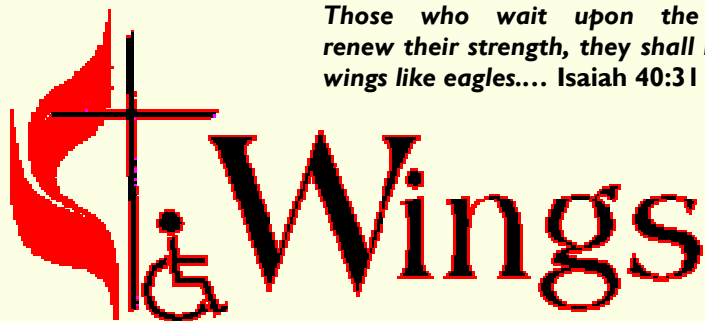


Those who wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles.... Isaiah 40:31 (NRSV)



A FAITHLETTER FOR UNITED METHODISTS WITH  
DISABILITIES AND THOSE WHO CARE ABOUT THEM  
Spring 2006 — Vol. 16 Issue 4 No. 64



## FROM WHERE I SIT: DARK AND MESSY ROOMS By Jo D'Archangelis

In his book, *A Mile In My Shoes: Cultivating Compassion*,\* Trevor Hudson writes about the difficulties some people have, even those working to alleviate the suffering of others, in dealing with their negative emotions. He gives as an example Jean Varnier, founder of L'Arche residential communities in which people with disabilities live together with "assistants."

Varnier began this movement in 1964 by sharing his small home with two men, both with physical and mental disabilities. Although he felt called to serve in this way, he was often shocked at the discomfort, even the anger and resentment, he experienced trying to relate to these men. He wrote of his self-discovery: *That, I think, was what caused me the most pain: to discover who I really am, and to realize that maybe I did not want to know who I really was! I did not want to admit all the garbage inside me.*

Hudson calls this process "uncovering the hidden poverty" within ourselves. Seeking to exemplify acceptance, tolerance, and empathy in all our personal interactions, even the best of us may find these qualities in shockingly limited sup-

\*Copyright © 2005 by Trevor Hudson, *Uncovering Our Hidden Poverty*, *Alive Now* (Mar.-Apr. 2006).

ply when push comes to shove.

At those times Hudson suggests that we imagine our heart as a dark room, littered with garbage, dirty clothing, and broken furniture. Jesus stands at the door with a lantern in his hand and knocks to be admitted. When he enters, his lantern brings light to all the corners of the room. He sits at the table, shares bread and wine with us, and tells us that no matter how dark and messy our lives are, he will be with us.

As I read the passage about Varnier, I was reminded of the dark feelings of frustration, irritation, and anger that some of us who are severely disabled experience. Not so much in regard to able-bodied people (although that has certainly happened). Not so much in regard to other people with disabilities (although that has happened too). But, rather, in regard to ourselves and our recalcitrant bodies.

Although I have been disabled since early childhood and have for the most part adapted well to my ever increasing limitations, I still have those occasional dark moments when I feel betrayed by my own body. It is *supposed* to work in a certain way—but either it works only partially or it doesn't work at all. The simplest tasks become "missions impos-

sible," and I wonder in frustration and anger what's wrong with me.

Oh, on the outside I may smile my-disability-doesn't-matter-and-I-am-just-like-everyone-else smile. But inside I feel broken and incomplete and useless. I feel myself becoming more of a burden to everyone in my life—and to myself.

Now at those times I adapt Hudson's suggestion to my own situation and envision myself sitting in the dark and messy room of my despair. I am listening to recorded voices telling me over and over again that God would heal my body and make it whole if only I had enough faith.

Jesus knocks at the door, but it's hard to hear him above the voices. Without waiting for a "come in," he enters, switches on the naked light bulb hanging from the ceiling, and turns off the CD player. Sitting down at the rickety, three-legged table across from me, he picks up the stale bread scattered around on it. He gives the bread to me saying something about his having "a broken body too" and tells me to be patient with my body for "it's doing the best it can."

He then fishes a half-empty bottle of grape juice out from under the table and pours the juice into two chipped glasses. He lifts his glass to me and says, "Don't listen to the garbage that others tell you or to the garbage you tell yourself. You are my sister and our father has a purpose for you. No matter how messy your body is, no matter how messy your life is, I am with you. Here's to true healing and wholeness..."

I drink the juice and eat the bread. It all tastes pretty good and I feel a lot better.

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## Other Voices

# NCCC POLICY STATEMENT ON DISABILITY AND THE BODY OF CHRIST



Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. (1 Cor. 12:14)

One in five Americans lives with an impairment that significantly limits one or more major life activities. Virtually everyone will live with a disability at some time in life. Concepts of justice for people with disabilities have evolved beyond paternalism toward the ideals of full participation and inclusion in all aspects of life. Disability rights and self-advocacy movements have emerged. At the national level, landmark laws such as the Rehabilitation Act, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) seek to assure the same rights to people with disabilities

that are guaranteed to all other people in our society.

This policy statement rests upon four theological principles:

1. All people are created in the image of God. *Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image...'* (Genesis 1:26)

2. All people are called by God. *For we are what (God) has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.* (Ephesians 2:10)

3. All people have special gifts. *Now there are varieties of gifts but the same spirit...* (1 Corinth. 12:4)

4. All people are invited to participate in God's ministry. *To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.* (1 Cor. 12:7)

In the light of these theological principles, it is the witness of the National Council of the Churches of Christ that all human beings, including those among us with disabilities, are entitled by God to the rights in church and society implied in the divine call. These rights include a life of dignity and respect with access to education, health care, useful work, recreation as well as the right to friendship, spiritual nurture, freedom, and self-expression. The rights of each person, including people with disabilities, are equal to and balanced by the rights of others.

We believe the human community in all its forms is accountable to God to protect these civil and human rights. God requires the church to give spiritual and moral leadership to society in protecting these rights. The church must exercise its leadership by its public preaching and teaching but even more by its example as an inclusive community of faith, using the gifts of all its members.

*Now there are varieties of gifts but the same spirit; and varieties of service but the same Lord... (1 Cor. 12:4)*

**National Council of Churches of Christ  
General Assembly, November 11, 1998.**



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/](http://www.cal-pac-ccdm.org/). Selected articles from back issues of *Wings* 1995-98 may be accessed at [www.mariposa-ministry.org](http://www.mariposa-ministry.org).

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## DID YOU KNOW IT SAYS RIGHT HERE IN THE UMC BOOK OF DISCIPLINE...?!!



### Responsibilities and Duties of a Pastor

... In the context of his/her basic responsibilities, the UM pastor has the specific duty "to lead the congregation by teaching and example in a ministry with people with disabilities."

*Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church 2004 (¶313).*

### Annual Conference

"The annual conference shall be held in places that are accessible to people with disabilities."

*BDUMC 2004 (¶603).*



## PRIEST WITH CEREBRAL PALSY SPEAKS OUT ON HEALING

By Matthew Davies

**T**he Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. (Luke 4:18-19)

The Rev. Nancy J. Lane, an Episcopal priest from the Diocese of Central New York who lives with

cerebral palsy, believes wholeheartedly in this Gospel message and in Jesus' commitment to the healing of body and soul. In 1983 Lane established a ministry to educate Central New York congregations to be more welcoming and inclusive of people with disabilities. Disability Awareness was designed to address negative and stereotypical attitudes, Lane notes, and to speak to the universality of limitation, suffering, and difference.

"It takes great faith to live with a disability, to constantly adjust and readjust to the barriers imposed by our society, whether physical barriers or negative attitudes," Lane said. "People with disabilities often live marginalized lives because of discrimination, low income, and lack of access to the church, market place, transportation, or a fulfilling social life. It takes enormous faith to live with these challenges."

Lane acknowledged that people who are not welcomed and included in the life of a worshipping community may not have a developing and deepening spiritual and prayer life to support them through their difficulties.... "Healing happens when we are welcomed, included, and our gifts received because we are part of the body of Christ. As I traveled around the country I discovered enormous suffering in people with and without disabilities. Much of this suffering was caused by people who wanted them to be 'cured' and when they were not, had been pro-

nounced as evil, possessed, sinful, or lacking faith."

These were issues that Lane had encountered often and she had wrestled with these issues and their attendant questions in prayer, therapy and throughout her theological and psycho-

**"Healing happens when we are welcomed, included, and our gifts received because we are a part of the Body of Christ." — Rev. Nancy J. Lane —**

logical studies. "I had learned long ago that healing of my disability [cerebral palsy] was not what I needed or even wanted," she said. "Rather, I often needed healing from the negative attitudes and responses of others and, like most of us, needed healing from the hurts that life may bring to any of us."

Lane's life experiences, academic studies, theological training, and long years of spiritual direction have convinced her that healing is a process of transformation and requires attention and discernment of one's spiritual journey to God. Her research in the study of healing, suffering, psychology, and theology has also reinforced her understanding of the Church's original purpose for confession, reconciliation, and anointing in the healing ministry. ...

In 1995, Lane embarked on a new mission and outreach project and founded A Healing Ministry, which currently provides therapy, lectures, workshops and retreats with counseling to clients using Jungian psychology, sacred psychology and prayer therapy. "Sacred psychology enables one to look at the

wounds, betrayals, and deep holes of life and learn how to turn them into holy places of strength," Lane said. ...

Workshops on healing and spirituality explore the relationship between spiritual health and faith in God and physical and psychological well-being. "This holistic approach reflects Jesus' ministry of healing, which was always concerned with the whole person and their transformation," Lane said....

A retreat for people with disabilities focuses on the theological and psycho-spiritual aspects of living with disability, as opposed to suffering from disability. Using a format of talks, discussion,

story-telling, and worship, the dimensions of the psycho-spiritual journey when living with a disability are explored....

Lane notes that Scripture clearly indicates that the church has been endowed with specific healing power and that the reader of the Gospels can readily perceive how Jesus invested a major portion of his ministry in healing the sick. "The meaning of healing extends far beyond the symbolic action of curing the sickness. The power of healing confronts the powers which oppress us and witnesses to the presence of God's power at work in the world."

"Jesus healed," Lane added. "He touched lame legs and gave them strength. He reached his hand to blind eyes and gave them sight. He touched weak minds and restored order. He forgave sins and cast out demons setting people free from spiritual, emotional, and physical bondage... Jesus healed both body and soul."

**Abridged from Episcopal News Service (Aug. 26, 2004). Davies is staff writer and web manager of ENS. A Healing Ministry: <http://ahealingministry.com/index.html>.**

**T**he question is not, how can we help people with disabilities? The more important question is, how can people with disabilities give their spiritual gifts to us and call us to love?

— Henri Nouwen —

## *I Am Disabled And...*

this has enabled me to identify with those on the margins. LORD, who is made weak and I am not weakened? Who is caused to stumble and I am not indignant? My disability has often been like a thorn in my flesh tormenting me. Repeatedly I have pleaded with you to take it from me, but you have said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness." So, I will take pride all the more gladly in my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may dwell in me.

**Affirmation #16 based upon 2 Cor. 11:29-30, 12:7-9 (NRSV)  
by Ken Tittle and Mariposa Ministry and Mariposa Online.**

## IS YOUR CHURCH ACCESSIBLE?

By Tom Gray

**W**hether or not your church is accessible to people with disabilities says a lot about your church. If you think about it, if any one place in the world should be handicapped accessible, it's the church!

We visit other churches from time to time [with our son Slate who has cerebral palsy and uses a wheelchair] and find a few here and there that have a really nice 1 in 12 ramp into their entrance. Their doors are wide enough, open outwardly, and they utilize horizontal levers versus knobs. Great, we think, until we get inside only to find that the rest room does not have a 5 ft. (wheelchair) turning radius in their stalls, or, worse yet, is downstairs.

Due to separation of church and state, churches are not bound by the same building codes as are other public structures. I firmly believe in the separation of church and state. More importantly, I believe that churches should be in the vanguard when it comes to providing accessibility to persons with disabilities. Whatever you have to say to this people group, you are being heard, loud and clear!

[Using]...a wheelchair is, of course, not the only disability. It is one of the most visible, but certainly not the only disability that churches should make attempts to minister to. How about kids and adults with learning disabilities? Should they be thrown in with their age

group...or peer group? Do the deaf need to "hear" the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

How about the ADHD kids? How does your church relate to them? "Bobby, sit down and please be quiet. You are disrupting the other children!" Face the facts: "Bobby" can't sit down and be quiet. If he could, he probably would. The "Bobbys" in the world also deserve an opportunity to hear the wondrous story about how God came to earth to bring his children into a relationship with him.

Another category should be mentioned here, although we probably don't see it as a disability. How does your church relate to people that don't speak the same language you do? To them, they are at a disadvantage. Any Koreans in your neighborhood? How about Hispanics, or Vietnamese, or Slavs, or Saudi Arabians?...Remember this, Christianity is not a religion, it's a relationship with the God that created the universe....Maybe he wants you to tell them about him. Maybe you are the only person, or the only church, that will have that chance. Seize the opportunity!...

Some disabilities are more obvious than others, but we have all been disabled in some way or another. Jesus wants to minister to everyone, whatever their predicament, wherever they live. Is your church...accessible?

**Excerpted from the *Biblical Recorder* (Sept. 22, 2001).**



## SLATE'S GIFT

By Tony W. Cartledge

**I**n the summer of 1999, Slate Gray was 7 years old and hard at work. Slate is the son of Tom and Deb Gray. They live in Seagrove, [N. C.], where Tom works as a potter (he also dabbles in writing and Web design). They are members at First Baptist Church of Seagrove. Slate is challenged by cerebral palsy, but he is an active boy, getting around with a walker and a shiny new wheelchair.

In August of 1999, Slate was active in the pottery shop, making Christmas ornaments of clay. Because his hand-eye coordination makes detail work difficult, Slate's ornaments tend to be free form, rather than looking like angels or reindeer. He adds splashes of red and white glazes, and his dad fires the ornaments in the pottery kiln. Slate strings a little card through a hole in each piece, explaining that the bare clay represents the earth from which we came, the red is a reminder of Christ's blood shed for us, and the white suggests our sins, made white as snow.

Slate's ornaments proved to be popular. They sold out by October, leaving him with a profit of \$300. His parents had agreed to allow Slate to decide what to do with his new-found riches, and fully expected him to purchase one or more large items for himself. And what did he choose to do? "I want to send it to the Floyd kids," he said.

Slate had relatives in eastern North Carolina, and he had heard about the difficulties facing children whose homes had been lost to Hurricane Floyd. Their need touched his heart. He wanted to help and that's exactly where his \$300 went. Slate's gift was a blessing to the folks affected by Floyd, and a lesson to the rest of us ... if we have ears to hear.

**From the *Biblical Recorder***



## CHURCH CHOIR PAIRS MUSIC WITH SIGN LANGUAGE **By Amy Green**

The idea struck Susan Plymell 10 years ago, when she was pastor of a church where a deaf boy attended services. "I just thought, 'Wouldn't it be great if we had a choir that could sign the music for him?'" she says. "I think sign language is such a beautiful language to begin with. I thought if you added music, it would be even more wonderful."



It is perhaps an unlikely blend, music with sign language. But Plymell put the two together five years ago as pastor of SonRise United Methodist Church in Pueblo, Colo., organizing a choir that signs the words to all the songs it performs. She started the choir to reach out to deaf congregation members and raise awareness, but now it performs across the community, inspiring churches, community groups, schools and others with its music and synchronized signing....

The 20-member choir of church and community members—some deaf, some from other congregations—rehearses two hours each week. It focuses primarily on contemporary Christian and gospel music but performs some secular tunes for community groups and schools.

Word has spread quickly about the choir. It makes a few performances each month—some as far as an hour away—for groups such as the local Shriners chapter and at the Pueblo Community College and area elementary schools. It also performs for special events at other churches and participates in the community's annual Fourth of July and Christmas parades.

"It's a real service to the deaf people," Plymell says. "It's an opportunity for them to actually participate in the music....For the hearing people, they love it because it's so beautiful to watch, and it enhances the music that's being played."

Plymell learned sign language as pastor of another church where a deaf boy attended services. When she joined SonRise United Methodist Church, which draws about 60 on an average Sunday,

she became reacquainted with Donna Roberts, who had taken the same sign language class as Plymell years before. Roberts offered to direct the choir.

The choir enables her to share her beloved music with deaf friends, Roberts says. "I feel for them because they can't hear music, and this is my way of sharing music with them," says Roberts, an interpreter for the deaf at Pueblo Community College. "They feel the vibrations, but putting the lyrics together puts a different meaning to the music."

Tiffany Sterner, 14, who has had hearing problems since she was born, struggled with sign language until joining the choir with her mother. She has been with the choir for two years and is glad to be able to communicate with the deaf.

"I get to learn a new language, and my mom doesn't have to shout at me all the time when she talks to me," says Sterner, who eventually wants to nurture other children through serious health problems as a pediatrician. "It's a beautiful thing, and it's just interesting to

watch."

Tiffany attends services at a Pentecostal church but joined the choir after her mom heard about it at a community event for the disabled. She says she enjoys visiting various congregations and learning about how other denominations worship. Her father, Doug Sterner, believes the choir has had another effect on his daughter. "It also gives Tiff a sense of purpose, that she does something that is important and makes a difference," he says.

Plymell believes the choir has succeeded in raising awareness. She notes many of the choir's members joined after they saw a performance and then signed up for sign language lessons. She feels the choir's movement to the music inspires audiences. "It just adds more depth to the words," she says. "It adds almost a physical and emotional response to the words."

She believes the choir has reached beyond its original goals. "It connects unchurched people with the churched people of different denominations," she says. "We're a truly diverse group of people, and that's really wonderful to see."

**From United Methodist News Service (March 23, 2004). © 2005 United Methodist Communications. Green is a freelance journalist based in Nashville, Tenn.**

### “SIGNS OF SOLIDARITY” A USEFUL BOOK

*Signs of Solidarity* is a useful resource that will aid congregations in involving persons of all ages with auditory and optic losses in the church. In the United States there are about 28 million hard of hearing people, .5 million Deaf, 1.5 million late-deafened, and 1 million deaf-blind, the latter including a growing number of older people with losses of *both* hearing and eyesight.

About 90 percent of church members and constituents living with any of these forms of hearing loss become church dropouts. The culprit is the failure of churches to be "hearing-accessible." Not only are the needs of these people neglected but, more importantly, churches and communities are deprived of their individual talents.

First published in 1994, *Signs of Solidarity* was revised in 2004 at the request of the National Committee on Ministries with Deaf, Late-Deafened, Hard of Hearing, and Deaf-Blind Persons in the United Methodist Church. The authors are the Rev. Dr. Kathy Black, Nancy Kingsley (also editor), Candis Shannon, the Rev. Kirk Van Gilder, and the Rev. Dr. Robert Walker.

*Signs of Solidarity* (#02088), second edition, may be ordered for \$7.00, plus shipping and handling, from the General Board of Global Ministries Service Center by telephone (1-800-305-9857), or by fax (1-513-761-3722).

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## THE GRAPEVINE By Virginia Schnabel

Like an old grapevine,  
twisted,  
turned,  
dehydrated,  
zapped of all life energy,  
tangled,  
ugly,  
brown,  
hanging on,  
waiting for a chance  
to live again,  
Someone comes along  
and creates a use  
for such a vine:

Let it dry,  
just a bit more,  
cure it in the sun,  
then twist it again,  
first here,  
then there  
Take some ribbon,  
now a bow,  
and hang it here,  
just so  
New life out of old,  
beauty out of pain,  
nothing lost,  
so much gained

**From *He Shall Give You Rest*, the newsletter of Rest Ministries, Inc. Schnabel wrote this poem in her journal one day when she was suffering from a relapse in her fibromyalgia.**

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