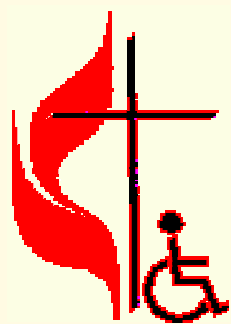
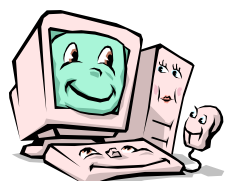


Those who wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles....Isaiah 40:31 (NRSV)



Wings

**A FAITHLETTER FOR UNITED METHODISTS WITH
DISABILITIES AND THOSE WHO CARE ABOUT THEM**
Summer 2009 — Vol. 20 Issue 1 No. 77



FROM WHERE I SIT: COMPUTER, ANYONE? By Jo D'Archangelis

My relationship with the computer began about 25 years ago when I took a course in computer programming. At the time I could see the value of computers for business and science, but outside of those areas there just didn't seem to be much that I, or anybody else, could actually *do* with them.

Shortly after that, however, the PC revolution took off, computers moved into the home, and millions of sites woven into one great electronic spiderweb of useful and useless information (plus large helpings of pure baloney) became accessible to the general public.

I soon became aware of what I—a person with a severe disability—could actually do with a computer (eventually supplemented in my case with voice dictation software), things I either couldn't do before or could only do with difficulty: communicate with others at a distance without hassling with a telephone or pen and paper, shop, manage my finances, google any and every topic, write and edit all kinds of stuff, and, best of all, put together a completely formatted “newsletter” with graphics yet.

No, I don't friend or tweet. I do text but only in the old-fashioned sense of composing e-mails on a desktop and even then I don't text so much as I voice, i.e., dictate words that “magically” appear on my computer screen. I don't blog either, but I hope to be able to do so someday.

I know, or know of, other people with various disabilities who likewise have had their once-limited worlds expanded. These people—some of whom can only move their pinky fingers or eyebrows—compose music, create visual art, design websites and video games, run their powerchairs, turn on lights, and open doors, all with computers or with electronic devices using computer technology. Some with vocal impairments now “speak” and others with vision impairments now “read.” In other words, with the aid of the computer many of us now lead more independent lives. For us the computer has proved to be a major blessing.

Granted there are some people who don't quite get the blessedness of computers. For example, they see the Internet as destroying the publishing

business. With the advent of the computer, they say, few people read books, magazines, or newspapers anymore.

Now I would agree that many companies in the “word” business are failing largely due to the Internet taking over their functions and people finding these electronic versions more appealing. Still, many businesses, especially those savvy enough to have seen the changes coming, are incorporating Internet versions into their existing operations while at the same time figuring out how to make them profitable, all in the true spirit of adaptive and creative entrepreneurship.

As for reading—in the first place, to access most of what is on the Internet nowadays, you have to be able to (hello?) *read*, or at least have it read to you. Not everything is a video of a bopping cockatoo. And words are no less words for being printed on an electronic screen rather than on a sheet of paper. Second, downloading books and magazines and newspapers is becoming increasingly popular. It's convenient, and convenience, whether we like it or not, is the name of the game.

So after I finish this essay, I'll put the finishing touches on this issue of *Wings*, record a donation to the newsletter fund, and e-mail a thank-you to a friend who sent me a birthday e-card. If I could, I would give my computer a little pat on its monitor before logging off. It enabled me to live a meaningful part of my life today. And it didn't crash once.

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A REJECTION OF BAD THEOLOGY

By Thomas H. Graves

On the evening of January 24, 2007, the First Baptist Church of the City of Washington, DC, held the first in a series of dialogues on the intersection of "Faith, Giftedness, and Disability," featuring renowned speakers from the faith and disability communities. Opening comments at this dialogue were given by Thomas H. Graves, President of the Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond [Va.]. Below are Mr. Graves' opening remarks.

God is not the cause of calamity. "Did this man sin or did his parents that he was born blind?" Jesus was asked. "Neither!" he responded.* Illness and disability are not the work of God nor are they a sign of God's displeasure. That approach of seeing human misfortune as the result of God's retribution for our sin is as old as the words from Job's "comforters." It was wrong then and it is wrong now. How is it possible for a faith that worships a man who died on a cross, to hold up misfortune and disability as a sign of unbelief? Suffering is not a sign of a lack of faith. God is not the cause of disease or catastrophe.

There are whole courses on the problem of evil. Scholars like C.S. Lewis have commented that nearly all of the trouble people have with the problem of evil stems from a bad understanding of God's omnipotence. God is best understood not as one who holds a monopoly on all power and [controls] every event but rather as one who is the perfect user of power, luring all creation toward harmony, intensity, and redemption. Suffice it to say that God has limited Godself to allow us freedom and to place us in an unfinished universe where there is still much for us to do as we join God in the ongoing tasks of creation. None of us is immune from the limitations of the created order. The question is not "Why me, O God?" but "Why not me?"

One should always be cautious when describing the character of God in keeping with one's own situation. With that warning, let me go on to suggest that there is more than enough Biblical

support to assert that one of the clear descriptions of God is that of "a disabled God."

The suffering servant is described in Isaiah 52:13-53:7 (NRSV) with these words: "...marred was his appearance... he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him... he was despised and rejected... a man

of suffering and acquainted with infirmity...one from whom others hide their faces...we held him of no account... [he] carried our diseases," he was "stricken...afflicted...wounded...crushed...oppressed..." Jesus chooses the passages of the suffering servant as the model for his own ministry. In fact you cannot understand the passion of Christ without that model in mind.

This is seen supremely in the crucifixion. Nancy Eisland in her book, *The Disabled God*, calls for the re-conception of the symbol of Jesus Christ as the Disabled God, particularly the symbol of Christ on the cross, with wounded hands, feet, and side. More than the

(REJECTION continued on page 3)

***John 9:2-3 (NRSV)**



A non-official quarterly newsletter for United Methodists with disabling conditions and all others interested in the issues of disability, accessibility, and the church

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(REJECTION continued from page 2)

 comforter, God in Jesus Christ comes to embody the very character of God as one who is disabled. It was Bonhoeffer who insisted that only a suffering God can help. In Christ we see that suffering and we see the disabled God.

If Christ on the cross provides the image of the Disabled God, then that should inform our own understanding of Christian discipleship and service. Henri Nouwen has helped us all with his use of the model of the wounded healer. That is, we minister more authentically when we come to others not based on our supposed strength or invulnerability, but when we approach others admitting our own need and woundedness.

I can remember graduating from seminary and entering ministry thinking I had been equipped with skill and knowledge that would serve as the foundation for a life of service. That was wrong. The wounded healer is a more faithful model for ministry. We minister best when we are in touch with our weaknesses rather than trying to appear as one operating from a stance of power and knowledge.

We have said that God can be fairly described as a Disabled God; we have said that the Christian minister can be best characterized as a wounded healer and now I would suggest that disability has its theological advantages. It helps us understand our human limits. The attitude of "God almightiness" has been described as a major source of human sin. Disability quickly dispels our attempts to escape the frailties of our human condition. It helps us understand our need to lean on others. The posture of disability often requires one to lean on others or walk with the assistance of a cane. That is a helpful spiritual model for us all.

Gary Wills in his book *Certain Trumpets* reports an interview with Pope John 23 in which the pope was asked what was the base of his religious au-

thority. The pope quickly referred to John 21:18 where Jesus says to Simon Peter, "When you were young you fastened your belt and walked wherever you wished to go, but when you are old another will fasten your belt and guide you even where you may not wish to go."

What is true of physically growing old is also true for spiritual maturity. Religious authority, said the pope, comes from leaning on the Christ. It helps us understand our fragile human condition. Disability often takes us to the margins of human existence where we encounter the shaking of the very foundations of life. When all we have depended upon begins to wither and fade, we are then reminded of a presence that stands beyond all that has crumbled and failed. Disability helps us to see the trivialities of life and to recognize that there is a more enduring presence than what has previously served as the basis for our life.

Disability can take us closer to dealing honestly with the possibility of death. One lives better when one is prepared to die. Disability can prepare us to live life as if every moment is precious. Disability can lead us to live in the present always in light of the future. In the New Testament Paul speaks of living with the end always in view. This need not be morbid or suicidal, but it is faithful and wise.

The issue is not so much *why* do bad things happen to good people but rather *when* bad things happen to good people. How we respond to disability is a matter of faith. I have found that we minister more [humanely], in a more Christ-like manner, and in a more Biblical fashion when we recognize the advantages of our disability and see ourselves as wounded healers.

Adapted from the website of the National Organization on Disability (www.nod.org/religion).

I, SONNET By Kenneth M. Tittle

(Dedicated to Nadine, 1999)

I thank my God, the novel says, that I
Am not a sonnet bound to live within
Just fourteen lines, a paltry taste of life
Close hemmed in time and space with few who care
To come with patience for your gentle song.
I say what I will say
I go where I will go
Take those I wish along.
Across the reach of history I twine
The lives of great and small to do my will.

It is beyond my ken or strength, I say.
For me, to know the moment, live this day.
He says, pity. I say, Your name shall be
To me Ozymandias. And who? he asks.
A mighty king who did just as he wished.
He smiles and pats me on the head, then leaves
Me with the warbler at my windowsill.



DEAF LIBERIANS GAIN HOPE AT SCHOOL By Bill Fentum

Before David T. Worlobah started the "Hope for the Deaf" school in Liberia—bringing educational opportunities to deaf children from impoverished families—none of his 24 students had used sign language. Marginalized in a society already devastated by 14 years of civil war, they weren't even aware they had names.

"Now they not only know, but they can write and identify their names," Mr. Worlobah, a hearing Liberian volunteer in the United Methodist Board of Global Ministries' Missioner of Hope program, told the *Review* by e-mail. "Praise God for the development that takes place every day in the lives of these children. Every time I see their faces, I see happiness, good future and God's unconditional love."

Mr. Worlobah, 34, grew interested in working with the deaf as a teenager, and while he devoted 10 years to a career in accounting, the calling never left him.

"I just couldn't control it," he said. "I now understand what God was developing in my life at the time. He was preparing me for a new ministry."

In 1999, he became a Commissioner of Hope and visited homes of less fortunate deaf and hearing-impaired children, trying to persuade their parents to enroll them in the program.

"It really was not easy," he said. "I encouraged the parents to begin loving and accepting their deaf children and understand that they have the capacity to do many things that any hearing person can do.

"In Africa, people still have the perception that disabled people are useless people. So society doesn't attach importance to them and the church finds it very difficult to get people with expertise and interest to work in this field."

Mr. Worlobah registered 28 students from different provinces, but finding space for classes proved diffi-

cult. In October 2000, he arranged use of a small library at the United Methodist compound in Monrovia, and started with teaching sign language. After two months, enrollment dropped to 14 because many students lived 15 to 18 miles away, and no housing was available on the compound.

By April 2001, the conference moved the program to its Department of Christian education, where Mr. Worlobah was officially assigned to work with Sunday schools. For two years he taught lip reading, finger spelling and simple English in a room that also served as his office. "I kept praying and trusting God for a bigger place," he said.

A search for donations led Mr. Worlobah to the Rev. Peggy Johnson, a hearing pastor at Christ United Methodist Church of the Deaf in Baltimore, and Noemi Fuentes, a Global Ministries executive who works with the National Committee on Ministry with Deaf, Late-Deafened, Hard of Hearing, and Deaf-Blind People.

Together, they won a \$2000 grant from the Board's Health and Welfare Ministries division to renovate a dilapidated building with four classrooms. The building was consecrated on October 15, 2003, by Bishop John G. Innes of the Liberia Annual Conference.

Mr. Worlobah said plans for the future include operating a full elementary school, with on-campus housing that would allow students to put what they learn into daily practice. He also hopes the program can expand beyond Monrovia to areas across West Africa.

"I have learned to make myself accessible at all times to anyone, especially the least in our society," he said. "Every time I see the progress these children are making in their lives, I feel really blessed and give the glory to God."

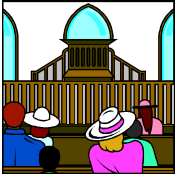
From *The United Methodist Review* (Jan. 16, 2004); originally entitled "Deaf Liberians Gain Hope At School Founded By Mission Volunteer."

Bill Fentum is Associate Editor of *The United Methodist Review*.

A COVENANT PRAYER IN THE WESLEYAN TRADITION

I am no longer my own, but thine.
Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt.
Put me to doing, put me to suffering.
Let me be employed by thee or laid aside for thee,
exalted for thee or brought low by thee.
Let me be full, let me be empty.
Let me have all things, let me have nothing.
I freely and heartily yield all things
to thy pleasure and disposal.
And now, O glorious and blessed God,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
thou art mine, and I am thine. So be it.
And the covenant which I have made on earth,
let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.

From *Alive Now* (Jan./Feb. 2009)



MAKING WORSHIP WELCOMING

By Rev. Kimberly Anne Willis

Here are some ideas for creating worship that is inclusive of and welcoming to people with disabilities.

- Many people with disabilities are willing and able to participate as liturgists, preachers, ushers, acolytes, and communion servers. A person in a wheelchair can speak or serve communion. A person who is visually impaired can sing in the choir or can read scripture provided in braille or large print.
- Metaphor is often used to convey a negative attitude about disability. Avoid saying "blind to God's presence" or "deaf to God's voice." For people who are visually or hearing impaired, such phrases judge who they are. Avoid using any form of disability to illustrate our spiritual condition.
- Encourage the use of multiple cues in worship. Combine simple printed directions in the bulletin with oral and physical cues. For example, a simple indication in the bulletin for the congregation to stand combined with the verbal cue, "Please rise as you are able," and the physical cue of raising one's arms provide multiple cues to the congregation.
- For some people, certain movements or the amount of time spent standing, kneeling, or sitting may be uncomfortable. Communicate the option not to participate in any action on the basis of comfort or conscience.
- People with disabilities may desire assistance during different acts of worship. Express openness to requests for assistance and work with people with disabilities to find creative solutions.
- Ask people with disabilities how they want to participate in sacramental celebrations. Don't presume to know or make decisions on their behalf.
- Avoid interpretations of scripture that

equate disability with sin, a lack of faith, or God's judgment.

- Special services emphasizing issues related to disability can effectively educate congregations, but seek consultation from people with disabilities and invite them to participate. Acknowledge the ways people with disabilities have been excluded.

- Speak clearly and, if not microphoned, speak with enough volume to be heard to the back of the sanctuary. Provide assisted listening devices. Reserve seating for the deaf and those who are hard-of-hearing to see a sign language interpreter.

- Provide large-print hymnals and bulletins. Use 16- or 18-point type for printed matter.

Adapted from an article reprinted in DAMI NEWS, the newsletter of Disability Awareness Ministries Inc. (Vol. 3, Issue 3, Nov. 14, 2006).



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

Committee on Disability Concerns

There shall be in each annual conference a committee on disability concerns or other structure to provide for the functions of this ministry and maintain the connectional relationships.

1. The basic membership of the committee shall be nominated and elected by the established procedures of the respective annual conference... Membership shall include persons with physical disabilities and persons with mental disabilities.
2. It shall be the responsibility of this committee:
 - (a) To be aware of, and advocate for, the role of persons with disabilities in ministry, including ordained and diaconal ministries and local church and annual conference leadership positions.
 - (b) To advocate for and help develop programs within the annual conference that meet the needs of persons with disabilities.
 - (c) To be informed about current ministries with the annual conference that are related to persons with disabilities.
 - (d) To develop ways to sensitize persons in leadership positions on issues that affect persons with disabilities and therefore the entire Church.
 - (e) To foster cooperation among ministries with the annual conference that focus on specific disabilities (deaf, deafened, hard of hearing, developmental disabilities, mental retardation, mental illness, visual impairment, physical disabilities, etc.)
 - (f) To be a resource for local churches who are attempting to develop ministries that are attitudinally and architecturally accessible.
 - (g) To promote the full inclusion of persons with disabilities in the life of the local church and the annual conference.
 - (h) To participate in jurisdictional accessibility associations in the sharing of knowledge and resources.

From Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church 2000, ¶649



EAGLES' WINGS By Bob La Forge

The LORD said, "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself." -- Exodus 19:4 (NRSV)

When I picture God's bearing us on eagles' wings, I think of smooth sailing, flying high above the fray. However, this verse is more intriguing when I realize the circumstances to which it refers.

The Israelites were enslaved in Egypt, but God did not remove or scatter their abusers. Rather, God told the Israelites to pack up their belongings and leave their homes. When they came to the Red Sea, the Egyptians cornered them and threatened to enslave them

again. But God opened up the sea and delivered them. In the wilderness, they grew thirsty and complained. God gave them water. When they complained about having no food, God gave them quail and manna. In the battle with the Amalekites, God delivered them. When the people overwhelmed Moses with requests, God provided counselors and judges from among the people.

That we are borne on eagles' wings does not mean that our lives are easy or without conflict. However, in trials

and rough circumstances, we can trust God to carry us through. We may feel overwhelmed and think that God has abandoned us; but in truth, strong wings bring us along toward a good place.

From *The Upper Room* (Jan./Feb. 2008).

IN REMEMBRANCE

On March 11, 2009, Nancy Eisland died. Author of *The Disabled God: Toward A Liberatory Understanding Of Disability*, a seminal work published in 1996, Eisland was considered by many to be "a giant" in the field of theology and disability. A memorial service was held for her on March 22 in the Cannon Chapel at the Candler School of Theology, Emory University.



Wings Honor Roll Of Appreciation

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