

Joni Eareckson Tada Commemorates Luke 14 in a Unique Way

Right before a star-studded red carpet premiere of the newly-digitized movie *Joni*, the star of the film, Joni Eareckson Tada, focused attention on several regional churches who have partnered with Joni and Friends to provide exceptional service to individuals affected by disabilities and their families. In a special pre-screening reception, these churches were recognized with the Luke 14 Award to honor their fulfillment of Jesus' words in the Gospel of Luke. Tada said, "Everything we do at Joni and Friends—from sharing my story in film, to delivering wheelchairs around the world, to operating Family Retreats to serve special needs families—is driven by Jesus' command in the book of Luke to 'invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind and you will be blessed ... make them come in so my house will be full.' We are so excited that these churches have joined us on this journey, and we wanted to recognize them for the amazing job that they are doing!"

Those honored include Anthem Church in Thousand Oaks, Calvary Chapel of Oxnard, Calvary Community Church in Westlake Village, Calvary Nexus in Camarillo, Cornerstone Community Church in Simi Valley, Discovery Church in Simi Valley, Emmanuel Church in Thousand Oaks, Godspeak Calvary Church in Newbury Park, Gold Coast Christian Church in Oxnard, Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, Mission Church in Ventura and the Bridge Evangelical Free Church in Newbury Park. Grace Community Church was singled out for the longevity of its ministry, which was founded in 1976.

"These churches exemplify what we call 'Irresistible Churches,' which we define as authentic communities built on the hope of Christ that compels people affected by disability

to fully belong,” Tada added. “We invite other churches to explore how they might become irresistible, and we provide many free resources to help educate leaders and walk them through the process at our new online community .”

The evening was part of a celebration of God’s faithfulness to Tada through 50 years in her wheelchair. Joni and Friends partnered with Calvary Community Church to host the event, which was one of the featured recipients of the Luke 14 Award. Senior Pastor Shawn Thornton helped emcee the premiere, interviewing Tada about her experience making the film and sharing how God has honored her faithfulness over the five decades since her accident. Special guests attended an invitation-only reception before the film, where churches who had received the Luke 14 recognition were presented with their award. All guests who attended the movie event were able to enjoy the opportunity to walk the red carpet, view authentic *Joni* movie memorabilia and read many stories of various wheelchair recipients, all given through Joni and Friends Wheels for the World program.

Joni and Friends President and COO Doug Mazza explained the reason for the festivities surrounding the digitized film’s premiere: “While most people wouldn’t celebrate their 50th anniversary in a wheelchair, we see this event as a true celebration of Joni’s life and all that God has accomplished through her ministry because of her 50 years as a quadriplegic. We thought this timing for the *Joni* digitization and red-carpet premiere couldn’t be better and wanted to mark the occasion with fanfare. It was also important for us to recognize others who have been used by God in disability ministry, including our great friend Pastor Shawn Thornton and the many churches in the surrounding area that have embraced the Luke 14 mandate.”

Originally released in 1979 by Billy Graham’s Worldwide Pictures, *Joni* tells the story of a young Joni Eareckson Tada, injured in a diving accident at age 17, and her journey of

faith as she comes to understand how her quadriplegia can be used by God to draw others to Him. Subsequently translated into 15 languages and shown in countries all around the world, *Joni* has received new life through digitization, almost 50 years to the day since Joni's accident.

For more than 38 years, Joni and Friends has worked to accelerate ministry to the disability community around the world, offering a wide array of life-affirming ministries, including the Christian Institute on Disability; Wheels for the World; international radio and television programs filled with inspirational stories; and Family Retreats, where families affected by disability learn they are not alone. For more information, please visit /. {eoa}