

**World Down Syndrome Day (WDSD)**  
**Sue Lubowitz – OPC Service Chairperson**

Since 2007 WDSD is marked each year on March 21. The 21st day of the 3rd month signifies the triplication (or trisomy) of the 21st chromosome which causes Down Syndrome. The day is observed to create awareness about Down syndrome.

Down syndrome was first described as a condition by English physician John Langdon Down in 1866. It is not yet known why this syndrome occurs, but Down syndrome has always been a part of the human condition. It exists in all regions across the globe and commonly results in variable effects on learning styles, physical characteristics and health. The estimated incidence of Down syndrome is between 1 in 1,000 to 1 in 1,100 live births worldwide. Each year, approximately 3,000 to 5,000 children are born with this chromosome disorder. Approximately one in 750 live births — or 500 babies a year — is affected in Canada, according to the Public Health Agency of Canada.

A few years ago, headlines around the world announced that Iceland was on the verge of becoming the first country where no Down syndrome births occur. While screening tests are optional, up to 85 percent of pregnant women take them, and just as many who receive a positive result decide to terminate their pregnancy. Termination rates in much of Europe are similar to Iceland's, while Canada lacks reliable data. The intent is to eradicate Down Syndrome from society.

It should be deeply distressing to us to hear such a bold affirmation of eugenic intent. Selective termination on the basis of disability is a clear indication of the extent to which ableist ideologies infuse our culture. Ableism is a world view that presumes the centrality of non-disabled experience, and by extension presumes the inferiority of disabled experience. It has become pervasive in our society and goes against our Gospel of Life.

Psalms 139 beautifully reminds us how God uniquely designs all people: "For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well." The message of the Psalm opens our hearts to people who have historically lived on the margins of both society and the church. As women of faith, service and social justice, how can we go beyond inviting those different from us into our midst? Do we support the local L'Arche community? There are 6 in Ontario.  
(<https://www.larche.org/>).

Do we use our voice to advocate? This year's theme for World Down Syndrome Day 2025, is "A Call to Governments to Improve Our Support Systems". Adequate access to health care, to early intervention programmes, and to inclusive education, as well as appropriate research, is vital to the growth and development of the individual. Members are asked to advocate for improvements to support systems in their communities. For more information and resources visit:

<https://www.worlddownsyndromeday.org/wdsd-2025-resource-hub>

A common activity to mark the day is to wear colorful or mismatched socks, to show support for people with Down syndrome. Socks are shaped somewhat like chromosomes.

Councils may also wish to view the animated short film, "Freebird". It was created to recognize World Down Syndrome Day in 2021. It can be viewed here: ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mf\\_4dsQJAXE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mf_4dsQJAXE))

Let's continue to see Christ in the face of all we encounter.

