 90 percent of those with intellectual disabilities fall within the mild to moderate range, further emphasizing the importance of reaching this people group within every people group. If one believes in the value of child evangelism, then why would one not consider the importance of reaching this population for Christ? Regardless of one's doctrinal position on the issue, it is of critical importance to factor in this information concerning cognitive capacity.

And what about those who function at a level so low as to preclude understanding the message of faith? God is sovereign and God is good. I trust Him to make the right call.

Training or Education

For some, the use of the word "train" evokes memories of a time when people with disabilities were classified as being either "trainable" or "educable." With such labels came a generalizing and limiting attitude that failed to recognize the rich diversity of capacity and giftedness among people with disability. As a result, the word "trainable" and its derivatives fell into disrepute. "We train animals, we educate people" was the often recited mantra.

There is no doubt that such historical distinctions were in direct conflict with Principle 2 which promotes the unique and varied capacity of each individual. The decision to use the word "train" in the Ai philosophy was intentional, strategic and

not without some controversy. Our use of the word does not imply approval or adoption of a primitive classification system used in times past. The word “train” has contemporary merit, and needs to be viewed apart from its historical association. In a business context, training is a well accepted word that is used without qualifying remarks about the differences between human and animal learning methods. Thus, Ai uses the word “train” to emphasize the practical and relevant aspects of the learning process. Furthermore, “train” focuses on outcomes and skills critical to success in the real world.

So, when Ai speaks of training, be assured that it is not in support of an archaic classification system, nor does it fail to appreciate the importance of thinking skills and other cognitive aspects of learning. Ai seeks to Train for Life; to provide people with intellectual disabilities the resources and learning experiences that will assist them in expressing their giftedness in pursuit of purpose.

An emphasis on education over training is often defended by the distinction that education teaches the learner how to think, rather than just demonstrate rote skills. It focuses on the mind, not just the behavior. But the polarization of the two concepts is artificial and of little practical value. Is the University superior to the Vocational School? Is one setting for smart people, the other for the less intellectually endowed? Does an emphasis on skill training negate the need for understanding, problem solving, and assessment? Does training neglect the mind and only modify the behavior? And how often is the typical higher education process criticized for being abstract, theoretical and disconnected from real life application? The divisions are enflamed when academics are accused of “ivory tower” superiority. And so the conflict is perpetuated. Should not learning, education, training (whichever term one prefers), focus on the learner and the process of instruction adapted to the needs and goals of the consumer? In the end it is about the people we serve.

Principle Four: Empowered to Serve

If there was ever a disenfranchised group of people, it would be those with intellectual disabilities. History’s attitude toward those with disabilities has vacillated from perverse worship to violent extermination. The Nazi purges of WWII, for example, focused their evil aim not just on Jews but also on people with intellectual disabilities. More often than not, however, indifference and neglect mark the posture of the world toward those with disabilities.

In response to this unfortunate disposition, Ai attempts to empower people with intellectual disabilities in whatever manner is appropriate.

The Definition of Empowerment

When we speak of empowerment, we mean releasing others to pursue and achieve their ordained purpose. We will resist the tendency to withhold opportunity, second-guess capacity, and to assume we know what is best. Instead we will work collaboratively with those we serve to support them in reaching their maximum

level of Appropriate Independence (Ai™). (Remember, we do not define appropriate, God does. It is His standard to which we align ourselves, not one of our own making.)

Debate

The word empowerment triggers diverse reactions. For some, it is simply a faddish “buzz-word” used flippantly by motivational speakers or found sprinkled throughout trending business literature. Certainly, the word is not without limitation. Nevertheless, it has been strategically selected because powerlessness seems endemic to the plight of people with disabilities.

An alternative word might be “enable,” yet that too has a negative connotation in psychological and substance abuse circles. In fact, we would strongly resist the use of enable given its link with co-dependency. Historically, well-intentioned care giving has been a front for co-dependent enmeshment (see previous discussion on benevolent caregiving) and has inadvertently undermined Appropriate Independence.

Empowerment also has political connotations that are not intended in this context. Certainly there are political issues at stake, yet what serves a political agenda does not always profit the individual who is the supposed beneficiary for such action. Sadly, in the push for inclusion (a good and necessary cause and value) the needs of the individual are sometimes sacrificed for a social or political agenda.

For example, securing a place for a student with disabilities in a college classroom addresses the issue of segregation and, for that reason, is a valiant effort. Unfortunately, the motivation is often social with the intent of breaking down prejudicial attitudes and promoting diversity. This is all well and good, but not if it is at the expense of an individual’s academic growth. Placing a student with intellectual disabilities in a college classroom and allowing that individual to room with non-disabled peers, is a win socially, but not necessarily academically. Ironically, such an attitude is tainted with prejudice itself. To settle for simply getting someone in the classroom implies that we have given up on their academic potential. It is “good enough” that they are seen and that our culture is faced with the need to integrate people with disability. But what about the actual learning that is supposedly the primary purpose for college? Does the student adequately comprehend the lesson? Has the instructor modified both content and style for the learner with an intellectual disability? Certainly supports and accommodations are provided for those with learning disabilities, but what of those with intellectual disabilities? What if the nature of the disability means they will take much, much longer to learn and retain the knowledge and skills than that of their non-disabled peers? Do we slow the classroom down and wait for those who are slower? What if the material is simply beyond the intellectual capacity of the learner? And if such a comment seems condescending, think back to your own academic career. I personally struggled with anything related to numbers. There’s a reason some of us

are not physicians or physicists – we just don't have the intellectual horsepower. It isn't personal; it's just wiring.

To suggest that a student be placed in a classroom specifically designed to address their unique learning needs seems regressive, but is it? What if the student learns more in the end? Is the answer really either/or? In the debates among industry professionals, this is sadly the predicament. Rather than either/or, could it not be both/and? There is a need for inclusion and integration, yet at the same time the individual priority of preparation and skill development. The social is not more or less important than the academic. Both are necessary, suggesting that our solutions will be found in a diversity of academic alternatives for our students. Debate lends itself to black or white positions, but such tensions do little to serve those with disabilities. We promote Individual Education Plans (IEP) with sensitivity to the unique, individual needs of the learner. Why would we settle for a one-size-fits-all education solution?

Crafting educational experiences for a learner requires flexibility and diverse options. Instead of professionals deciding what is best and then mandating (and funding) that option, perhaps parents, educators, and learners should collaborate to design custom educational environments focused on the unique needs of the learner.

When a seminary invites people with intellectual disabilities to live with their ministerial students, they take a positive step in breaking down disability barriers. Such encounters allow the pastorally inclined to “practice what they preach” on a first hand basis. I suspect it is a good experience for both the seminary student and the person with disability. But is the roommate with intellectual disabilities also a student in the seminary or are they simply a recipient of pastoral care? I would anticipate that they both benefit, but is the benefit intentional and planned? Is it reciprocal ministry? This is not to suggest the program be changed; it is simply to highlight the limitations of any endeavor, regardless of how well-meaning or popular it may be. No program satisfies every need.

This issue has personal significance for Shepherds. Shepherds College offers a customized approach to post-secondary education for young adults with intellectual disabilities. It is not an integrated program. When asked about the percentage of students with disabilities in our school, the answer is 100%. Ironically, instead of being applauded, it is often met with disdain. We are not inclusive, we are exclusive, and that contradicts the acceptable model. But such exclusiveness is intentional and motivated by the best interests of the student, not prevailing political attitudes. Mainstreaming makes perfect sense in many situations, but it is not the only alternative, particularly at advanced levels. What benefit is it if a student goes to college, but never learns anything academically? Does integrated dorm life really “Train for Life?” Not completely and certainly not intentionally. Such learning is complementary and secondary to the primary objective of college, which is the subject one chooses to major in. What if both student and parent prefer a

customized, disability-centric program that creates a learning environment that is not just safe, but also transformative?

To suggest that such a program is inferior is counterproductive. Yet, when alternative educational options run contrary to the gods of political correctness, they are often demonized or at the very least, looked at with condescension and disdain. And as far as funding goes, that won't be an option. The end result is empowerment for/of the cause, but disempowerment for/of the individual.

Disempowerment

Acts of disempowerment can be both overt and covert. A subtle, hidden expression of discrimination is to passively obstruct access to opportunity. When prejudicial attitudes based on assumptions of ability, or more specifically, assumptions of disability, keep a person with disabilities from exercising their skills (no matter how limited), disempowerment has occurred.

One subtle expression of disempowerment is to do a task for someone else because we either assume they cannot do it, or we are in too much of a hurry, and it is easier to do it ourselves. Parents certainly understand the latter. But in reality, such action advances only our own interests, and not the interests of the one we are supposedly serving. Being a servant, as we will see in the next section, is not doing everything for someone else. That's called enabling. Sometimes we best serve when we insist that the one we are helping do it themselves.

Providing opportunity is of little value if there has been no preparation. Training for Life attempts to lay the foundation of skill and values needed to take advantage of opportunities should they arise. However, once there is capacity, is there opportunity? For many individuals with disability, the opportunity never materializes. It is undermined by assumptions and preconceived notions regarding ability. It is precluded by bias and misunderstanding. "Let me do it for you" may soothe one's conscience but does little to release potential of the one being helped. "That's too hard for you" may eventually prove true, but should it be assumed or proven? Empowerment necessitates opportunity, but sadly, opportunity is often sabotaged by well-intended helpers.

If we truly want to see people pursue their purpose, we must provide both opportunity and training – that's empowerment. One without the other is counterproductive. Opportunity without training sets an individual up for failure. When that person fails, it not only reinforces stereotypes of helplessness and incompetence toward people with disabilities, it is also demoralizing for the one who failed. But even worse than failing is to never have had the opportunity to try. Providing opportunity involves actively looking for ways in which ability can be released. If we restrain our tendency to either do it for them or have someone else do it, then we are regularly saying, "you can do it" or "give it a try."

Equally disempowering is the hesitancy to allow someone to fail. Driving this hesitancy is a pre-occupation with disability, rather than ability. Embedded in a disability focus is the expectation of failure. Assuming one will fail and, therefore, justifying the withholding of opportunity, takes away the right of that individual to at least try, even if failure is a possible outcome. Such attitudes are rationalized by a well-meaning desire to protect someone from the pain and embarrassment of failure. But doesn't respecting the rights of people with disability also mean allowing them to experience the same things that non-disabled people encounter? Must we only allow good things to happen to those who have a disability? Providing opportunity, not guaranteeing success is only reasonable.

Now inject "supports" and "accommodations" into the performance equation. While mandated by law, such supports can, inadvertently, create the very problem they were designed to erase. In our fear of injuring self-esteem, we adapt and support to the point of enabling. In extremes, it is neither healthy for the individual nor society as it breeds an artificial estimate of real capacity. People without disability become resentful. People with disability get a pat on the back and falsely believe that their performance was qualitatively identical to everyone else's performance. The error finds its root in the fusion of essential worth and functional worth. While human beings are equal in essence, they are not equal in function.

So should supports and accommodations be eliminated? Of course not! Accommodation is almost always qualified by the word, "reasonable." Typically, the determination of reasonable is for the sake of the provider, not the individual. In other words, if the provider can reasonably support the individual, then they should do so. But what if such supports create an artificial reality that distorts the truth of human limits? Should we provide supports that exceed normal human capacity? If in a Track and Field competition, I pick up an athlete with quadriplegia and throw her over the high jump does that count? While the example is extreme, the issue remains quite controversial. We see it often expressed in sporting competitions (the ultimate platform for functional worth and identity). Does a golfer with a physical limitation gain competitive advantage if they are allowed to use a golf cart, while the other golfers walk? Do the titanium limbs of a sprinter with disability provide an advantage because of adaptive technology? When technology eventually allows the artificial limb to propel its user at speeds far exceeding that of human legs, should we encourage its use? It is an interesting debate. Are there limits to the level of support that should be provided to a person with disability? Who determines such limits? The individual? Society? We don't resent the use of spectacles or hearing aids, but are they not also supports? It would seem the issue only becomes significant when the support allows for superior performance, rather than just "normal" performance.

Now move the discussion from physical performance to intellectual performance. If I help you with an exam by giving you the answers, that is considered cheating. It is one thing to be given more time to complete a test, or to be allowed a distraction free setting, it is quite another to take the test for you. When can we be courageous

enough to acknowledge that someone is not able to do or understand something and leave it at that? Why must we feel compelled to give them a pass when any objective analysis shows that they have failed? This is not an issue of judging the person; it is about judging the performance. When the one team scores, we don't arbitrarily give the other team a point so as not to hurt their self-esteem. When an exam is graded, some will do better than others. Do we subjectively adjust the grades so that everyone can pass? Grading on the curve would seem to take on a new meaning in such context.

How far do we go in supporting an individual intellectually and behaviorally? Let me provide you with a real-life controversy surrounding this issue.

I would hope that we all would recognize that individuals with intellectual disabilities are sexual creatures. To be fully human is to be fully sexual. That is God's design; that is God's gift. We also recognize that sexuality transcends the physical act and also involves our mind, will, emotions, values, and spirituality. Given the complex nature of our sexuality, it is understandable that there is considerable confusion and debate on the matter. But who determines what is sexually appropriate for an individual with limited intellectual capacity? Whose values are recognized? The caregiver's? Society's? The individual? How far do we go in supporting sexual behavior when at issue is not the act, rather the understanding of the full implications of the act? In some countries, sexual surrogates (often prostitutes) are legally provided under the guise of "independence" and "rights" to those with disability. Look beneath the troubling legal and moral aspects of the policy, and focus on the rationale behind providing these accommodations. The "if you can't, we will help" mantra seems grotesquely perverted in this context.

Supports and accommodations are the right of every individual. It would be foolhardy to undermine the hard fought political and social battles waged by disability advocates. That certainly is not our intention. Rights must always be balanced with "right" and what is right for the individual may not always align with the mood of the disability industry.

Our preoccupation with functioning rather than the appreciation of our differences needs to be challenged. We place such emphasis on being the same functionally that we miss the more important value of essence. Once that deeper attitude is aligned with God's heart, the issues of function become more reasonable. Now "who's better" is not a question of personhood, but rather an assessment of function. In turn, we can find the right person for the task relative to their ability rather than arbitrarily fulfilling a quota demanded by social engineers. The Scriptures tell us that the body has many members and that ALL are needed. All function differently and even the WEAKER members are necessary. With that in mind, we can then purposefully prepare and then release individuals to their calling (vocation), regardless of disability. What complicates the matter are the attitudes of those without disability. Our focus on competition quickly pushes the less-abled to the end

of the line, on the bench and for some, out of sight, out of mind. The issue isn't ability, it's pride and selfishness, exalting function over essence.

The Source of Empowerment

Understanding empowerment also requires us to consider the source of empowerment. People with disability are well acquainted with powerlessness. It is, unfortunately, inherent in their condition. That's why it's called a disability. Be it powerlessness due to physiological malfunction or sociological oppression, not having power is endemic to the experience of disability. But as we seek empowerment, it is easy to elevate self at the risk of minimizing our dependence on God. The Scriptures tell us that we "can do all things through Christ, who strengthens us." Implied in this verse is the recognition that our efforts are ultimately empowered by a dependency on Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit working in us. Does this verse only apply to spiritual activities? Does the Holy Spirit empower me to make my bed, brush my teeth, or do my job? Or, does this verse only apply to those things that I cannot do in my own strength? In other words, do I do it on my own until I need some help, and then ask God for strength? That would make God the equivalent of a 5-hour energy drink, to be used for our own purposes to accomplish our own agendas. Do you serve God or does God serve you? It's an important question because the answer ultimately determines our theology and our practice.

Or does the verse simply address the way in which we do our tasks? I do it in my own strength, but I do it in a manner that is pleasing to God. Frankly, if I do it in my own strength and then offer up my actions as a sacrifice of praise, I've emulated Cain's approach to worship. Sinatra crooning "I did it my way" has musical panache, but is hardly an anthem for worship. Or is it? Frankly, this is the humanist manifesto put to music. Hardly appealing to a sovereign God.

Human effort and divine empowerment - an interesting combination. Is it one without the other or both together? And if both together, in what balance? 50/50? 80/20? And how does this even relate to people with intellectual disabilities? We certainly want to praise human effort, particularly when the task is strenuous. And, in our context of disability, what may seem trivial is often a herculean task. Is it right to praise such determination? Of course it is, but at the same time, without balance, we risk promoting a self-effort that aggrandizes the person to the neglect of the one who truly empowers us. Does this principle only apply when the task itself borders on the super-human? Certainly in that context, the temptation to be god-like and proud would seem greater. But what about tying my shoes, washing my face, or writing a simple sentence? Certainly there is no risk of human pride surfacing in such seemingly inconsequential tasks, is there? Your answer reflects your worldview, particularly your view of humanity and your view of disability. We assert that all people, regardless of race, gender or disability are created in the image of God. We also assert that all people are broken because of the Fall. At the root of our fallenness is pride. Pride establishes the self as the final authority and the source of all power. People with disability are not immune to this disposition.

People with disability don't get a pass on this issue. Pride is pride and its expression, even in the heart of a person with disability, is unhealthy. To assert otherwise is promote a double-standard. While it may seem pro-disability, it promotes a distinction that is of no value and of great consequence. Ironically, the quest for equal rights includes the right to be equally fallen. To argue otherwise is to suggest people with disability are not equally human.

So, how do we encourage a healthy self-confidence coupled with a humble dependency on God? How do we pat someone on the back and proclaim, "You did it!" yet at the same time encourage a recognition that God is the source of our strength? The same way we do it with anyone else. As they are learning and trying we say, "God will help you; He will give you strength." Then upon completion of the task we say, "Good job! You really tried hard. God helped you." We are not passive marionettes manipulated by some divine puppet master. Our humanity and the very image of God within us, is expressed in the power of choice. Those choices can be self-energized or Spirit empowered and each choice brings corresponding consequences. How important it is to allow choice, yet at the same time reinforce the principle of "doing all things through Christ."

While empowerment is an integral component of independence, the emphasis of Appropriate Independence and a unifying theme throughout our discussion of Ai is balance. It's the Appropriate in Ai that keeps independence in check. Individuality without the balance of community is self-serving and self-focused. Created as an Individual for Community brings both into harmony. So it is with empowerment. Empowerment out of balance regresses to self-serving efforts designed to advance our own agenda. Ai believes in appropriate empowerment and balances empowerment with service. We Empower to Serve.

Service

The purpose of authority and the power that comes with it is for the intent of serving those under that authority. This is the Biblical model. Power and authority are always granted in order to fuel service. And so, in that vein, we propose a balancing relationship between empowerment and service. We empower to serve. While discussions of serving are easily understood in a Christian context, it is a concept that arouses suspicion in the world at large. The barbarism of slavery retains a residual tenderness in the conscience of our country. We are, and should be, sensitive to issues that speak of becoming a "servant." In the proper context serving is a crucial component of God's plan for this world and for His church. Christ humbled Himself and took on the form of a servant and we who would seek the mind of Christ follow suit. We are servants teaching others to serve. This is the Biblical model we embrace. We apply it to our own conduct and expect the same for our clients.

Is there a place for people with intellectual disabilities to serve? Our first instinct is to think that they are the ones who need be served. They are the disadvantaged, the

disabled. Should we not be serving them? Yes, but not because they have a disability, but because they are people. Is there a place of service for people with cognitive limitations? Is there a place they can serve without being taken advantage of, without being “enslaved?”

We must look for that place and, if it does not exist, create it. We must challenge our spiritual communities to find opportunities for putting faith into action, for a place of service within the local body of Christ.

As part of a spiritual community can you think of a place where a person with disabilities could serve?

- Hospital visitation?
- Handing out bulletins?
- Being a greeter?
- Visiting shut-ins?
- Setting up chairs in the auditorium?
- Praying for the sick?
- Stuffing envelopes?

AI prepares people with disabilities to be servants because a servant spirit is the hallmark of an effective employee. When a person with disabilities working in the community manifests the character qualities of a Christ-like servant, God is glorified.

Ministry is effective when the people who are being ministered to are ministering. Ministry has now gone full circle. How much more pleasing it must be in the sight of God when we are ministering WITH people with disability rather than just TO people with disability. Now granted, sometimes disability is so profound that the victim of that impairment can only receive. But let’s not begin with that assumption. A frequent refrain among volunteers who come to serve at Shepherds is that they received far more than they gave. The Scriptures remind us that, “it is more blessed to give than to receive.” Many times the blessing comes from giving, but we must make another distinction. Yes, sometimes the volunteer is blessed because they blessed others. More often, however, they are blessed by the very ones they came to bless. Can you see the difference? They received a blessing from the ones they came to serve. They blessed, and they were blessed in return. They served, and they were served in return. The ministry was not one direction, rather reciprocal. How did our clients serve the ones who came to serve them?

Listen to a few of the comments of our volunteers, many of whom were teenagers involved in our Friends Program:

“I was accepted for who I was. I was shown unconditional love.”

“I got lost on campus and someone showed me the way.”

“I mentioned a concern and they immediately stopped and prayed for me.

“I had been struggling with the fact that I am here for a purpose. That week with Faith helped me so incredibly much. She helped me. God used her to speak to me, and I

am so thankful for that! God used the week as a whole to remind me that His ways are so much better than mine."

"I liked how everyone was open. They loved you even though they just met you. We shouldn't judge people by their looks."

"God worked wonders in my life through the residents here." This was the greatest week ever! It's amazing that every time I come to serve, I end being served more than I expected!

Interesting responses aren't they? When the people we are ministering to are ministering, our mission has been successful. In order for that to be accomplished, we must Empower to Serve.

Do you work with someone who has a disability? Are you the parent of a child with disabilities? The Ai attitudes find expression in action. One such action is a commitment to Empower to Serve.

Serving in Perspective

It has been said that the true test of being a servant is when you are treated like one. And while we would never condone the mistreatment of people, it is inevitable that such experiences occur. How do we prepare a person with disabilities for servanthood? How do we teach them to respond when they are being treated in a slave-like fashion? When is submission to authority or deference to others healthy and when does it become toxic and dysfunctional? These are issues that everyone deals with, but people with disability confront additional challenges.

Historically, people with intellectual disabilities have been vulnerable to manipulation and abuse. For the profoundly impaired, neglect, abandonment, or at best institutional warehousing were typical outcomes. For those capable of work, their labor was typically menial with little attention to safety, adequate compensation, or meaningfulness. So when Ai asserts the importance of being a servant, it is not without potential for misunderstanding. Words and ideas are always filtered through historical context and thus have the potential to carry unintended associations. Being a servant is not being a slave. Being a servant does not require oneself to be taken advantage of or abused. This is not what we are advocating. A servant's attitude is at the heart of Ai. Once empowered, we use such capacity for the advancement of more than just the individual; we seek a greater impact on our community. People with disability can make a difference in our world, however they have often been hidden and excluded from the workforce. Sadly, disability advocacy must confront somewhat contradictory attitudes when it comes to people with disability and work.

The first is the assumption that people with intellectual disabilities are incapable of meaningful work. To this we assert that work was part of God's design for all mankind, including people with disabilities. Every human being has a divine calling on their lives, a calling to work. This is our "vocation" or calling. Such work is not exclusive to the clergy, rather it is woven into God's creative intent for all mankind.

The significance of such work may vary by human standards, but all work is noble as it fulfills the creation mandate. Remember, work is not a consequence of the fall. Adam tended a garden prior to his tumble into disobedience. Yes, work like all of creation has been corrupted, but the original intent was for mankind to work. If we see people with disabilities as fully human, then they too should have full opportunity to fulfill that calling, that vocation.

Secondly, forced labor under conditions that take advantage of intellectual limitations is reprehensible. The right to work may have been satisfied, but at the cost of human rights. Having earned the right to work does not preclude the right to safe and appropriately compensated work. How easy it has been for unscrupulous employers to take advantage of the intellectually disabled.

Thirdly, we would assert that if at all possible, work should be meaningful. Meaningfulness covers both the work itself and its value in the mind of the worker. Both are significant. We recognize that some tasks appear trivial on the surface but are, nevertheless, necessary for accomplishing a greater objective. When President Kennedy visited the Space Center in 1962, he asked a custodian to explain his job. The answer was unexpected. "We're sending a man to the moon!" was the confident reply. While some may see janitorial services as insignificant, this man understood the role each individual played in accomplishing the greater vision. To him, his work was meaningful. I suspect President Kennedy agreed.

Does this illustration remind you of a Scripture passage? Does I Corinthians 12 come to mind? "Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually." This is why we assert that we have been Created as Individuals for Community. This is why we Empower to Serve. That service is on behalf of a community. It is not self-centered or self-empowered. As individual members of the body of Christ, we have a job to do. It is job for which we have been created; it is a job that aligns personal strengths with community need. Serving others accomplishes that mission, and it is a task ripe with meaning and significance.

Summary

The four quadrants of Ai do not exist in isolation. They build on one another in a complementary fashion. Principles One and Two are attitude principles that find application and action in Principles Three and Four. If we believe people are designed by God on and for a Purpose, then we will train them for that life purpose. If we believe that people have been created as individuals for community then we will empower them to use their abilities and strengths in service to their community.

Conclusion

The journey is long, full of options and opportunities, fraught with frustrations and obstacles. Our ministry aligns itself with people who are grappling with intellectual disabilities and walks with them along this challenging path. Our collaborative partnership is born out of our heart for ministry. Our view of people as image-bearers shapes our attitude and our actions. In the course of this journey we have discovered a few important things:

First, God has a plan and a purpose for each of His children. He has designed us on purpose, for purpose. As we discover and execute that purpose we become a part of the Master's plan for this universe. That is living life on purpose.

Secondly, the uniqueness of our individuality displays the artistry and creative power of an awesome God. He has created us as individuals, special and valued. But His creative purpose also places us in community in which we can contribute and flourish. He has created us as individuals for community.

Because of this perspective, we commit ourselves to providing services that will realize and release the potential of every client. Consequently, we will Train for Life and Empower to Serve.

This is the Shepherds Way, expressed through a philosophy of ministry called Appropriate Independence.

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