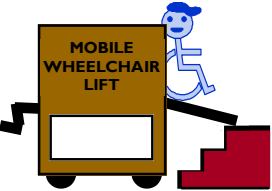


...Those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles.... — Isaiah 40:31 (NRSV)



Wings

A FAITHLETTER FOR UNITED METHODISTS WITH DISABILITIES AND THOSE WHO CARE ABOUT THEM
 Winter 2012 — Vol. 22 Issue 3 No. 87



FROM WHERE I SIT: A DAS IN GOOD WORKING ORDER

By Jo D'Archangelis

The worship service had just ended when Pastor Brad came over to me, bent down, and asked if I knew Rev. Tom Reinhart-Marean. I said I did. Although we hadn't seen each other in quite a while, I knew Tom as someone living with chronic and often painful back problems who was very much into disability ministry in the Cal-Pac conference. In fact, he had chaired a meeting at Fallbrook UMC in 2001 to form a Conference Task Force on Disability Ministries (later to be known as the Conference Committee on Disability Concerns).

Pastor Brad then informed me that Tom was going to be our guest preacher at the Disability Awareness Sunday (DAS) service in a couple of weeks. Whoa, that was kind of a surprise! Not so much about Tom but about the whole DAS thing in general. After all, four years had passed since this church had last celebrated DAS, and I was completely unaware that it was on the worship schedule this year, least of all that it was set to take place so soon.

About five days before the service, Julie, the church administrative assis-

tant, e-mailed me that Pastor Brad wanted me to give the "Pastoral Prayer." I readily agreed but noted that in my case it would be more of a "Laity Prayer" (which seemed only appropriate since Laity Sunday was also observed on the 3rd Sunday in October). But apparently that didn't sound quite right, so Tom suggested that it be listed simply as the "Morning Prayer" in the Order of Worship.

OK, that was taken care of. Now what about the wheelchair lift needed to access the chancel? The lift had been sitting dormant for the past four years in a corner of the sanctuary. It was all mechanical, no electronics involved, but perhaps a part had rusted or dropped off during that time? Moreover, nobody could quite remember how to operate it. Eventually, however, somebody located the instructions, and the Saturday before the service the lift was given a successful "trial run" (minus me and my wheelchair).

Sunday morning, I arrived at church about half-an-hour earlier than usual. Hoping that the lift worked as successfully with me in it as it did empty, I maneuvered my wheelchair onto it, and

Ron, the head usher, started cranking away. I slowly ascended into the chancel area and rolled off the lift without incident.

The first part of the service proceeded as usual with an opening prayer, hymns, a praise song, and a choral anthem. Then Tom stepped forward (he had brought along a powerchair but only used it to travel, at seemingly warp-speed, from one location to another on the church grounds) and pointed out the disability access improvements that had recently been made in the church facilities:

—Replacement of the water fountain in the hallway to the men's room off the narthex with an ADA-compliant fixture, a move which also opened up the hallway making it easier to turn a wheelchair around—

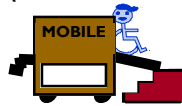
—Replacement of all restroom sinks with ADA-compliant sinks which include, among other disability accessible features, padded under-sink drainage pipes—

—Replacement of signage for restrooms throughout the campus with signage featuring the disability access symbol—

(FWIS: DAS continued on page 2)

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(FWIS: DAS continued from page 1)



Now it was time for the "Morning Prayer." Dave, the pastoral assistant, sat at my right holding a microphone, and Steve, a church friend, sat at my left holding a piece of paper with the words of the prayer printed on it. Much to my relief, I was able to say the whole thing, including the Lord's Prayer at the end, without running out of either breath or voice.

After the scripture about Jesus healing the blind man with a paste of dirt and saliva was read, Tom launched into his sermon. A few minutes into it, he suddenly turned to me and asked if I thought people with disabilities should be offended by hymns that included

words like "walk with Jesus." Caught totally off-guard but trying to sound as unflustered as possible, I responded, "Only if it's taken literally." It wasn't the most well-considered answer in the world, but at least it was an answer and Tom didn't give me a look.

At the end of the service, I rolled onto the lift and was slowly lowered to the sanctuary floor, again without incident. Thankfully, both the lift and I were in good working order for that Disability Awareness Sunday service.

Hopefully, everything and everyone will be in good working order at the next Disability Awareness Sunday service observed at Fallbrook United Methodist Church. And, also hopefully, it will not come as a surprise.



A MORNING PRAYER

Gracious and merciful Father,
Mother, Creator—

We come here this morning in our weakness, brokenness, and imperfection—knowing that we have failed
to hear those crying out for help,
to see those whom we choose to ignore,
to speak out against injustice,
to understand what is really important in life,
to move forward in your will for us.

We come here this morning, each of us with our own share of pain and loss, disappointment and helplessness—hemmed in by barriers and obstructions over which, it seems, we have little control.

But we also come this morning in gratitude and in faithful expectation—knowing that your love and forgiveness, grace and strength, are abundantly available to each of us and that in you all things ultimately work together for good.

Whatever our physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual condition—help each of us to look beyond differences and recognize the humanity in all of your children;
to hear your "still, small voice" comforting and guiding us;
to speak words of

(MORNING continued on page 3)



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

CONTACT 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: jdarchangelis@roadrunner.com.

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WINGS ON THE WEB Selected back issues of *Wings* in PDF format and Word Document format plus information about the newsletter and its founder/editor may be found at the United Methodist Association Of Ministers With Disabilities (UMAMD) website, www.umdisministers.org. Click on the *Wings* banner near the bottom of the home page.

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(MORNING continued from p. 2)

reconciliation and peace
and to affirm them with our
actions;
to comprehend that which is
true, right, and good;
to break down barriers and
remove obstructions so
that we might move
toward a fuller, more
loving relationship with you
and with others.

We ask your blessing upon all of
us here this morning—and
upon this church that it
might grow in its mission and
ministry to all your children.

We also ask your blessing upon
all those who cannot be here
this morning:

those incapacitated by
illness or injury and
confined to hospital beds,
nursing homes, or their
own homes—that they
might find the help and
healing they need;
those who work and serve as
caregivers, for in serving
others they serve your Son;
those in the military who
have been wounded in
body, mind, and spirit—
that they might get the
care, support, and
rehabilitation they deserve.

We pray this in the name of
Jesus Christ, in whom we all
find our true healing and
wholeness—

Amen.

— J. D. —

**Adapted from a prayer given
on Disability Awareness
Sunday at the Fallbrook
(Calif.) United Methodist
Church on October 16, 2011.**



IN REMEMBRANCE: JAMES (JIM) TROESH

By Jo D'Archangelis

Dave Troesh's e-mail came to me from out of the blue of cyberspace. In it, he said he had found a copy of *Wings* in his brother Jim's apartment on the day of his memorial service. At first, he was just going to ask that his brother's name be removed from the *Wings* mailing list but then decided to attach a couple of obituaries, effectively bringing me up-to-date on the life and legacy of this actor/writer/director/producer who also happened to be quadriplegic.

My only real contact with Jim Troesh had been in the spring of 1996 when he graciously consented to do a telephone interview for a *Wings* article. At that time, he was a member of St. Matthew's United Methodist Church in Hacienda Heights, Calif., and was known for his recurring role as Scotty in the 80's television series, *Highway To Heaven*. [See reprinted article on p. 4.]

Although work was sporadic over the next several years, Troesh managed to act in and/or co-write television programs (*Airwolf*, *Boston Legal*) and movies (*Color Of The Cross*, *Notes From The Underground*). His latest project was an unsold TV pilot, *The Hollywood Quad*, a wryly comedic look at his own experiences as an actor in a wheelchair—which he produced, directed, wrote, and co-starred in with actor Brian Cranston.

Troesh was the only quadriplegic to belong to both the Writers Guild of America West and the Screen Actors Guild and was an active member of the

Writers With Disabilities Committee of the WGAW. He also served on the Performers Executive Committee of the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences and was former National Chairman of AFTRA's Performers with Disabilities Committee and former president of the Media Access Office. As his brother Dave put it, "[Jim] raised awareness and opened a lot of doors for handicapped folks in a number of different industries."

About 10 years ago, Troesh moved to North Hollywood, next door to the Academy Awards Theater. Because of insurance problems, his care-assistants weren't allowed to drive his van, so he used his powerchair to go from place to place in his neighborhood as much as possible. For longer distances, he relied on the notoriously undependable Accessible Transit Service.

The Avery Schreiber Theater was also in close proximity, and there Troesh became involved in improvisational theater, most notably performing with "The Moving Targets," a political satire/sketch comedy/improv troupe that he also co-produced and wrote for. In addition, he co-founded "Improv For Kids," a not-for-profit organization, and taught classes at the theater.

Dave reported that his brother "always liked" St. Matthews UMC in Hacienda Heights but that "the challenges of getting back and forth after he had to give up his van were more than he could deal with." Dave added that

(REMEMBRANCE continued on page 4)

A NEW KIND

You don't think your way into a new kind of living. You live your way into a new kind of thinking.

— Henri J. M. Nouwen —

(REMEMBRANCE continued from page 3)



Troesh occasionally visited a non-denominational church which was in rolling distance of his North Hollywood apartment.

Troesh was only 54 years of age when he died of respiratory failure on October 6, 2011. His memorial service was held on October 21 at the Avery Schreiber Theater—outside. “He asked for an outdoor service where people could just stand around and happily celebrate his escape from his earthly body,” Dave recalled. “That is exactly what we did. It was different from any memorial service any of us had ever attended, but it was all Jim.”



(A WINGS ENCORE) “HIGHWAY TO HEAVEN” ACTOR FINDS ROAD TO FULL LIFE By Jo D’Archangelis

James Troesh has achieved a few firsts in his life. He was the first quadriplegic actor to join the Screen Actors Guild; he was the first disabled actor to play a romantic lead in a television program (*Highway to Heaven*); and he believes he was the first quadriplegic to skydive, in 1989.

Troesh did the skydiving tandem style with his instructor on his back. Afterward, he decided to make his first jump

his last. As he explained in a telephone interview from his home, “I proved to myself I could do it, but I found out I might get pretty banged up too. It just wasn’t worth the risk to try again.”

In other areas, Troesh has not let the possibility of getting “banged up” deter him from going where few disabled people have gone before. Born and raised in Whittier, Calif., he was disabled at the age of fourteen when he climbed up on a tower to install a television antenna. Somehow a spark from an adjacent electric cable touched the antenna, and between 20- and 40,000 volts ripped through his body.

“I don’t know if it was from the shock or the fall, but I woke up paralyzed from the neck down,” he says. He underwent rehabilitation at Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center in Downey, Calif., for 11 months. A C4-5, he learned to operate the controls of a powerchair using chin movements. He can also move his shoulders and breathe on his own.

Some years later, Troesh entered Rio Hondo College in Whittier to study journalism and found himself deejaying on a local radio station. In 1980, to perfect his radio and journalistic skills, he took acting classes at PATH, the Performing Arts Theater of the Handicapped, then located in Los Angeles. The acting bug bit him deeply. “I gave up everything to focus on acting and writing,” he says.

He made his acting debut a year later in a theatrical production of *The Caine Mutiny Court Martial*. In 1983 he got his first speaking part on television in the short-lived series, *AfterMASH*. Small roles in other series followed, plus some commercials. But he credits the

(HIGHWAY continued on page 5)

(A WINGS ENCORE) WANTED: ATTENDANT FOR ACTIVE QUADRIPLLEGIC MAN By James Troesh

My friends, my enemies,
my confidantes, my critics,
my painfully obvious,
invisible associates.
Always dependent,
but somehow above it all,
and them
eternally making a day
in my life
into a day at their office.
They know all my secrets,
my personal affairs--
a constant struggling
for privacy,
my thoughts their only mystery.
Resentment cloaked in humor,
orders masked as
offhanded requests,
wishing all the while
that they would see
behind the veil.
Precious things become
meaningless
as they treat them
without regard.
A memorable picture,

a childhood sculpture,
a pet
become little more than clutter.
Every point is disputed,
every action must be justified.
I tremble with fury but fold,
as always,
to avoid confrontation.
Accommodating
and compromising
until self disappears,
an actor in an endless play,
ever-ready to resume
my daily performance.
Days of forged laughter,
nights of scorn,
endless fretting,
forever saying,
someday it will be different,
someday I'll take charge.
Memory fades them
one into the next
as the years pass,
leaving nothing but faceless,
nameless hands....

Reprinted from Summer 1996 issue of Wings.

(HIGHWAY continued from page 4)



real breakthrough in his career to the late Michael Landon, actor-writer-producer of *Little House on the Prairie* and *Highway to Heaven*.

Troesh recalls, "In 1984 Michael was holding auditions for someone to play a person in a wheelchair in an episode of *Highway to Heaven*, and he picked me out of all of those who showed up, disabled and non-disabled." Landon was so impressed by the first episode Troesh appeared in, he later wrote a two-parter especially for him. Troesh played the recurring role of "Scotty" in several episodes during the six years *Highway to Heaven* was on the air. He even co-wrote the episode, "A Match Made in Heaven," with Landon, based on his own idea.

In the late 80's acting jobs became scarce, so Troesh concentrated on his writing. He has published several poems and short stories and has written newspaper articles. His play, *Another Pleasant Evening*, was presented in Los Angeles and won a disabled playwrights award. He has screenplays in development and hopes to find a publisher for his autobiography, *Dare To Dream*.

Has his disability kept him from getting more acting jobs? "No," he says, "There are about 17,000 actors looking for work and a minimum number of roles available. It's lucky for anyone to find a job acting, disabled or non-disabled. I'm not bitter at all."

Luck was with him recently, however. The producers of an independent film, *Notes From The Underground*, were looking specifically for a disabled actor to fill a minor role that didn't even require a disability. Troesh auditioned and got the part. "The film should be released in about six months," he says.

Now living in Rowland Heights, Calif., Troesh keeps body and soul together working fulltime in Advocate Services for the regional Independent Living Center. His job entails community outreach, speaking to senior citizen groups, promoting ILC services, writing the

Center newsletter, and advocating for disability issues with members of the California State Legislature.

For the past four years, Troesh has been a member of St. Matthew's United Methodist Church in Hacienda Heights where he lived until recently. Although not raised a Methodist, he says he was drawn to Methodism because he found more freedom "to do my own thing. They don't beat you over the head with the sin thing or the money thing."

Even though no longer living in Hacienda Heights, he still attends St. Matthew's. He likes the church's comfortable, family-oriented atmosphere and

generally finds it accessible. When he sang in the choir (something he doesn't have the time to do now with the demands of his job and his daily maintenance routine), the church provided a temporary ramp to the choir loft for him. "But there is no wheelchair accessibility to the altar," Troesh notes. "So I couldn't get married there if I wanted to."

It seems that a highway to heaven is one thing; a way to the altar another.

Reprinted from Summer 1996 issue of Wings under title "Highway To Heaven" Actor Finds Full Life Here On Earth."



RHODODENDRON By Steve Garnaas-Holmes

Outside the window where I pray
a rhododendron blossom begins to open.
Its flame-shaped bud rests on a platter of green
like a lotus, like a promise.
Soon it will unfold into wild and exuberant beauty—
but not yet.
For now, it folds its hands in prayer and waits,
for rain, for warmth, for juices from within,
for the fullness of time.

Such a blessing rises in you as well, child of God.
An extravagance of mystery hides within you,
a beauty undisclosed by the husk of your life.
It abides, curled and folded,
but whole and intense in its secret darkness.
Sit in the sun and rain and wait for it,
the sun unfolding from within you,
God blooming in you.
Let this be your prayer,
your promise, your confidence—
you, upon whom loving eyes look
in awe and devotion
from their window every morning.

From Alive Now (September/October 2009).



IF NOT THROWING WIDE, INCHING OPEN DOORS (PART I) By Kenneth Briggs

Seminaries are becoming more welcoming places for persons with a physical or developmental disability, and this raises interesting planning issues for board members and other leaders in theological education.

Twenty percent of the population of the United States and Canada—one of every five persons, crossing race, social, economic, gender, and age categories—faces the challenge of a physical or developmental disability. Despite the numbers, seminary communities lag in giving attention to the educational and spiritual needs of persons with disabilities

and in educating students to minister to persons with special needs.

Jeremy Funk was a whiz as a student at Princeton Theological Seminary. He excelled in linguistics and otherwise sailed through the course load like a schooner in a brisk wind. But his seminary transcript tells only part of the story.

Funk arrived at Princeton Theological Seminary with cerebral palsy and a hearing loss, a combination that required much ingenuity and aid from members of the campus community. He was provided with note takers to allow

him to keep up with classes he couldn't hear. Professors gave him extra time to finish exams. A friend was hired to take him to places whose locations he couldn't recall. And when it came time for his fieldwork assignment, he was handed keys to a specially equipped car, the gift of an anonymous donor.

Advocates for persons with disabilities wish there were more examples like Funk's. To that end, they pursue goals of accessibility, theology, and attitude to help insure that future generations of ministerial candidates will have more of the kind of opportunities afforded to the Princeton Seminary student.

With varying degrees of effort and money, seminaries have begun opening their doors to candidates for the ministry who have disabilities. No tally of these students is available, but the number is widely believed to have inched up in the last decade. As disability awareness has slowly dawned, the list of human conditions fitting this definition has grown and been argued over. Impairments resulting from disease, accident, or birth are generally accepted without question, but discussion has arisen over some of the newer categories of learning difficulties such as dyslexia and attention deficit disorder (ADD) and over a range of psychological diagnoses such as chronic depression.

According to official estimates, about 20 percent of persons in the United States and Canada live with some level of disability. By comparison, only three to five percent of church attendees fit that description, according to Robert Anderson, president of the Center for Religion and Disability in Birmingham, Alabama. To Anderson and others who study the subject, the low percentage of Christians with disabilities in the pews indicates that sanctuaries are much less hospitable than they ought to be.

And that is the driving force motivating a cluster of advocates, none with *(THROWING continued on page 7)*



THE BOOK OF DISCIPLINE OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

On Inclusiveness

We recognize that God made all creation and saw that it was good. As a diverse people of God who bring special gifts and evidences of God's grace and to the unity of the Church and to society, we are called to be faithful to the example of Jesus' ministry to all persons.

Inclusiveness means openness, acceptance, and support that enables all persons to participate in the life of the Church, the community, and the world; therefore, inclusiveness denies every semblance of discrimination. The services of worship of every local church of The United Methodist Church shall be open to all persons.

The mark of an inclusive society is one in which all persons are open, welcoming, fully accepting, and supporting of all other persons, enabling them to participate fully in the life of the church, the community, and the world. A further mark of inclusive is the setting of church activities in facilities accessible to persons with disabilities.

In The United Methodist Church inclusiveness means the freedom for the total involvement of all persons will meet the requirements of The United Methodist Book Of Discipline in the membership and leadership of the Church at any level and in every place. In the spirit of will this declaration, United Methodist seminaries will make all efforts to meet Americans With Disabilities (ADA) accessibility standards by the year 2011. Exemptions for historical or existing buildings are not allowed under this requirement.

From the 2008 BDUMC, part III, section VI, paragraph 139.

(*THROWING continued from page 6*)

I more effectiveness or spirit than Ginny Thornburgh, the director of the Religion and Disability Program of the National Organization on Disability.* Thornburgh, a trustee of Princeton Seminary, is virtually a one-woman band, staging conferences on the subject, promoting the cause among seminary leaders, and offering encouragement to those in the fledgling field. Among her primary goals, if she finds the funding, is to build a network among seminaries to share information and ideas. When asked if there is a “movement” toward raising the issue, she paused, chuckled, and said calmly, “You are speaking to the movement.”

On individual campuses, of course, much has happened. The school Thornburgh serves, Princeton, for example, spent \$10,000 in 1997 for a survey to find out what it needed in order to satisfy requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act. From there, the school launched a project that, among other things, has renovated the 1873 chapel (\$125,000), installed special signs (\$25,000), built a ramp to the president’s house, added TTY-TTD phones for the hard of hearing, and provided a specially equipped bathroom in the student center. Each year the seminary sets aside \$25,000 for new improvements.

Princeton’s priorities fit a pattern. The immediate challenge for schools is usually architectural: installing, where needed, ramps and elevators, renovating classrooms to allow wheelchairs, and providing resources to respond to the special needs of students who are blind and deaf, to mention just a few. Some of these adjustments require a level of investment that hard-pressed seminaries find burdensome. But while finances are certainly a valid concern, in the words of one seminary dean,

*Thornburgh is currently Director of the Interfaith Initiative program of the American Association of People with Disabilities (www.aapd.com), phone: 202-521-4311, email: gthornburgh@aapd.com.

money can be used “as an excuse.” As a participant from Lancaster Theological Seminary at a recent conference on theological education and disability noted, it is possible for a seminary community to make “reasonable accommodations” (the standard phrase in the field) without “breaking the bank.”

A United Church of Christ study carried out by Dr. Laura-Jean Gilbert in 2000 tested some of the basic assumptions about disability within the seven seminaries directly related to the denomination and seven with historic ties to the UCC (eleven of the fourteen schools participated in the study). Administrators graded their schools on disability-related issues and faculty members were invited to answer questionnaires. Only one or two of the campuses were rated “totally” accessible to persons in wheelchairs; the rest

were clumped in the “mostly” or “somewhat” categories.

The age of the school did not make it any more or less likely to have pursued accessibility. Nor, surprisingly perhaps, did a school’s yearly budget. And as for the schools’ recruitment materials, they contained little information and even fewer pictures that might be regarded as welcoming to persons with disabilities. Accessibility was nearly the sole concern of the seminaries in Gilbert’s study, with limited efforts to include disability studies in seminary courses or to deal with negative attitudes toward persons who are disabled.

(Part 2 will appear in the Spring 2012 issue of *Wings*)

From *In Trust*, the magazine of the Association Of Boards In Theological Education (New Year 2005).

DISABILITY MINISTRIES RESOURCE



Including People with Disabilities in Faith Communities: A Guide for Service Providers, Families, and Congregations By Erik W. Carter, Ph.D. (Brookes Publishing Co.: 2007)

A congregational community is an ideal place to share and strengthen faith, form lasting relationships, and develop special gifts and talents. Too often, though, people with developmental and other disabilities lack the supports they need to fully participate in the faith community of their choice. With this innovative guide, congregations will get the realistic how-to strategies they need to become places of welcome for people with a wide range of disabilities. Bringing his ideas to life with anecdotes, thought-provoking quotes from experts and community members, and examples of successful strategies, Erik Carter helps readers:

- ◆ reflect on how inclusive their congregation is—and could be
- ◆ break down attitudinal, architectural, and programmatic barriers to inclusion
- ◆ develop meaningful religious education programs and other inclusive activities
- ◆ discover and support the spiritual preferences and needs of people with disabilities
- ◆ plan, fund, and implement bold community-wide inclusion efforts
- ◆ pursue inclusion beyond congregational activities, responding to people’s needs for social relationships, leisure activities, employment, and transportation

US \$24.95, Stock Number: AF-67434, 264 pp., 6x9 paperback, ISBN: 978-1-55766-743-4. See www.brookespublishing.com for more info.

Abridged and adapted from disc e-mail list (April 2007).



VALUABLE TO GOD

By Sheila Hicks

God shows no partiality. — Romans 2:11 (NRSV)

Sometimes I wonder if I matter to God. By the world's standards, I am worth nothing. I don't have a high-paying job; in fact, I am disabled and live in low-rent housing. With a modest, subsidized income, I don't have a big bank account. By society's standards, I would be considered a failure and perhaps an outcast.

However, when I find myself feeling worthless and useless I can turn to Romans 2:11 and read, "God shows no partiality." Meditating on this scripture helps me to realize that regardless of my position in life, I matter to God just as much as anyone else in the world. Our worth to God is not based on race, financial position, age, sex, or education. We matter to the supreme

God, who created us and loved us enough to send Jesus Christ to die for the sins of each one of us. Knowing that, we can respond to feelings of worthlessness by remembering how worthwhile we are to God.

**From *The Upper Room*
(May/June 2007).**

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If you are a computer user who receives the paper-and-print version of *Wings*, would you consider switching to *E-Wings*—either in the PDF version or, for use with a screen reader, in the MS Word Document version? Please e-mail me at:

jdarchangelis@roadrunner.com

Jo D'Archangelis, Editor



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