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### **Answering the Call**

Every journey begins with a call. Whether it's Gandalf the Grey disrupting a quiet hobbit life in the Shire, Obi-Wan ("Ben") Kenobi handing Luke his first lightsaber, Rosa Parks refusing to give up her seat on a bus, or Jesus asking fishermen to put down their nets and follow Him – journeys call us out of our comfort zones into a new way of life.

The journey of Karis Disability Services began when God called Jim and Adrienne Reese after the birth of their son, Steven. Born on March 5th, 1963, Steven had Rubinstein-Taybi Syndrome (RTS), a condition characterized by short stature, intellectual disability, and distinctive facial features. At that time, when somebody was born with a developmental disability, the accepted support option was to send them away to live in an institution. Jim and Adrienne wanted more for their son. They wanted Steven to be supported in a caring community that nurtured his faith and celebrated his gifts. Jim and Adrienne realized that God was calling them and they responded to the call.

In 1965, Jim and Adrienne, along with other families impacted by disabilities and supported by their church community, founded the Ontario Christian Association for Exceptional Children (later renamed Christian Horizons, and now, Karis Disability Services). Though a lot has changed in 60 years, we still hold to our values and our vision that *people with disabilities belong to communities in which their God-given gifts are valued and celebrated*. We are excited to celebrate this 60-year journey together this year, and we look forward to continuing this work for many years to come!

*"But the plans of the Lord stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations." (Psalm 33:11)*

### **Celebrate Every Journey**

Our 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary is a celebration of all our journeys and stories, reflecting God's abundant goodness and grace in our lives. Our 2025 theme, Celebrate Every Journey, was thoughtfully chosen by the Onward Communications Champions and Our Voices Matter Council. The theme is designed to help us

celebrate more often, honour our mission, hint at the work of a new strategic plan, and meaningfully mark our anniversary year. (*How did we do?!*)

We share stories at connections meetings, in the annual report, when we thank donors, and when we talk with our communities about what Karis *is* and *does*. As our organization's writer and storytelling coordinator, I have the immense pleasure of hearing the stories of families, people who use our services, global partners, and employees. I've written about child sponsorship uplifting entire families and communities; family camps offering much-needed vacations for families who experience disability; and how people with disabilities have changed their lives and accomplished their goals with the right support.

This year, we are sharing stories from the Karis family on our website, across social media, and at upcoming in-person events like our Annual Community Meetings in September and on the *International Day of Persons with Disabilities* (December 3<sup>rd</sup>). By sharing these stories, we celebrate every journey together. So far at [karis.org/60](https://karis.org/60), we've shared Reg and Yvonne's love story; Christopher's transformation into a good friend and housemate; Wogane's first day of school in an accessible classroom; and many more.

We will be sharing more stories to celebrate our 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and we hope you will share your stories too!

*To read the stories and to submit your own, visit [karis.org/60](https://karis.org/60).*

### Making the Connection

- Every journey starts with a call, asking us to get out of our comfort zone. When have you stepped out of your comfort zone to begin a new journey?
- As a team, what have you accomplished recently? How did you celebrate this step on the journey?
- What do you think developmental services will be like 60 years from now – in 2085? What might be different and what will stay the same?

