

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 UNITED METHODISTS WITH
DISABILITIES AND THOSE WHO CARE ABOUT THEM
Spring 2005 — Vol. 15 Issue 4 No. 60



FROM WHERE I SIT: ON BEING HIGH AND LIFTED UP By Jo D'Archangelis

To me it looked like a small metal boxcar except that it was open at the top and used for vertical rather than horizontal transportation. As someone remarked at the “rehearsal” the day before it was to be unveiled at Sunday service, the new mobile wheelchair lift was a marvel of engineering—no electricity, no electronics, no motors, no hydraulics. Just a few turns of the hand crank and human being and wheelchair were lifted into the air. Another few turns in the opposite direction and human being and wheelchair were lowered to the ground. Simple, easy, safe, and effective. One wondered what all the fuss had been about.

Actually, I knew what all the fuss had been about starting 16 years before, when the lack of access to the chancel area in our church for people with mobility impairments had first been pointed out. Various kinds of lifts and ramps were sporadically suggested as “solutions” over those years and then dismissed with “it’s too expensive,” “it’s too impractical,” “it would change the church too much,” “there isn’t enough room,” and, oh yes, “it’s too expensive.”

After many years I was pretty much

resigned to the unlikelihood of anyone with a mobility impairment ever getting the opportunity to sing in the choir, read from the lectern, speak from the pulpit, or approach the altar—at least not during my lifetime. Fortunately, however, there are people in this church with a tad more tenacity than I have, notably among them a man named John Henker.

After several months of checking out different kinds of wheelchair lifts, John finally found one last year that he thought would fit the bill. It was easily movable from place to place and thus could be pushed out of sight when not in use so as not to offend the esthetic sensibilities of some churchgoers. It did not require the demolition of any part of the sanctuary. And although it was by no means inexpensive, it was by far the least expensive of the alternatives.

So John kept popping up, and re-popping up, at meetings of church committees, commissions, and boards. He showed videos of the lift, handed out literature, and fielded objections right and left. (At one point in the exasperatingly slow process, he and I even considered parading back and forth in front of

the church chanting, “What do we want? Access to the chancel! When do we want it? Uh, someday soon?,” but deemed that even a bit too radical for Methodists.)

Little by little, church leaders were eventually persuaded to approve the mobile wheelchair lift, and on March 13, Disability Awareness Sunday, wheelchair users Lupita Alonso-Redondo and I sat in the chancel of the Fallbrook United Methodist Church. It wasn’t the first chancel I had ever sat in nor the biggest, but it was definitely the best because it was my church. I was unashamedly pleased and proud to be up there.

As Lupita and I were lowered to the sanctuary floor after the service, people clustered around the lift, admiring the ease and simplicity of its operation. One guy even asked John if he could turn the crank. Then a longtime member of the church, one who had over the years been a chief obstructionist to having access to the chancel area, came over to me and said, “It was nice seeing you up there, but I still worry about you going over the edge in your wheelchair.” I smiled and said thank you.

I didn’t quite understand why I was any more likely to go careening over the edge of the chancel than someone walking on two legs (well, okay, we wheelchair users are an easily distracted lot and don’t look where we’re going half the time, but it’s not a major thing you know), but I decided not to let such comments sprinkle on my parade. There will always be those who don’t quite get it, but thanks be to

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DISABILITY RETREAT SET FOR JUNE 3-5 By Bruce Baraw

The Earl Miller Memorial Spiritual Life Retreat, a retreat for persons 16 years and older with mobility, sight, and/or hearing impairments, plus their spouses or caregivers, has been scheduled for Friday through Sunday, June 3-5, 2005, at Camp Cedar Glen in Julian, Calif.

Co-sponsored by the Committee On Disability Concerns and the Board of Outdoor, Camping, and Retreat Ministries of the California-Pacific Conference of the United Methodist Church, the retreat has as its theme: "Being Able When You're Dis-Abled" and will be led by M. Guadalupe (Lupita) Alonso-Redondo.

Alonso-Redondo will graduate from the Masters in Divinity program at Claremont School of Theology this year and is currently seeking probationary status

within the Elder's track of the United Methodist Church.

As a person of Hispanic origin with a physical disability, she shows a special interest for the Holy Spirit, worship, disability issues, inclusion, and Hispanic Ministries as well as a passion for being Christ's arms and feet for the world.

Alonso-Redondo has been part of Mariposa Ministry and other ministries of the Church such as Walk to Emmaus, Conference on Prayer and Healing, and Lay Speaking Ministries for many years. She brings a special understanding of what it means to be called not "in spite of" her physical limitations but "with all" her abilities and disabilities in order to give honor and glory to God.

The cost of the retreat is \$100 per person, including meals and accommodations, program and materials. Inter-

ested parties are encouraged to seek scholarships or sponsorships through their local churches. Partial scholarships are also available through the Dean of the Retreat, Dee Baraw. All inquiries will be confidential.

For brochures and registration forms or information about the retreat, scholarships, and accommodation of special needs, contact Dee Baraw at 619-337-0746, e-mail SDUMCampsDee@aol.com, or fax 619-303-9962.

Brochures and registration forms are also available from Jheri Heetland at 1-800-244-8622, e-mail jheetland@cal-pac.org, or fax 626-796-7297. All registrations must be submitted by May 13, 2005.

Baraw is a member of the Committee

Grants Available For Assistants To Deaf/ Disabled Youth At Church Camps

Tom Simmons, chairperson of the Committee on Disability Concerns, California-Pacific Conference of the United Methodist Church, reports that the committee has available two \$200 grants to provide the cost of housing and meals for personal aides and/or interpreters accompanying youth with hearing, sight, and/or mobility impairments to conference and district camping or retreat events. The grants will be awarded on a first-come, first-served basis. To apply, contact Jheri Heetland at 1-800-244-8622 or email jheetland@cal-pac.org.



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

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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WINGS ONLINE Four issues of *Wings*—Fall 2002, Winter 2003, Spring 2003, and Summer 2003—in their entirety may be accessed at www.cal-pac-ccdm.org/. Selected articles from back issues of *Wings* 1995-98 may be accessed at www.mariposa-ministry.org.

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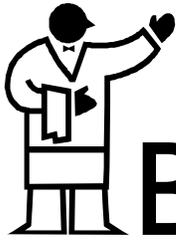
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(FWIS continued from page 1)



God for those who do.

My gratitude not only to "Mr. Persistence" himself, John Henker, but to everyone in the Fallbrook United Methodist Church—among them Ron Hogan, Paul and Cay McCracken, Jean Dooley, Marilynne Gebhart, and Pastor Dennis Ginoza—who, moved by the Spirit of God, have supported access to the Church by all of God's children.



KEEPING THE FAITH: INVITED TO THE BANQUET By Josie Byzek

Bob Molsberry, senior pastor of United Church of Christ in Grinnell, Iowa, lay in a coma for six weeks after a bicycle accident in 1997 left him with an incomplete LI injury.

Like most other people with SCI, Molsberry's adjustment to his disability isn't always easy, but he says his injury never shook his faith. "My family has been through a lot of loss, lots of changes and stuff," he says. "We always knew things were going to work out, God was with us. Even in disability, even in death, faith was not in question."

Molsberry and Ann, his wife of 26 years, have lived through losing one child to a stillborn birth and almost losing another child to leukemia. Molsberry's injury and subsequent use of a wheelchair was just one more big life-changing incident to deal with.

Molsberry holds a unique view of scriptures dealing with disability, healing, and cure. "I think you need to throw out the primitive worldview of the Bible," he says. "The Wisdom literature from the Old Testament very clearly equates disability and sin...unworthiness, unsacredness. You defile the altar if you approach with a blemish or lameness. That's specific, that's clear, but that's a world view you have to set aside."

What about all those New Testament lepers, blind men, hemorrhaging women and paralytics who pick up their mats and walk off? "I disregard them, in terms of disability," he says. Those scriptures have no bearing on his life: "I'm not looking for healing, I'm looking for adjustment to where I am."

He finds himself in the scripture passages where Jesus subtly speaks for inclusion, "where Jesus talks to women and sinners, and to people who you normally wouldn't talk to....These passages also refer to acceptance of people with disabilities, even though it's not spelled out."

Bible studies with Molsberry can sometimes become wrestling matches. "People resist me. They say we all need spiritual

healing, and I say, well, yeah, of course, but it says the lame guy got up and walked. Where does that put me?"

..."There is a strong, strong Christian movement for justice, for inclusiveness," he says. "But often the diversity, justice, and inclusiveness movements—the civil rights movements—don't see disability as being in one of those categories."

Molsberry wishes churches would use

the model Jesus taught in the Gospel of Matthew. "Jesus says to turn away the normal invitees to a banquet and invite the lame, the cripples, and the blind...not to heal them, but to show that they're part of the kingdom, and really to show up the so-called normal ones."

(Molsberry's book, "Blindsided By Grace: Entering the World of Disability," was published in 2004 by Augsburg-Fortress.)

Excerpted with permission from "Keeping The Faith," *New Mobility* (Dec. 2002), www.newmobility.com

ROLLED BACK By John Bade

Cold, dark rock, immovable—casting its shadow over the garden, entombing life within its silent, dark chambers.

We know only too well those stones that weigh heavy on our hearts—grief, death, illness, loneliness, sin, shame, guilt, addiction, depression, broken relationships.

The landscape of our lives is littered with these rocks. . . boulders that block our path and keep us from life.

Like the women that First Easter morning, we wonder, "Who will roll away the stone?"

It is too big, too imposing for our limited strength alone to move. Our energy and thoughts become consumed by its presence, and we lose the purpose of our journey.

It becomes the stone around our neck that drowns us, suffocating life and hope.

But when we finally arrive at the place of the stone, we discover that the stone has been rolled back — not removed, but moved just enough to allow the power of the resurrected Christ to be set free in the world.

God has the power to roll the stone away.

In God's hands, the stone that entraps us and seals out life can become the foundation for new life.

In God's hands, the boulder that causes us to stumble can become the pavement for a new path.

In God's hands, the rock that casts its shadow over us can be refined and polished to become a beautiful gem that reflects the light of God's love and power to all who see it.

Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed!

God has rolled away the stone;
life, love, grace, power, and light break forth
into the darkness of our lives.

From *Alive Now* (Sept./Oct. 2000)

At the time he wrote these words, Bade was a husband, father, pastor, and writer who had been living with Parkinson's disease for ten years.



BUT I CAN'T HEAR YOU

By Kit Kuperstock

Americans often say, "I hear you." We mean, "I hear and understand you." Everyone hungers to be heard. That's why hearing loss, the most common serious handicap, can also be the most infuriating. "I can't hear you" can seem an affront.

A dedicated, successful teacher said a small deaf student she loved "could hear anything he really wants to hear." I wished she were right. But like her little student and ten million other Americans, I have to watch a speaker closely enough to speech read in addition to having electronic help.

My electronic help includes a powerful hearing aid for my left ear; my right ear doesn't work. I use a TDD (telephone device for the deaf) for essential phone calls.

At church, my help comes from the infra-red system in our sanctuary. With it I hear our church services better than I've ever heard anything else. Every word, every bit of music is broadcast directly to the infra-red receiver in my ear. Yet, even more important at church is non-verbal communication—there's no need to amplify a smile or a hug. Bread and wine feed hunger that words cannot really satisfy.

While there are many ways of communicating nonverbally, our culture is very verbal. That presents me with the continuing problem of often not knowing what's going on. If I'm with friends deciding where to go for lunch, I find out when

we arrive. Rather fun.

But sometimes not being able to hear has more serious consequences. If I had to be rushed to a hospital and emergency surgery was advised, I'd need someone to explain every detail—probably writing notes—so I could make informed decisions.

It has been pointed out, however, that there are times when not hearing has its benefits. Glen, a high school student, often flips off his hearing aid before asking his parents anything to which they might answer "No." Glen also argues that Thomas A. Edison accomplished so much precisely because he was deaf: "Nobody could interrupt him." As Glen insists, even deafness may occasionally come in handy.

Deafness can be a horrible isolation chamber. I've had experience with that isolation chamber. That's why it seems incredible that my life now, working in a home office, alone at least twenty hours a day, has somehow become a mostly joyful silent retreat. I find myself daring to bring even tiny things to the Lord of all time and space. Even when I don't, God's voice is an antenna to keep me on wavelength. That is grace in its purest form, definitely not deserved.

After saying this, however, I am positive about one small thing: It is easier to be a *doer* of the word when one can also sometimes be a *hearer*.

From *Alive Now* [March/April 1997]

I Am Disabled And...

LORD, it is almost too awesome to contemplate that as I present my body to you as a living sacrifice in response to your great mercies to me, you find me holy and acceptable in your sight. This renews my mind to reject what the world values as "good" and "perfect" and to experience your truly good and acceptable and perfect will for me.

Affirmation #12 based upon Romans 12:1-2 (NRSV) by Ken Tittle and Mariposa Ministry and Mariposa Online.

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UM CHURCHES RAMP FAITH INTO ACTION By Betty Backstrom

Al Smith, a retired American League baseball umpire, was having difficulty getting up and down the front steps of his house in Bossier City, La. The effects of knee surgery had forced Smith—who once shared the baseball diamond with legendary players like Mickey Mantle—to use a walker and a wheelchair to get around.

Members of North Highlands United Methodist Church in Shreveport provided a solution to the problem by building a wheelchair ramp for Smith's home. The structure built by the volunteers was the 25th in a series of ramps constructed by the group over the last three years.

Inspired by the "Takin' it to the Streets" initiative, a project of the Louisiana United Methodist Volunteers in Mission* program, North Highlands is one of about 15 churches in the annual conference that have organized ramp-building programs.

"The reward we get from building the ramps is being able to do something for folks that they can't do for themselves. The ramps make them more mobile, and help them to get out of the house," said Guy Moore, coordinator of the program for North Highlands....

The group from Shreveport now travels across the state, helping out wherever the need arises. "...On the average, we complete six to nine ramps a year," Moore said....Each ramp takes 15-20 hours to build. With some pre-construction done in one of the volunteer's home workshops, the group can put a ramp together in one day.

The ministry draws volunteers from all walks of life. As he worked on the Smith ramp project, Bob Dykes, an oilfield contractor, pointed out, "This fellow right here, with the red shirt on, is Jim Roberts. He's the retired chief of police...."

Members of the construction team pay their own travel expenses. "It costs about \$100 a man to go," Dykes said.

Many of the recipients cannot afford the cost of supplies to have the ramps built. North Highlands pays for materials in those cases. Those who can afford to pay for the materials do so, with the volunteers providing free labor.

"There's a good turnout today," said the Rev. Tom Dungan, associate pastor at North Highlands....Dungan explained that the group stays in contact with those who deal with people in need of ramps. "Matter of fact, several hospitals

have even called us when they were aware of a patient being sent home that had to have a ramp. This is just a good opportunity for us to get out in the community and show our faith by putting it to work. Faith in action."

Al Smith, rolling down the completed ramp for the first time in his wheelchair, said, "I appreciate this more than they'll ever know. It's going to be a wonderful help for me and for my wife. I could never say enough good words. It just astounds me what they did."

Abridged from *Churches Put Faith Into Action With Ramp-Building Ministry*, United Methodist Disability Concerns website (<http://gbgm-umc.org/health/disc/>), Mar. 29, 2004. Backstrom is editor of *Louisiana Now!*, the newspaper of the Louisiana Annual Conference of the UMC.



PET: "THE GIFT OF MOBILITY"

Neither small nor furry, the PET is nonetheless in the words of its designer, United Methodist Earl Miner, "cute." Part go-cart, part tricycle, a PET (Personal Energy Transportation) has wheelbarrow tires and a box under the seat to haul items, and is operated by a hand crank or levers. It goes where wheelchairs can't and is a lot less expensive to manufacture. PET owners, disabled by polio, landmines, birth defects, war injuries, and animal attacks, can be found in 27 different countries, including Zambia, the Congo, Zaire, and Georgia (a former republic of the Soviet Union).

Rev. Mel West, a retired United Methodist minister in Missouri, leads PET Project, a program of the United Methodist Rural Fellowship. In 1993, West heard from Larry and Linda Hill, mission workers in the Congo, of the need for a one-person-sized mode of transportation that was sturdy and easily operated by hand. He took the general specifications to Miner, a retired industrial designer, and the first PETs were assembled in West's garage in 1996.

Today a network of over 30 volunteers throughout the United States raises funds, buys materials, cuts and welds steel, makes wooden parts, and assembles PETs—1500 of them in 2003—at various centers. PETs assembled in the U.S. are then sent overseas via Mercy Ships where organizations like Roc-Wheels and Iowa-based Hope Haven distribute them. Last year, the United Methodist New Life Center in Zambia began assembling PETs; there two or three PETs can be manufactured for the \$250 it costs to assemble one here.

In countries where poverty is rampant and social services nonexistent, PETs have enabled many people with mobility impairments to farm or get work. "Our ministry gives people the gift of mobility which restores their dignity and ability to care for themselves," says West. "PETs allow us to say to people, 'In the name of Jesus, arise and walk.'" — J. D. —

(For more information about PETs, visit www.giftofmobility.com, www.newlifezambia.com, www.petflorida.com, and www.rocwheels.org. Contributions can be made to The PET Project from these sites or by means of UMCOR Advance Special #982665-5.)

Based on "Pet Project," by M. Garlinda Burton, *Interpreter* (Feb.-Mar. 2000), and "Mobility Gift' Restores Disabled People's Lives" and "PET: Simple, Easy And 'Cute'" by Susan Valle Barton. *The United Methodist Review* (Jan. 16, 2004).

*United Methodist Volunteers in Mission (UMVIM) is a missionary program in which United Methodists, both lay and clergy, may offer their skills and talents for Christian service at home and around the world on short-term assignments at their own expense.

FALLBROOK UMC DEDICATES LIFT

On March 13, Fallbrook United Methodist Church in Fallbrook, Calif., celebrated Disability Awareness Sunday by dedicating a new mobile wheelchair lift to its chancel, an area formerly accessible only by steps. Easily movable from place to place and operated by a simple hand crank, the lift is a welcome addition to the church. Wheelchair users Lupita Alonso-Redondo, a Divinity student at Claremont School of Theology, and Jo D'Archangelis, a longtime member of the church and editor of a newsletter for disabled United Methodists, participated in the worship service for the first time from the chancel. Joining them were Joyce Brownlee and Joann Orendurff, members of the California-Pacific Conference Committee On Disability Concerns. In 2003, Fallbrook UMC was co-recipient of the Award for the Most Accessible Congregation in the California-Pacific Conference. Under the leadership of its pastor, the Rev. Dr. Dennis Ginoza, the church continues to make itself accessible to all of God's children.

From *Cal-Pac Update* (April 8, 2005), the e-newsletter of the California-Pacific Conference of the United Methodist Church.



Each day holds a surprise. But only if we expect it can we see, hear, or feel it when it come to us. Let's not be afraid to receive each day's surprise, whether it comes to us as sorrow or joy. It will open a new place in our hearts, a place where we can welcome new friends and celebrate more fully our shared humanity.

— Henri J. M. Nouwen —

From *Bread For The Journey* (Harper: San Francisco, 1997).

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