



Wings

...Those who wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.
Isaiah 40:31 [NRSV]

Vol. 8 Issue 3
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A Faithletter For, By and About
United Methodists With Disabilities



Winter
1998

FROM WHERE I SIT **By Jo D'Archangelis**

A year or so after World War II broke out, my family and I moved to Wayne, Michigan, a suburb of Detroit, where my father, and later my mother, found work in a defense factory.

For several years we lived in a government housing project. Wooden houses—small, single-story, rectangular clones of each other—sat close together on sloping lots, each separated from its immediate neighbors by a patch of ground, a couple of clotheslines, and a gravel driveway.

As a small child I was able to walk for a time in a rolling gait known as a “duck waddle.” I walked mostly by balancing myself against walls, furniture, whatever was available.

One day our next-door neighbor on the south side nailed together some boards in the shape of an A-frame, suspended a swing from it on chains, and placed it at the top of his driveway for his children to play on.

I lusted to get on that swing.

I don't remember how I made it over there; I must have waddled along the back of our house and then taken a few unsupported steps until I was able to grab one of the chains, turn myself around, and plop down onto the swing seat.

I deliberately chose a time when there was no one else around. It was a bright, shiny day, and I still remember the feel of the rough, sunwarmed wood of the seat on the back of my thighs.

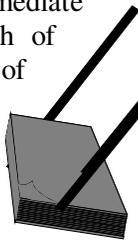
How I knew to set myself in motion without someone to push me, I have no idea (I probably watched the neighbor kids do it), but I grabbed the chains with both hands and stepped backwards as far as I could with my butt planted firmly in the seat.

I then leaned back and at the same time lifted and pushed my legs straight out in front of me. I moved forward in an excruciatingly small arc. Immediately I leaned my body

forward, pulled my legs back at the knees, and swung backward in a slightly bigger arc.

I repeated this pumping action—body leaning back, legs straight out, swing forward, body leaning forward, legs bent back, swing back—several times, arcing higher and higher with each pendulum stroke of the swing.

It was exhilarating, and it was frightening. I was so afraid my hands



How often since then in my hesitant groping through life have exhilaration and fear conmingled only to have the fear win out, short-circuiting the exhilaration?... Too many times, it seems.

would suddenly become tired and slip off the chains and I would fall onto the hardpacked ground below. But I continued to pump my legs back and forth, back and forth, swinging higher and higher through the air.

It wasn't too long, however, until I began to feel my body weaken from the exertion, and I had to stop pumping, hoping desperately that I wouldn't fall off the swing as the arcs became smaller and smaller and I finally came to a stop.

I don't remember how many trips I made to the swing after that—maybe one or two, maybe none. I loved it. I loved the freedom of pushing and pulling myself through the air, of flying back and forth above the

ground. I was just too scared of falling to do it more than a couple of times.

In my child's imagination though I continued to swing as long and as high as I wanted. But being ever practical even in my fantasies, I thought of myself as being enclosed by a special harness attached to the swing which kept me from falling, or, more accurately, kept me from being afraid of falling.

How often since then in my hesitant groping through life have exhilaration and fear conmingled only to have the fear win out, short-circuiting the exhilaration? How often has fear closed me off from the possibility of exhilaration in the first place? Too many times, it seems.

Years have passed and though I am a lot older and wheelchair-borne now, I am, somewhat paradoxically, a little less cautious than I used to be. In the ordinary and extraordinary events of my daily life I continue to take awkward, waddling steps to that swing, set myself down on the seat, grab the chains, and push myself this way and pull myself that way through the air, risking the fear to find the joy.

And while I have come to believe that “underneath are the everlasting arms,” I do not envision them as arms that wait to catch me should I fall but rather as arms that hold me in place as I try, in fits and starts and some days more successfully than others, to swing higher and higher.

Within Us There Are Wounds
Although within us there are wounds, Lord
Christ, above all there is the miracle of your
mysterious presence. Thus, made lighter or
even set free, we are going with you, the
Christ, from one discovery to another.

— Brother Roger of Taize —
Life from Within

'98 Cal-Pac Annual Conference**UMWDS ENCOURAGED TO PARTICIPATE IN WORSHIP SESSIONS**

Hopes for a disability worship session at the 1998 California-Pacific Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church at the University of Redlands evaporated when it was learned that the conference no longer permits specific groups to put on worship sessions. "Too many groups," explained Dr. Paula Ferris, senior pastor of the First United Methodist Church in Long Beach and chairperson of the Conference Worship Committee.

Instead, the focus is on diversity and inclusivity, i.e., the inclusion of individuals from as many ethnic, cultural, racial, and intergenerational backgrounds as possible in the five worship sessions planned.

Funny how conference discourse on diversity and inclusivity often overlooks certain major categories, so

we asked: Does this include United Methodists with disabilities (otherwise known as UMWDS)?

Oh yes, we were assured. In fact, Dr. Ferris invited us to send someone to represent disability concerns at meetings of the Worship Committee. Abby Vincent, a member of the United Methodist Church in Ocean Park, responded.

Accompanied by her guide dog, General Mills, Abby began her stint as disability rep at the November 7 meeting where she was made co-team leader for the Faith and Healing worship session to be presented on Friday morning at the Annual Conference.

"One of my tasks is to recruit persons with disabilities to serve as anointers for the healing worship session," she says. "This isn't healing as 'cure' but as moving towards wholeness or having our wholeness acknowledged. Grace accepts you the way you are." She adds that she is looking for clergy members with disabilities as well as laypersons.

If you are disabled and interested in volunteering as an anointer or in

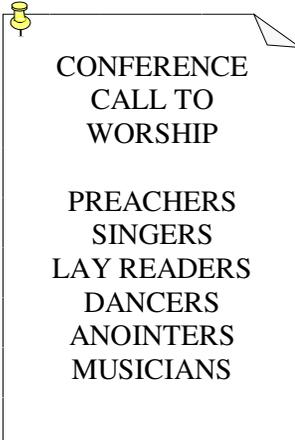
serving in any other capacity at one of the worship sessions, or if you just want to offer suggestions in the design of the worship sessions, please contact:
Abby Vincent
10834 Pickford Way
Culver City, CA 90230
[310] 559-4989
avincent@ix.netcom.com

"This isn't healing as 'cure' but as moving towards wholeness or having our wholeness acknowledged. Grace accepts you the way you are."

Dr. Ferris is also looking for groups to sing, dance, play musical instruments, or in some way perform during the worship sessions or prior to the plenary sessions at the 1998 Annual Conference. Groups including both disabled and non-disabled persons are urged to audition.

She asks that groups submit less than a single sheet of paper describing the group and its nature. Groups are also asked to send in a demo audio/video tape if possible. Contact:

Dr. Paula Ferris
First United Methodist Church
507 Pacific Avenue
Long Beach, CA 90802
[562] 437-1289
revpaf@aol.com

**LISTEN UP:
UMCD NEWS**

THE REV. KIRK A. VANGILDER, a deaf minister with a Master's degree from Iliff School of Theology in Denver, has been appointed to serve half-time as campus chaplain at Gallaudet University and half-time at Christ UMC of the Deaf in Baltimore (Baltimore-Washington Annual Conference).

THE TASK FORCE ON DEAF MINISTRY in the California-Pacific Annual Conference, under the leadership of Dixie Zimmer, has announced the establishment of a Deaf Ministry scholarship at Claremont School of Theology. Applicants' qualifications must include a basic understanding of Deaf Culture and fluency in American Sign Language.

AL MARTIN BOND, cyber-communications expert, has set up a UMCD home page and an e-mail newsletter, the "UMCD Digest." The UMCD Home Page may be accessed at: www.wco.com/~martinal/umcd.html Those wanting to receive the monthly "UMCD Digest" may e-mail Al at: martinal@wco.com



A non-official, non-profit quarterly newsletter published for, by and about United Methodist adults with disabling conditions

Founder/Editor • Computer Layout/Graphic Design
Jo D'Archangelis

Wings Needs The Following From You

Ideas and suggestions for articles	Original stories, poetry, cartoons
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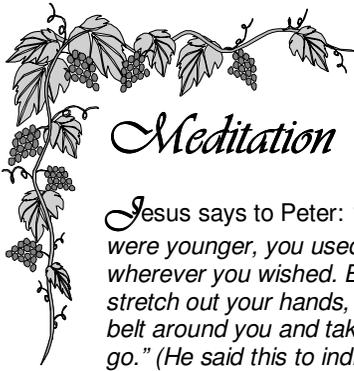
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Meditation

Jesus says to Peter: "Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go." (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, "Follow me." [John 21:18-19 NRSV]

This passage reminds me of the frustrations with which handicapped people must daily cope. The normal stresses of life become even greater problems in a crippled hand.

When I was twenty years old, I was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. I have reached my forty-third birthday and am grateful for the time to reflect on this life. Lessons have been severe and frustrations enormous, but through the example of the infinite patience of God, I've been able not only to accept this illness but ultimately to rejoice in it.

Through Jesus Christ's teachings we discover that he spoke and taught everyone without regard to physical condition. In God's eyes we are each equally his children, called by him to love Jesus and imitate his ways.

We are able to live with our frustrations and infirmities because we know that in the midst of them God has loved us.

We are intimately known by him.

— Rev. Dr. Susan Lemly —

Dr. Lemly, an ordained minister in the United Methodist Church, currently resides in San Clemente, California.

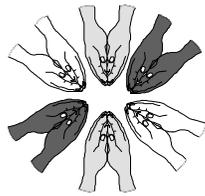
METHODISTS CALLED TO BE UNITED IN PRAYER

Editor's Note: The following is excerpted from an e-mail letter we recently received.

We are asking 1,000,000 United Methodists to join us in praying for revival in our denomination by the year 2000. Many seek to bring political and/or financial pressure for change and that has its place; however, we believe revival can and will come only if we humble ourselves and pray before Almighty God....

Our denomination has been losing 1000 members per week for almost three decades. For over 200 years, we have been a great force for God but the words of Revelation 3:1 "To the angel of the church of Sardis write...I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead" accurately describes many of our churches today.

Our answer lies not in another seminar, changing labels or programs,



but in responding to God's call to "...return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning. Rend your hearts and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God...." (Joel 2:12-13a).

No red tape! No politics! No programs! Just prayer....This is a grass roots appeal that is dependent upon your ACTING IN FAITH....We are a connectional church. Let's get connected in prayer. God is already moving in many places. Let us join Him.

Some guidelines: Use Isaiah 58 as a guide and let's claim Isaiah 58:8-14 for the UMC.

1. Pray every day, but especially on Fridays, for revival until the year 2000. John Wesley prayed, "Lord, send us a revival without defects, but if that is not possible, send us revival, defects and all."

(UNITED IN PRAYER continued on page 4)

Beatitudes

Blessed are you who take time to listen to defective speech, for you help us to know that if we persevere, we can be understood.

Blessed are you who walk with us in public places and ignore the stares of strangers, for in your companionship we find havens of relaxation.

Blessed are you that never bid us "hurry up" and more blessed are you that do not snatch our tasks from our hands to do them for us, for often we need time rather than help.

Blessed are you who stand beside us as we enter new ventures, for our failures will be outweighed by times we surprise ourselves and you.

Blessed are you who ask for our help, for our greatest need is to be needed.

Blessed are you who realize that I am human and don't expect me to be saintly just because I am disabled.

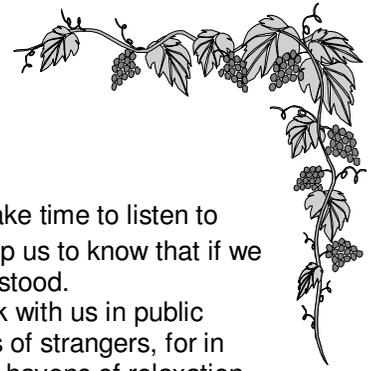
Blessed are you who understand that sometimes I am weak and not just lazy.

Blessed are you who forget the disability of my body and see the shape of my soul.

Blessed are you who see me as a whole person, unique and complete, and not as a "half" and one of God's mistakes.

Blessed are you who love me just as I am without wondering what I might have been like.

Blessed are you when by all these things you assure us that the thing that makes us individuals is not our peculiar muscles, nor our wounded nervous system, but is the God-given self that no infirmity can confine.



— Marjorie Chappell —

From *Laughter, Silence & Shouting: An Anthology of Women's Prayers*, ed. Kathy Keay, Harper [San Francisco, 1994]

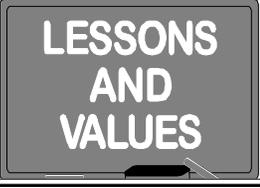


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LESSONS AND VALUES

By Mary Jane Steinhagen

The other evening a noted local author spoke on lessons learned and those yet to be learned in living with a chronic illness. A fine talk, it spurred me to ask those same questions about disabilities and religion.

Lessons I've learned from observation and experience:

- ◆ some disabilities are more acceptable than others
- ◆ talking about creating an inclusive community is easier than actually creating one
- ◆ accommodations are viewed as being done for "them" rather than for all of us
- ◆ attitudes are a far bigger barrier than any physical structure
- ◆ there is no correlation between the wealth of a congregation and its degree of inclusiveness
- ◆ families with disabled members are the most forceful movers and shakers
- ◆ friendship between people with and without disabilities is what changes attitudes
- ◆ changing what we *call* people with disabilities (the disabled, differently-abled, challenged...etc.) doesn't change the level of inclusiveness
- ◆ we tend to consider what people can't do more often than what they can do
- ◆ there are people who still equate a disability with punishment from God or demonic possession or lack of faith

Values I'd like to see espoused more within our congregational lives:

- ◆ that inclusion goes beyond the ramp or bathroom
- ◆ that inclusion enriches and benefits the entire congregation
- ◆ that inclusion is a way of life and not just the focus of one Sunday or month
- ◆ that providing transportation to those in need should be a given
- ◆ that inclusion goes beyond a "we-they" attitude
- ◆ that inviting, welcoming, and accepting those who have differing gifts is a matter of justice and not charity
- ◆ a friendly "hello" to a stranger is a good place to begin

I encourage you to consider these categories for yourself. Perhaps you too will find it a stimulating exercise.

Steinhagen is part-time co-ordinator for the Persons With Disabilities program in Catholic Charities for the St. Paul-Minneapolis Archdiocese. She has lived with Crohn's Disease for 25 years. Five years ago she underwent an ileostomy, which she says has greatly improved the quality of her life.

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(UNITED IN PRAYER continued from page 3)

2. Pray every day for your church, its pastor and leaders....

3. Pray for our high schools and colleges. God is bringing revival to high school and college students.

4. Form prayer groups to pray. It only takes you and one more.

5. Remember, not all seeds fall on good ground, but we keep sowing....

Let us know you are praying and report results as you see your prayers answered:

Methodists United In Prayer
2800 Wilde Lake Blvd.

Pensacola, FL 32526

Telephone: [904]944-0197

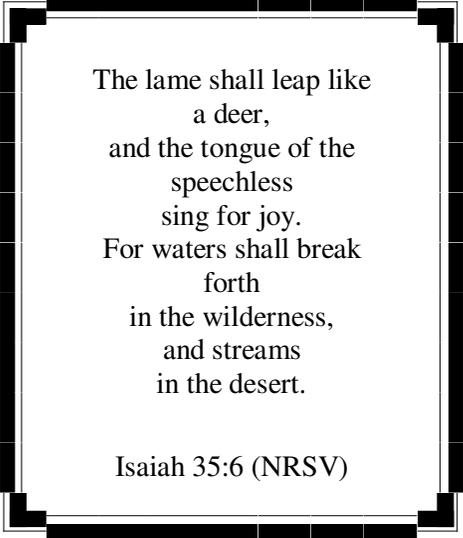
FAX: [904]941-2111

E-mail: pfumc@biblepacesetter.org

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Alabama (West Florida Conference)

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The lame shall leap like
a deer,
and the tongue of the
speechless
sing for joy.
For waters shall break
forth
in the wilderness,
and streams
in the desert.

Isaiah 35:6 (NRSV)



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and Those Who Care About Them"*

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