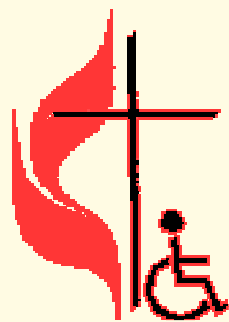


Those who wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles....Isaiah 40:31 (NRSV)



Wings

A FAITHLETTER FOR UNITED METHODISTS WITH DISABILITIES AND THOSE WHO CARE ABOUT THEM
Spring 2010 — Vol. 20 Issue 4 No. 80



FROM WHERE I SIT: FIERY ORDEALS AND OTHER TRIALS

By Jo D'Archangelis

The preacher was expounding on Peter's First Letter in the New Testament: In this letter, Peter encourages Christian converts in Asia Minor to persevere in the face of ostracism and harassment from the surrounding society. These ordeals, the apostle assures them, will only serve to strengthen their faith and make them more Christ-like—much like gold is refined by a fire.

During the service, the preacher related two stories about "fiery ordeals." One was the Biblical story of the three Israelites thrown into a "fiery furnace" at the command of King Nebuchadnezzar; the Israelites are apparently protected from the flames by an angelic presence. The other story was a real-life one captured on film for a television program in which a stuntman runs through a burning tunnel. Unfortunately, although the stuntman was wearing an asbestos suit for protection, the wrong gloves had been given to him and both his hands were severely burned. At the conclusion of the film clip, the preacher called the former stuntman up from the congregation to witness to us how he had been able to endure months of pain

and disability through his faith in God.

The preacher then went on to characterize the various "ordeals" we may be undergoing today—loss of a job, a disintegrating marriage, an illness, the death of a loved one, or (with a side-long glance at me, I'm sure) a major disability. He began his final exhortation with these words: "When God gives us these trials...." What? My mind suddenly popped open. When God gives us what? God threw the three Israelites into the fiery furnace? God set the stuntman's hands on fire? God gave me my lifelong disability?

OK, maybe that makes theological sense to some people but I have never been able to believe that a good, benevolent God could intentionally will his children to suffer through some physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual ordeal. Of course, those people who do believe such a thing usually point to some kind of divine rationale. God, they say, gives us various trials and ordeals **in order to** (pick one or more): test our faith; punish us for our sins; increase/strengthen our faith; have more empathy/compassion for others; share in Christ's sufferings so that we,

like him, can be raised to eternal life.

The problem for me in these "good reasons"—in particular, those involving faith-testing, punishment, and future reward—is that they reduce humans to being nothing more than laboratory rats in a huge cosmic experiment designed by God: if we do what God wants, we are given "food pellets" (children, health, prosperity, heaven), and if we do what God doesn't want, we're given "electric shocks" (cancer, earthquakes, poverty, multiple sclerosis). No, sorry, this isn't the God I worship.

Other, more "positive" reasons that God may have for inflicting various trials and ordeals upon us—to discipline us into becoming more spiritually/morally mature or to help us grow in faith, empathy, compassion, Christ-likeness, etc.—are for me not much better. Not because there's anything wrong with growing spiritually and/morally. In fact, I believe that God wants nothing more than that we his children should grow in faith towards him and love towards each other when we undergo various trials and ordeals. I just can't believe that God intentionally inflicts trials and ordeals upon us to achieve these goals.

Sometimes enduring trials and ordeals has just the opposite effect on people—

(FIERY ORDEALS continued on page 2)

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they may become bitter and even lose whatever faith they once had. But if trials and ordeals don't have the intended effect, then what is the point of inflicting them in the first place? Or is God just playing the odds (this cancer is more likely than not to make Fred a better person)? However you try to justify it, this is not the God I worship.

Then who is the God I worship? I believe he is a God who is always with me sharing my pain and sorrow even when I cannot feel his presence through my despair. I believe he is a God who provides me with comfort, encouragement, and strength even in those cases where

I may have, to one extent or another, brought my misfortune upon myself. Most of all, I believe he is a God in whom ultimately "all things work together for good" (Romans 8:28). Even in my darkest times, God continues to fulfill his will and purpose for my life and to do so in unexpected ways that would have seemed improbable, if not impossible, under the circumstances.

This is the God that Jesus reveals to me—not a God who intentionally gives us fiery ordeals to make us better people but rather a God who gives us the hope and faith we need to make it through the flames to the other side and there to find ourselves in a better place.

PEOPLE-FIRST LANGUAGE

By Nella Uitvlugt

The point of "People-First Language" hit home for one of our staff members recently as she was reading her son a book in which two characters argued over whether one of them was "an allergic." If you visit the Friendship offices, you're pretty likely to see Gwen reach for the stash of tissues she always keeps nearby (and you'll never catch her eating shellfish), yet she would not define herself by this one characteristic.

And that's just the point. To emphasize one thing about a person not only reinforces stereotypes, it also ignores the complex (and changing!) set of strengths and weaknesses, likes and dislikes, each one of us possesses. In light of this, we would like to challenge [you] to reflect on the way we use our words to describe each [other].

Consider these People-First principles:

1. Identify individuals first, before naming disabilities. For example, "my friend who has Down syndrome" instead of "my Down's friend."
2. Children with disabilities grow into adults with disabilities. Avoid calling adults children [and treating them as children].
3. A person "has" a disability, rather than "suffers from," "is a victim of," etc.
4. Each person has their own interests and talents. Avoid using stereotypes, such as "they're all so friendly," to describe people.

Slightly adapted from *Extras*, the newsletter of Friendship Ministries (Spring 2009). Uitvlugt is Executive Director of Friendship Ministries.



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

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; mailing address: 592 Ammunition Road, Apt. 1, Fallbrook, CA 92028-3191; phone/fax: 760-723-2668 (please call before faxing); e-mail: jodarlis@aol.com.

E-WINGS Two electronic versions of *Wings* are available for those who are vision-impaired and have computer "reading" devices, those who have difficulty handling paper and print publications, those who live outside the United States and its possessions, and/or those who just prefer computer viewing: (1.) A document version in partially formatted text without graphics available to those able to open attached files in Microsoft Word Document 2000 (this version seems to work best for those who use computer "reading" devices), and (2.) A full newsletter-formatted version with color graphics available to those able to open attached files in PDF format with Adobe Reader 6.0 or higher software (Adobe Reader software is easily downloaded from Adobe.com without charge). E-mail Jo D'Archangelis at jodarlis@aol.com to request one, or both, of these versions.

WINGS ONLINE Selected back issues of *Wings* plus information about the newsletter and its founder/editor may be found at the Web site of the United Methodist Association Of Ministers With Disabilities (UMAMD), www.umdisabledministers.org/wings000.html.

DONATIONS *Wings* is an all-volunteer effort, but financial assistance is needed for printing and mailing costs as well as for the purchase and maintenance of the computer equipment used by the editor. Most of our funding comes from reader donations. There are no subscription fees. If you think *Wings* is worth it, please make out a check or money order payable to "Fallbrook United Methodist Church" (or "FUMC"), mark it "Wings Newsletter", and mail it to Fallbrook United Methodist Church; church address: 1844 Winterhaven Road, Fallbrook, CA 92028; phone: 760-728-1472; fax: 760-728-7433; e-mail: FUMC1887@sbcglobal.net.



FULL PARTICIPANTS: PASTORS WITH DISABILITIES SHARE STRUGGLES AND HOPES

By Bill Fentum

For the Rev. Kirk Van Gilder, life in the deaf community and his call to ministry both began in a single moment of grace. Born hard-of-hearing, he learned sign language when the condition progressed in his teen years. But he still struggled in his 20s to identify with deaf culture, in many ways its own world. Then during a mission trip to a deaf school in Kenya a hearing teacher pushed him aside, refusing to let him lead a class.

Later he told his mission partners what had happened. "I had experienced total rejection of myself as a deaf person, and I broke down in tears in front of the team," he recalls. "I tried to leave the room, but the other deaf people encircled me in prayer. It was like a sacrament—every bit as powerful as my baptism—and I felt at home."

Mr. Van Gilder then went to seminary and now serves as an ordained United Methodist elder in the Baltimore-Washington Conference. He shared his story during a meeting of the United Methodist Association of Ministers with Disabilities (UMAMD), Oct. 6-7 at Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University.

UMAMD, an official caucus within the denomination, changed its name at the meeting from the Association of Physically Challenged Ministers. Founded in 1990, the group supports disabled people in ordained or lay ministry and advocates for them at all church levels. The United Methodist Social Principles urge "the Church and society to recognize and receive the gifts of persons with disabilities, to enable them to be full participants in the life of the church."

Many people, though, experience the opposite. The Rev. Bill Downing, an elder in the Peninsula-Delaware Confer-

ence, led local churches for three decades before a serious auto accident forced him into disability leave in 2003. "Friends distanced themselves from me," Mr. Downing said at the meeting, "and I heard more 'poor Bill' than, 'You're OK, and you'll go far just the same.'" Worse, he said, someone suggested that he must have sinned or "crossed lines with God" to be forced out of the pulpit so violently.

That's retributive justice theology, says the Rev. Bruce Birch, a former dean of Wesley Theological Seminary who led part of the UMAMD meeting.

"The Book of Job tried to knock it down," he said, "but a lot of the friends of Job are still out there, preaching that the righteous prosper and the wicked perish."

Dr. Birch helped draft policies on disability adopted in 2008 by the Association of Theological Schools, an agency that accredits most seminaries in the U.S. and Canada. Under the new policies each seminary is urged to ensure physical access, welcome disabled students and faculty, and include disability concerns in its courses. Many schools, according to Dr. Birch, need advice on how to take those steps. "I'd love it if people in our network would go to all 13 United Methodist seminaries and ask to see their disability policies," he said. "See if you can open a conversation."

Dr. Birch's daughter Becky, 29, was **(FULL PARTICIPANTS cont. on page 4)**

ALONG THE WAY

By Sudha Khristmukti

Sometimes it is in becoming lost that I am truly found...

In the hour of darkness that I see God's light;
in being helpless that I seek God's strength,
a strength far greater than mine.

In reaching a dangerous precipice that I discover important truths.
In losing that I really win,
In searching that I find,
In the face of rejection, humiliation, pain,
and unspeakable grief,
that I find the true measure of God's unconditional love and the blessing of God's

peace.

In the depths of the loneliness from failure,
from abandonment,
from betrayal,
I grasp the meaning of God's word.

When I finally dare to take that step of trust,
and let God into my heart;
into all the wounded places the world cannot see,
When I dare to take refuge in the shelter of God's care,
when I dare to prepare God room,

To live the journey of the faith that I profess.

From *Alive Now* (Nov./Dec. 2009). Khristmukti is a freelance writer and independent teacher of English. She is a member of The Methodist Church in India and lives in Nadiad, Gujarat, India.

(FULL PARTICIPANTS cont. from page 3)



born with severe intellectual and developmental disabilities. Being her father “has been both challenging and immensely rewarding,” he said in a sermon at Perkins Chapel, where UMAMD members led a worship service for students and faculty. Early on, Dr. Birch recalled, a doctor told him to accept that Becky would “live her life as a flawed human being.” “I was shocked,” he said. “I couldn’t imagine that her very humanity was in question. Are people on a continuum from more human to less human? I think not.”

Even some theologians, he added, measure worth according to ability. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) wrote in *Summa Theologica* that “only in a rational creature do you find a resemblance to God in the manner of an image. . . . [O]ther things resemble him in the manner of a trace.” “This naturally leads to a hierarchy of intellect,” Dr. Birch said, “that probably leaves my daughter as a flawed human being, and leaves the profoundly disabled often labeled as subhuman. I want to suggest... that the image of God has nothing to do with any set of abilities. Every human has the created possibility of reflecting the goodness of God, with whatever gifts we possess.”

The Rev. Eric Pridmore, who co-

chairs the UMAMD, has lost most of his sight to a degenerative eye disease but leads Memorial United Methodist Church in Bolton, Miss., with his wife, the Rev. Lisa Pridmore. A Ph.D. candidate in sociology of religion at Drew University, he also teaches Old and New Testament classes at a community college.

“The image of God has nothing to do with any set of abilities. Every human has the created possibility of reflecting the goodness of God, with whatever gifts we possess.”

— Dr. Bruce Birch —

Mr. Pridmore’s disability and his busy schedule sometimes clash, he said at the meeting. “Living with blindness takes a secondary role to doing what people expect of me,” he said. “On one hand it’s nice to have those responsibilities. But to deal with everything and still find a way for my spirit to sing, now and then becomes difficult.”

It’s easy for people with disabilities to begin feeling vulnerable and overwhelmed, qualities that no one looks for in a church leader. Perhaps, Dr. Birch noted, that calls for a new “theology of disability”—the idea that God, too, is vulnerable. “It started in the Garden of Eden,” he said, “when God was the first one to be wounded and rejected in a relationship.” Later, in Exodus 3:7, God tells Moses: “I have

observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings. . . .” Those should also be powerful words, Dr. Birch said, in a postmodern world faced with war, economic woes, and the needs of an aging population. Who better to preach that God shares in human suffering, he suggested, than disabled clergy who draw strength from that promise?

In 2007, the Rev. Tom Hudspeth, director of deaf ministries at Lovers Lane UMC in Dallas, was struck with Guillain-Barré syndrome, an autoimmune disorder that paralyzed most of his body. He recovered after several months, but the outcome wasn’t always certain. “People were quick to pray for my healing, but slow to ask how I was actually doing,” he told others at the meeting. “Why not ask what God was saying to me, in the midst of my frailty? We might learn something.”

Dr. Hudspeth, who is hard-of-hearing, earned a D.Min. in deaf ministry at Wesley Seminary in 2002. Wesley has since dropped the program—not for lack of funding, but because it couldn’t recruit enough students. “I see an opportunity for us to be stewards of a vision,” Dr. Hudspeth said, “where we encourage a sense that people with disabilities are needed in the church... Growing up with hearing loss, it was always something I tried to hide from the rest of the world.... Then I realized God was calling the deaf side of me and saying, ‘I want to use all of you, Tom, not just the hearing side.’ That’s what this group can offer to the Christian community: God’s call on people to do ministry that involves all of their abilities.”

Adapted and slightly abridged from the UM Portal Web site (www.umportal.org); originally published Oct. 30, 2009, under the title *Full Participants: Pastors With Disabilities Share Struggles, Hopes In Ministries*.

ON PATIENCE

By Henri Nouwen

Patience is not just waiting until something happens over which we have no control: the arrival of a bus, the end of the rain, the return of a friend, the resolution of a conflict. Patience is not a waiting passively until someone does something. Patience asks us to live the moment to the fullest, to be completely present to the moment, to taste the here and now, to be where we are. When we are impatient, we behave as if the real thing will happen later, and somewhere else. Let’s be patient and trust that the treasure we look for is hidden in the ground on which we stand.

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



WINGS INCLUDED ON NEW MINISTERS WITH DISABILITIES WEB SITE

Wings newsletter has been included on the new Web site of the United Methodist Association of Ministers with Disabilities (UMAMD)—www.umdisabledministers.org—a Web site that officially became operational in February of this year. The *Wings* Web page features a short biography of the newsletter's founder/editor, Jo D'Archangelis, and tells how the newsletter came into being (www.umdisabledministers.org/wings000.html). Selected back issues of *Wings* in PDF format are also available for viewing. "The eventual goal," said D'Archangelis, "is to archive all of the newsletter's existing issues going back to our debut issue in August of 1990."

The UMAMD, an official caucus of the United Methodist Church formerly known as the Association of Physically Challenged Ministers (APCM), will also be celebrating its 20th anniversary this year. Under the longtime leadership of Rev. John C. Carr, the Association grew in numbers and in its impact on General Conference disability legislation. Carr retired in 2006, and Rev. J. Eric Pridmore and Evy McDonald were selected as co-chairs. Throughout the years, however, the task of the UMAMD has remained the same: "...to alert the denomination and others in faith communities to the ways attitudinal barriers have discouraged" people with disabilities from participating in ministry.

Members of the UMAMD are not required to be clergy or United Methodist or even have a disability; they must simply support the Association's goals for people with disabilities who feel the call to serve, namely, full access to seminary education and leadership training as well as full acceptance as clergy and lay leaders at all levels of church ministry.

Annual membership dues are \$25 while reduced dues for retirees, stu-

dents, and other persons with limited income are \$15. More information about mission, membership, dues, and donations may be obtained by going online to the UMAMD Web site or by contacting Tim Vermande, UMAMD Secretary; mailing address: 3645 Toronto Ct., Indianapolis, IN 46268; e-mail: tim@vermande.us.

Vermande, who has cerebral palsy and back injuries from an accident, is also the designer and Webmaster of the new UMAMD Web site. In between working as a part-time instructor in World Civilizations And Cultural

Anthropology at a local school and teaching classes at St. Peter's United Church of Christ in Carmel, Ind., Vermande creates, as he puts it, "simple and straightforward (i.e., accessible)" Web sites at low cost for non-profits, especially those involved in disability ministry. He can also provide free Web space for those non-profits whose Web sites are on the verge of being discontinued as a result of budget cuts. Vermande's own Web site is at www.vermande.us.

"*Wings* is very pleased," said D'Archangelis, "to have been asked to be part of the new UMAMD Web site and to participate in its own way in the vital work of this organization."

— J. D. —



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

Nondiscrimination Policies

1. It shall be the policy of The United Methodist Church that all agencies and institutions...shall:
 - (a) recruit, employ, utilize, recompense, and promote their professional staff and other personnel in a manner consistent with the commitment of The United Methodist Church to women and men of all races and ethnic origins, including persons with disabilities;
 - (b) fulfill their duties and responsibilities in a manner that does not involve segregation or discrimination on the basis of race, color, age, sex, or disability, including HIV status....
2. All agencies and institutions shall, insofar as reasonably possible, schedule and hold all events, including designated places of lodging and meals for the events, in accessible settings that adequately accommodate persons with disabilities. If for any reason whatsoever any event is scheduled or held in the facility that does not so conform, all notices of the meeting will include plainly stated advice to that effect, or alternatively may bear a logo consisting of the international symbol for access placed inside a slashed circle. The term event shall be given a broad interpretation and shall include, by way of example, scheduled conferences, seminars, and other meetings to which persons are invited or called to attend as representatives of the Church or its various institutions and agencies.

From *Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church 2000*, ¶715



EUNICE KENNEDY SHRIVER: A GREAT ADVOCATE

Bishop Peggy Johnson

The world lost a great advocate for [people with] disabilities with the passing of Eunice Kennedy Shriver. She was the sister of the late President John F. Kennedy and a tireless worker for not only people with disabilities but human rights in general. She worked in the prison system and cared about people on the edges of life. Her great interest in disabilities came from her own family experience. Her sister Rosemary was intellectually challenged.

In all of the reports about Eunice's passing not much was said about Rosemary. I always thought she was a Down syndrome child. From my research I learned that she had average intelligence, but she had learning disabilities and most likely suffered from mental illness. Her severe mood swings led her family to agree to have a lobotomy performed on her. This calmed her mood

swings but left her severely cognitively impaired for life. The well-meaning intentions of her family to have this surgery performed on their daughter (which blessedly is now no longer a part of medical practice) created additional problems. It was indeed one of the first Kennedy family tragedies.

This crisis in the family spurred Eunice Kennedy Shriver to begin the Special Olympics, which has grown into a worldwide venture. It gives dignity and purpose to people with many kinds of disabilities. Eunice also encouraged her brother, President Kennedy, to enact laws to improve the lot in life for people in institutions. These were some of the earliest beginnings of de-institutionalization in our country.

Of all of the disability communities I have worked with, there is none more misunderstood than the mental health

community. In recent years, medical science has a larger array of medications and therapies to work with than in the past. Many people who had previously lived in locked units in mental institutions now reside in community homes with support systems, have meaningful employment, and are integrated into society.

However, thousands and thousands of people with mental illness are not so lucky and slip through the cracks in the system. Many of them are the homeless who live on our streets. Mental health services get far less funding than physical illnesses in this country. Many insurance programs have no provision for mental health, while others have limited coverage. Families who have family members with mental illness often suffer in silence with few resources for respite, financial support, and a stigma that is like none other.

Every church has people in it with mental health issues. Much of it is hidden due to fear of rejection and alienation. Sometimes the stranger with unusual behaviors that enters our doors is politely welcomed but held at a distance by people who are afraid of them or feel uncomfortable associating with them.

I applaud churches that have special classes for people with intellectual and mental health challenges. I applaud churches that welcome people who come from group homes and give them a place in the family of the church where acceptance and compassion does more for a person than all the medication in the world.

Where can your church be reaching out? How can you educate your congregation about the attitudinal barriers that we often throw up when a person with mental challenges joins the church? In all things show the love of Christ to everyone. Seek support from community and health services as needed, and cover all of your ministries with prayer.

Adapted from United Methodist News Service commentary (Sept. 1, 2009).

UM BISHOP PEGGY A. JOHNSON

Area and Year Elected Bishop: Philadelphia Area (Eastern Pennsylvania and Peninsula-Delaware Conferences) in 2008.

Appointment When Elected: Pastor, Christ United Methodist Church of the Deaf, Baltimore, Md.

Greatest Hope for The Church: The risen Christ among us manifested in our diversity.

Greatest Challenge Facing The Church: Truly living out the Gospel in love and social witness.

Primary Scripture Guiding Your Life and Ministry: Matthew 6:33: "Seek first the kingdom of God and God's righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you."

Favorite Biblical Character: Barnabas, "Son of Encouragement," in Acts. He was sold out to God, encouraged the unlikely ones, and handled interpersonal conflicts creatively with love.

Favorite Hymn: "Be Thou My Vision."

Ministry Setting that Has Been Most Meaningful to You: Working with deaf blind people in Christian camping. Deaf blind people inform us about God's all inclusive love and witness to God's power made perfect in weakness.

Adapted and abridged from *Interpreter Magazine* (Sept.-Oct. 2008)



CONFRONTING FEAR

By Tim Gilmer

(Gilmer is the editor of *New Mobility* magazine. The following is from one of his "Bully Pulpit" editorial columns.)

A handful of readers have complained about my frequent references to God in this column. They think I should keep my belief to myself. Truth is, that's easier said than done. In fact, it's next to impossible to separate one's opinions from one's personal beliefs.

Those readers who object to my writing about my belief do not seem to realize that they are basing their opinions on their own beliefs. From their letters, if I may paraphrase, they seem to say, "I believe there is no such thing as God, and I object to you using your column to say there is. Talk of God does not belong in a magazine about disability." Fortunately, we live in a country where freedom of expression and freedom of religion are inseparable. I claim both freedoms, as do readers of this column.

As it happens, this month's cover story—about fear—is also related to personal belief. How we respond to stressful circumstances and fear has a great deal to do with what we believe or disbelieve.

My own response to sudden paralysis, as a tentative 20-year-old, was to deny fear. Inwardly I was afraid, not knowing if I would ever meet someone who would love me, be able to secure a decent job, or find a place in society. Inwardly, I acted as if I didn't care about love, was unconcerned about working, and moved so often that my car seemed like home.

But five years of denying my fears got me nowhere. I became embittered, alienated. Either God didn't exist, I reasoned, or he didn't care. Either way, I decided I would live by my own rules. My self-serving attitude left no room for God.

I won't go into the details, but that approach didn't work. Alienation and unhappiness led to taking foolish risks. You know the story—substance abuse, careless living—many of us have wasted years there. Eventually I found myself in the worst mess of my life, much more serious than being hospitalized with an SCI after a plane crash.

When I hit bottom (1971) and could not envision a future, in a moment of desperation I cried out to the God I had denied and was surprised to find him there. Slowly, over many years, bitterness turned to gratefulness, hope sprang from the ashes, and my life turned around. Instead of denying my fears, I began confronting them—drawing on my fledgling faith.

Some feel it is a sign of weakness to rely on God. They take pride in relying on themselves. While self-reliance is admirable, there are times when circumstances beyond our control all but overwhelm us, when even the strongest among us feel overtaken by hopelessness. What then?

This issue is rich with resolution—stories of people like you and me escaping the grip of fear, each in our own way.

Forty years after my accident—and my knee-jerk denial of God—I learned that all major arteries to my heart were blocked and underwent a quintuple bypass and an arduous, protracted recovery. Surprisingly, I was at peace throughout the whole difficult process. During that time I leaned on my faith every day, as I do now.

Reprinted by permission from *New Mobility*, originally titled "Bully Pulpit: Confronting Fear" (Aug. 2008); phone: 888-850-0344; Web site: www.newmobility.com.

HOPE WITHIN THE VOID

By Richard Rohr

It should be the work of Christians who believe in the paschal mystery to help people when they are being led into the darkness and the void. The believer has to tell those in pain that this is not forever; there is a light and you will see it. This isn't all there is. Trust it. Don't try to rush through it. We can't leap over our grief work. Nor can we skip over our despair work. We have to feel it. That means that in our life we have some blue days or dark days.

Historic cultures saw it as the time of incubation, transformation, and necessary hibernation. It becomes sacred space, and yet this is the very space we avoid. When we avoid darkness, we avoid tension, spiritual creativity, and finally transformation. We avoid God who works in the darkness—where we are not in control! Maybe that is the secret.

From *Everything Belongs: The Gift of Contemplative Prayer*, ©1999 by Richard Rohr. The Crossroad Publishing Co.



SUFFERING TRANSFORMED

By Fahim El-Dabbagh

Blessed be...the God of all consolation, who consoles us in all our affliction so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God. -- 2 Cor. 1:3-4 (NRSV)

A good friend of mine is a doctor of internal medicine. His hobby is playing tennis. During a strenuous game, he injured his back and was confined to bed for months. He had two operations, but he hasn't fully recovered and is constantly in pain. Because of this, he can practice medicine only part time.

For the last few years, I had given this friend a copy of *The Upper Room*. Daily reading of the meditations has touched his heart and given him comfort. Recently, he asked me to subscribe to 50 copies so that he could distribute them to others who are suffering. My friend has become more sensitive to the strug-

gles of others and wants them to receive the same comfort he has been receiving.

God uses our suffering and weakness to open the hearts and minds of others

to God's love. Genesis tells the story of Joseph, who suffered betrayal and pain at the hands of his own brothers. However, in time, because of Joseph's relationship to the king they survived the great famine in Egypt and neighboring countries (see Genesis 45:4-11). For those who love God, everything works for good and opens their hearts to God's mercy. (See Romans 8:28.)

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



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