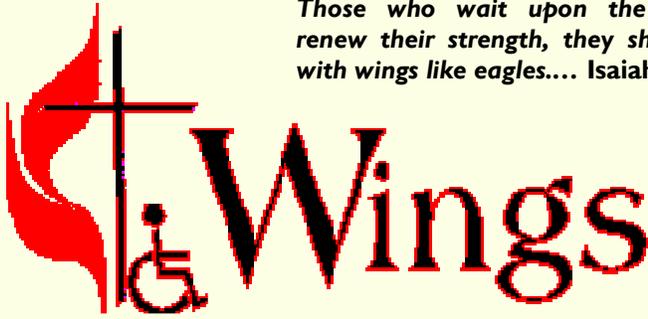


Those who wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles.... Isaiah 40:31 [nrsv]



**A FAITHLETTER FOR, BY AND ABOUT
UNITED METHODISTS WITH DISABILITIES**
Fall 2003 — Vol. 14 Issue 2 No. 53

certainly a sign of the blessedness that arises from that struggle.

For Jacob the struggle was in holding on to God until God blessed him. For some of us the struggle is in God holding on to us until we allow him to bless us. My relationship with God has never been an easy one. I was what you might call “God-obsessed” as a child. I started reading the Bible at a young age, and I prayed and thought about God a lot. But it was a relationship based, at least initially, on the fear of hell and, later, on strict adherence to rules and dogma.

As I grew older, I grew tired of trying to be someone I wasn’t—namely, a “wheelchair saint”—and of professing beliefs I really didn’t have. By the time I reached my junior year in college, my faith just sort of crumbled, and for the next 18 years I tried to push God out of my life as much as possible.

I wish I could say I wasted those years in a dissolute life full of sex, drugs, and alcohol as that would make a much better story. But I can’t. I married, studied several years for a Ph.D., and joined disability groups. But nothing



FROM WHERE I SIT By Jo D’Archangelis

Jacob is one of the most interesting characters in the Old Testament. He is chosen by God to be the “Great Patriarch” of the twelve tribes of Israel. He is also, at least in the first part of his life, an exceptionally deceitful and dishonest man. He manipulates his brother, Esau, out of his birthright and deceives his blind father, Isaac, into giving him his deathbed blessing. In fear of his brother, he flees from Canaan to his father’s homeland and after many years of hard work, skillful negotiation, and a bit of flimflam, amasses wives, children, slaves, and livestock. He eventually returns to Canaan and on the way there is reunited with Esau.

According to Genesis, Jacob encounters the person of God twice. First he has a dream in which he sees God standing beside him and angels going up and down between heaven and earth on a ramp.* When Jacob awakens from his dream, he exclaims, “Surely God is in this place and I didn’t know it!” One suspects that God had been with Jacob in many other places

*The Hebrew word for “ladder” can also be translated as “ramp.”

up to that time but that Jacob perhaps avoided acknowledging his presence.

At any rate, the second time Jacob encounters God is in a full-throttle smack-down of a wrestling match. For a while it looks as though Jacob will get the best of God, but then God grabs hold of Jacob’s thigh and gives it a twist, thereby dislocating Jacob’s hip. Jacob, however, continues to grapple with God and cries out as much in desperation as in defiance, “I won’t let you go until you bless me.” This time Jacob rightfully earns the blessing he receives. God tells him that from now on his name will be Israel, i.e., “one who strives with God,” and God reaffirms his promise to make Jacob the father of a great nation.

At this point the Bible doesn’t say that God disables Jacob as punishment for his past duplicity. Rather it says that Jacob’s disability is to serve as a permanent reminder of his struggle with God, a struggle from which Jacob emerges both humbled and elevated. Moreover, Jacob’s disability becomes, if not a blessing in itself,

INSIDE

CAUCUS WORKS TO EMPOWER DEAF UNITED METHODISTS	2
DOES YOUR CHURCH CELEBRATE DISABILITY AWARENESS SUNDAY?	3
HOW TO OPEN YOUR CONGREGATION TO DEAF MEMBERS AND VISITORS	3
IT’S SO DAILY	4
IN REMEMBRANCE: HOLLY ELLIOTT	4
THE TREE OUTSIDE THE CHANCEL WINDOW	5
DOING	5
NOW IS THE TIME	6
HONOR ROLL OF APPRECIATION	6
I AM DISABLED AND...	6

(FROM WHERE I SIT cont. from page 1)



ing brought much meaning or fulfillment to my life. My marriage eventually petered out, I didn't complete the Ph.D., and I dropped out of the disability groups.

Then one day—I don't know exactly why—I opened the Bible and started reading it again. Another day I started praying to God again. And yet another day I started to attend church again.

After that my life gradually attained a richness and meaning it hadn't had before. I have been blessed over the past several years by being able to participate in church activities and disability retreats, to come into contact with other believers with disabilities, and to serve God and my church by doing something I love: putting together this newsletter.

I also wish I could say that during this time my faith in God has been unwaveringly sure and secure. But I can't. It seems I have been struggling with God all my life—intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually—and even now I continue to struggle with him, perhaps even more so now than when I was younger.

Yet even at those times when doubts assail me and the silence of God seems most overwhelming, I like to think that he stands beside me—at the foot of a ramp ascending into heaven no less—waiting patiently for me to be aware of his presence. Whatever my physical or mental or spiritual condition, I know at the center of my soul that God holds me fast and refuses to let me go until he blesses me.

CAUCUS WORKS TO EMPOWER DEAF UNITED METHODISTS

By Bill Fentum



Breaking the sound barrier" between United Methodists with hearing loss and the rest of the denomination has stayed the goal of the United Methodist Congress of the Deaf since its formation in 1978. But for every advance the caucus makes, another road block appears.

The latest hurdle is gaining representation and assistance at General Conference, said the Rev. Peggy A. Johnson, who attended a biennial UMCD meeting at Lovers Lane United Methodist Church in Dallas [this past August]. Ms. Johnson, a hearing pastor at Baltimore's Christ United Methodist Church of the Deaf, said she thought the problem was solved at General Conference in 2000 when an 11th-hour resolution called for sign-language interpretation at all future sessions. But then she learned such bills are worthless without first being approved by the General Council on Finance and Administration.

"You have to put in a budget, because if you don't, it's not going to go anywhere," said Gary Bowen, GCFA associate secretary and business manager for the General Conference. "Nobody I know has any kind of open checkbook. We have to serve the delegates so they can make the most informed decisions for the church, and it does not look like we're going to have any primary delegates who are deaf at next year's General Conference in Pittsburgh."

But Mr. Bowen added he will confer with Ms. Johnson on interpretation



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Founder/Editor Computer Layout
Graphic Design Jo D'Archangelis

Correspondence Send all correspondence — including feedback, original writings, items from other sources, and changes of address — to Jo D'Archangelis, Editor, at

Mailing Address 592 West Ammunition Road, Apt. 1 Fallbrook, CA 92028

Telephone/Fax [760] 723-2668 (please call before faxing)

E-Mail jodarlis@aol.com

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(CAUCUS WORKS continued from page 2)

 options for hard-of-hearing delegates and deaf visitors. "We'll be looking at various scenarios, including closed-captioning on big-screen television, and possibly adding interpretation to the streaming webcasts transmitted by United Methodist Communications," he said.

Ms. Johnson said one deaf delegate was elected in June from the Baltimore-Washington Annual Conference, but only as a fourth alternate. "That means this gentleman will have almost no chance to serve in any real, legislative action," she said. "I don't know if it's even worth bothering. Why do we bother going, when everything's always sewed up ahead of time? Deaf United Methodists feel like second-class citizens, like they're generally unempowered in our denomination to have a voice or a vote. If we're as inclusive as we say we are, why do we let this hap-

pen?"

Christ UMC member Ken Schroeder, the only deaf delegate elected for the 2000 meeting in Cleveland, lamented the situation in an e-mail to

"Deaf United Methodists feel like second-class citizens, like they're generally unempowered in our denomination to have a voice or a vote."

the Review: "The resolution in 2000 was passed to give us equal access to General Conference so we can observe and participate as any other United Methodist can. Now it seems this will only happen if there is a deaf delegate. What will our denomination's response be to this? Will we be once again excluded from the life of the church?"

This struggle for a voice in the Methodist tradition has a 109-year-old history, beginning in 1894 when Philip J. Hasenstab, the first deaf clergyman in the Methodist Episcopal

Church, started a mission in Chicago....

After more than a century, the Baltimore-Washington and Illinois Great Rivers conferences remain the denomination's only strongholds for deaf ministry, and economic decline has led to cuts in services that once thrived in other regions. Ms. Johnson said. "Very few of our conferences have intentional leadership development," she said. "It's one thing for someone like myself to be empowered for co-ministry with both deaf and hearing church members. But deaf United Methodists never get to be elected as board chairs. Our denomination needs to make that jump where we say, 'We want them to be empowered for ministry in the church.'"

From *United Methodist Review* (Aug. 29, 2003). Bill Fentum is Associate Editor of the *United Methodist Review*.

Does Your Church Celebrate Disability Awareness Sunday?



Disability Awareness Sunday...shall be

observed on a date to be determined by the annual conference. Disability Awareness Sunday calls the Church to celebrate the gifts and graces of persons with disabilities and calls the Church and society to full inclusion of persons with disabilities in the community. If the annual conference so directs, an offering may be received and the funds used by the annual conference to promote the work of creating architectural and attitudinal accessibility in local churches....

The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church (2000), §265(4)

How To Open Your Congregation To Deaf Members and Visitors

- ✓ Install assistive-listening systems that deliver sounds with minimal distortion from microphones to those who are hard-of-hearing.
- ✓ Hire qualified sign-language interpreters for worship services, meetings, classes, and fellowship activities.
- ✓ Use visual arts—such as maps, slides, banners, and liturgical dance— as often as possible.
- ✓ Have a hearing note-taker available at church meetings to record deliberations and voting for those who are hearing-impaired.
- ✓ Have a closed-captioning decoder or a television manufactured after July 1, 1993, with a closed-captioning decoder mandated by the ADA for showing videos to the congregation.
- ✓ Install text telephones in offices that convert phone signals to visible print.
- ✓ Offer sign-language classes for hearing members, or encourage them to carry a pad and pen to communicate with deaf members and visitors.

Adapted from *United Methodist Review* (Aug. 29, 2003).

IT'S SO DAILY

By Hendrik [Henk] G. Wapstra

A friend of mine and I were discussing some of the problems connected with our disabilities, and she summed it up by saying, "The main problem with a physical handicap is that *it's so daily!*" I couldn't have agreed with her more.

The daily struggle with difficulty is different from the discomfort of a cold or the pain of recovering from surgery or a broken leg. Health problems like these are usually cured with the passing of time.

Not so with physical disability. We wake up every morning with the same set of circumstances. Even when we have learned to live with the conditions, the daily struggle is still there.

Yesterday my alarm clock awakened me from a dream, and for an instant I planned to fling back the covers, swing my feet over the side, and hop out of bed. But I haven't done that for 30 years!

I quickly remembered my present system. The process I use now is similar to a work project. I have a series of 55 moves (I counted them!) which have to be done, but each move is necessary, and I must concentrate throughout the whole procedure in order to get into a sitting position and then maneuver from the bed into my wheelchair. Seven minutes is my best time.

I am very grateful I can do it by myself. But *it's so daily!*



clock awakened me from a dream, and to fling back the covers, swing my feet

clock awakened me from a dream, and to fling back the covers, swing my feet

Occasionally I feed a friend of mine who has cerebral palsy. While helping her I have often thought, "I'll bet she would love the chance to eat dinner by herself." Every meal, everyday, she eats according to someone else's routine or taste—meat, potatoes, vegetable, salad. Maybe she'd like to eat all her potatoes at once for a change!

She never complains, but it must be frustrating. *It's so daily!*

Another handicapped friend once said to me, "If only I could take care of myself in the bathroom. I would feel so much better about myself. I get so tired of having to have someone around to help me all the time."

Others would be so happy to be able to dress themselves or comb their own hair or brush their own teeth. In some instances these tasks can be done, but it takes them four or five times longer than the ordinary person. And *it's so daily!*

But these same daily struggles have their own rewards for the ones who trust in God for their daily strength. God has promised, "*As thy days, so shall thy strength be*" (Deut. 33:25 [KJV]).

We who are handicapped have more opportunities than most people to test the strength and sufficiency of God, because we must draw from him daily. We can depend on his promise, "*My grace is sufficient for thee; my strength is made perfect in weakness*" (2 Cor. 12: 9 [KJV]).

Each morning as I maneuver myself out of bed, I am reminded of the eleven years when I could not get out of bed without someone's help. Then I met a new therapist, and she worked out "my system." I thank God daily for having sent her my way.

Every day I am amazed by his goodness toward me, allowing me to live a full and happy life despite its limitations.

In Remembrance: Holly Elliott

Holly Elliott first earned a degree in music from UCLA (she later said that no one could tell her as a deaf person what she couldn't do!). She then married, raised three children, and at the age of 50 returned to school to earn an MS in rehabilitation counseling, becoming possibly the first professionally-trained deaf counselor-therapist in the United States.

As President of the United Methodist Congress of the Deaf, Elliott was instrumental in persuading the 1992 General Conference to form a committee on developing deaf ministries—now known as the National Committee on Ministries with Deaf, Late-Deafened, Hard of Hearing, and Deaf-Blind People.

Up until her death at the age of 82, Elliott was editing manuscripts on the theology of enablement. She will be remembered within the deaf community, the Church, and society at large for her efforts in helping us all to recognize and break the "sound barrier" to full inclusion of those who are hearing-impaired.

Based upon "In Memory of Holly Elliott," *Signs of Change: The UMCD Newsletter* (Spring 2003)

From Bridge Ministries (Seattle Area) website, 1995



THE TREE OUTSIDE THE CHANCEL WINDOW By Jack Strout

Rev. John (Jack) Strout contracted polio at a young age and was known later in life as a "polio survivor." Ordained a United Methodist minister, he pastored churches in the Northeast Ohio Conference and later served as Minister of Education in California-Pacific Conference churches. Jack died in June 2003 at the age of 80, but he was more than just a "survivor." He inspired all of us to move above and beyond whatever circumstances we found ourselves in just as he himself did. Below is one of Jack's essays we first reprinted in the Fall 1999 issue of Wings. —Editor—

There was a large evergreen tree among the shrubs and bushes just outside and a bit to the right as you looked out the chancel window behind the altar of the Claremont [Calif.] United Methodist Church. Sometimes during worship services as I observed it, I thought, "What an ugly tree!"

It was misshapen, its branches of varying, not tapering, lengths, irregularly spaced with conspicuous gaps and protruding at different angles. It was far from the ideal balanced and tapering Christmas tree, yet that was what it once was—a Christmas tree.

It was in the early eighties that our then associate pastor arranged for the securing and later planting of the tree. Boy Scouts did both jobs. First, using a borrowed truck, they went to the Chino area where they selected the tree, dug it up, roots and all, placed it in a tub, and brought it to the church patio where, once decorated, it served as the Christmas tree for our first Alternate Christmas. In other years it served as our "Mitten Tree." On Sundays prior to Christmas, children and others brought mittens which they hung up on the tree to be donated to one of our missions.

Eventually the tree, five or six feet tall, outgrew its tub, and the Scouts transplanted it to its outside location. That was no mean feat considering the size of the hole that had to be dug and the quantity of rocks that had to be removed.

I remember noting from the beginning how oddly and irregularly this tree was shaped. One could well imagine why this was so. It must have grown originally where other trees and foliage crowded it, denying it adequate space and light so that it reached out wherever it could to secure these necessities.

While it grew into a large and imposing tree, it still retained its odd shape. Yet it stood there among the abundant, living greenery that enhanced our worship as our altar's re-

dos—a living backdrop to the altar.

That tree bore a striking resemblance in various ways to all of us. Everyone at numerous points in life has experienced deprivation or conflict of some sort and has reached out to compensate, often resulting in physical or personality "irregularities" that become a part of our characters.

Paralysis in all extremities has had profound effects upon my body and upon my spirit and personality as well. Others have had various "negative" family, educational, social, spiritual, as well as physical experiences which have affected their personalities as they sought to deal with them or overcome them.

But all of us, no matter how we "look," are privileged to stand in God's garden—just like that "ugly" tree—offering our testimony of praise and thanksgiving at God's altar.

Originally adapted from *Beneath the Rainbow*, a publication of the United Methodist Church of Claremont, Calif.

DOING

There is much I cannot do
 Things I took for granted
 Eating peas with a fork
 Slipping into my jacket
 One sleeve at a time
 Without struggling for the
 collar
 I miss the feel of the steering
 wheel
 Giving me power over the huge
 machine
 Need for alertness
 Watching for the other's passing
 I miss writing
 Running
 Having control over my
 footsteps

There are too many things on
 my list
 I could spend too much energy
 missing
 But I can smile
 Make others laugh
 Give warm hugs
 Receive the same
 I can give others pleasure in
 helping me
 Transporting me where I need
 to go
 I can listen
 And listen
 And listen

10/31/02

— Edith Parker —

Edith Parker is a longtime member of the First United Methodist Church in La Mesa, Calif.



**NOW IS
THE TIME**
**FOR ALL PEOPLE
WITH CHRONIC
HEALTH
CONDITIONS,
AND THEIR
CAREGIVERS, TO
GET A FLU
VACCINATION!
CONTACT YOUR
DOCTOR OR A
LOCAL CLINIC.**

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I Am Disabled And...

LORD, like Jacob I have a lifelong disability in which others may see a memorial to my struggles with you and a testimony to your blessing.

Affirmation #6 based on Genesis 32:24-31 by Ken Tittle and Mariposa Ministry and Mariposa Online.

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