



Wings

...Those who wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.
Isaiah 40:31 [NRSV]

Vol. 8 Issue 4
No. 32



A Faithletter For, By and About
United Methodists With Disabilities



Spring
1998

FROM WHERE I SIT **By Jo D'Archangelis**

When you first meet him, your impulse, even if you're a quasi-quadruplegic as I am, is to reach out and shake his hand. Until you realize with an inner start (and even though you knew it beforehand) that he has no arms.

But apparently the Rev. Dr. Harold Wilke is accustomed to right arms that shoot forward and then as suddenly recoil, and to embarrassed, confused looks on peoples' faces. He immediately puts you at ease with some warm and welcoming remarks and you feel as though you had shaken hands with him.

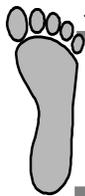
Frankly, I hadn't even heard about Harold Wilke until I started putting out this newsletter some 8 years ago. At that time someone mentioned his book, *Creating the Caring Congregation*, and I thought, "Oh, that's nice." Then some mutual friends who live in the same retirement community as he does showed him a copy of *Wings*. We put each other on our respective mailing lists, and he started sending me copies of his newsletter. I soon learned that amongst a host of other things he has spoken at the United Nations, conversed with Pope John Paul, and given the invocation at the ceremony at which George Bush signed the ADA, and I thought, "Hmmm, this is kind of impressive."

So I more or less invited myself and a few other UMWD's and FUMWD's to visit Dr. Wilke at his home in Claremont, California. The ostensible purpose was to tape an interview with him to be published in this newsletter (see p. 3). The real reason was to come face-to-face with a true pioneer in the disability movement while I had the opportunity.

Some disability pioneers, like Ed Roberts or Evan Kemp, are no longer with us, while others, like Justin Dart Jr., are in failing health. Silver-haired and trim at the age of 83, Dr. Wilke is very much with us, and his health yet allows him to criss-cross the country, giving lectures and receiving awards, albeit at a slower rate (his wife once

admonished him, "Harold, remember you're not 70 anymore"). He stands quite straight for a man of a "certain age" and appears to be taller than he actually is.

At one point in the general conversation, he asks, seemingly from out of nowhere, "Do you know why I wear the clerical collar?" I don't suppose any of us had given it much



...As food intermittently drops into your lap from weakened hands and fingers, you even find yourself envious of Dr. Wilke's marvelous toes.

thought. Few clergy seem to wear the collar in the United Methodist Church, and those who do, wear it mainly at worship services and other religious events. Perhaps it is different in the United Church of Christ?

No, that isn't it. You can tell that it is a matter of some pride with him, that here is a man with a noticeable disability who has nonetheless been fully accepted into the Church. But more importantly, he points out, the visual impact of armlessness and clerical collar sends a positive message to people even as it jars their expectations. You realize then how much Dr. Wilke appreciates the value

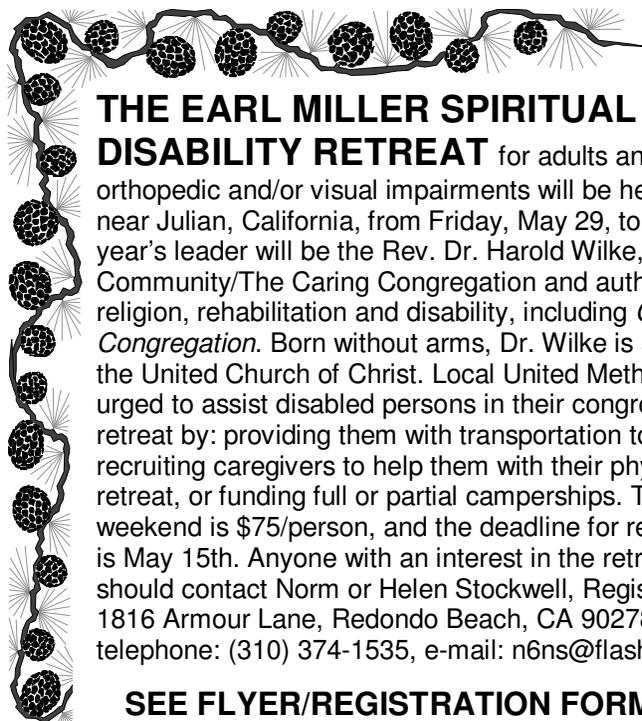
(and power) of symbolism.

Later on at the beginning of a light supper, you notice something else about him remarkable for a man his age: his physical flexibility. He slips off his left shoe and brings his foot up to the table. He has socks especially made to fit like a glove between his first and second toes. He grasps a spoon with those toes, dips it in his soup, and brings it to his mouth in one clean movement.

You are at first fascinated (apparently he is also accustomed to people gawking at him in amazement, for he goes on eating and drinking and talking without missing a beat).

And as food intermittently drops in your lap from your weakened hands and fingers, you even find yourself envious of Dr. Wilke's marvelous toes.

After a few minutes though you're no longer awestruck or envious. Nor does it cross your mind that being seated next to an octogenarian contortionist wearing a clerical collar and a wristwatch on his ankle ("extra links in the wristband," he explains, anticipating our question) is all that unusual. It seems perfectly natural and ordinary. And in fact it is perfectly natural and ordinary—just people sharing soup and salad and bread and God's blessings.



THE EARL MILLER SPIRITUAL LIFE DISABILITY RETREAT

for adults and young people with orthopedic and/or visual impairments will be held at Camp Cedar Glen near Julian, California, from Friday, May 29, to Sunday, May 31. This year's leader will be the Rev. Dr. Harold Wilke, founder of Healing Community/The Caring Congregation and author of several works on religion, rehabilitation and disability, including *Creating the Caring Congregation*. Born without arms, Dr. Wilke is an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ. Local United Methodist churches are urged to assist disabled persons in their congregations attend this retreat by: providing them with transportation to and from the retreat, recruiting caregivers to help them with their physical needs at the retreat, or funding full or partial camperships. The total fee for the weekend is \$75/person, and the deadline for registration is May 15th. Anyone with an interest in the retreat should contact Norm or Helen Stockwell, Registrars, 1816 Armour Lane, Redondo Beach, CA 90278, telephone: (310) 374-1535, e-mail: n6ns@flash.net.

SEE FLYER/REGISTRATION FORM INSIDE 

THE CHURCH IN OCEAN PARK: AN 'UPLIFTING' COMMITMENT TO ACCESSIBILITY

The Church in Ocean Park is a small, old United Methodist Church in the south section of Santa Monica, California. What this church has are tremendous vitality and a commitment to social justice. What it didn't have for years and years, with its flights of stairs and a sanctuary located on the second floor, was access for persons with mobility limitations—least of all the money to provide it.

Matters came to a head in 1992 when members of the disability community vehemently protested their inability to attend a meeting of a renters' rights group held in the church without risk to themselves and to those trying to carry them up the stairs. The church and its then-pastor, the Rev. James Conn, made a commitment to provide accessibility to the sanctuary. Calling access "a basic issue of social justice," Conn persuaded church member Mary Beth Welch to organize a fund-raising program.

Architects Doug Lowe and Ralph Mechur donated their services to design a wheelchair-lift shaft plus bathroom renovations without sacrificing the historicity of the building. With the volunteer assistance of a local attorney who knew the way

around city building permits and regulations, plans were finally approved in 1993. In 1994 fund-raising began in earnest. Construction and installation took place in the fall of 1997 with the total cost of the accessibility project coming to \$40,000.

In an e-mail interview the Rev. Sandie Richards, who was appointed to pastor the church in 1995, recalls the fund-raising efforts: "It took us over five years of fund-raising events, including the marriage of the former minister and his wife. Jim Conn and Susan McCorry asked for donations to the lift in lieu of wedding gifts! We joined the Human Race (a walk/run/wheelchair-a-thon put on by the Center for Non-profit Management), held comedy-night fund-raisers, begged, pleaded, cajoled, applied for grants, etc.

"In the end," she goes on, "We raised \$31,000 and decided to go ahead with the project anyway, even though it meant taking money away from other capital expense projects.

We have raised another \$1500 following the installation and hope to get donations to recoup the rest of our capital funds. We thought it was important to get the lift in as soon as we could. We were all looking forward to completing the project."

When asked what the congregational response has been to the installation, Richards replies,



For more information or to make a donation to the church's accessibility project, contact: Rev. Sandie Richards, Pastor, The Church in Ocean Park, 235 Hill Street, Santa Monica, CA 90405, [310] 399-1631. E-mail: churchop@aol.com.

"People are excited to have the lift in. Many have friends or aging parents who have mobility impairments and would like to get them to church. We are somewhat anxious, because we know that the lift alone is only the first step toward welcoming people with mobility impairments. We have a lot to learn about accessibility."

A dedication ceremony was held March 12 at the church. Attendees, including Bishop Roy Sano of the California-Pacific Annual Conference, paid tribute to the commitment and perseverance of the Church in Ocean Park in opening its sanctuary doors to everyone.

JAF MINISTRIES 1998 FAMILY RETREATS

Christian retreats for families who have at least one member with a disability—Fellowship, worship, workshops, respite care provided

JUNE 1-5 Camp Allen
Nevasota, TX (214)739-2523

JUNE 15-19 Mission Springs
Scotts Valley, CA
(510) 930-6775

JUNE 22-26 Spruce Lake
Canadensis, PA (818)707-5664

JUNE 29-JULY 3
Oakwood Inn Syracuse, IN
(630)529-6100

JULY 13-17 Murrieta Hot
Springs Murrieta, CA
(818)707-5664

JULY 20-24 Bonclarken
Flat Rock, NC (704)845-9031



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

Wings Needs The Following From You

Ideas and suggestions for articles	Original stories, poetry, cartoons
Personal essays and anecdotes	Appropriate items from another source
The name and address of someone dying to be on our mailing list	A change-of-address notice if you move and want to continue receiving <i>Wings</i>

Send All Correspondence To
Jo D'Archangelis, Editor, Wings

Church Address

Fallbrook United Methodist Church
1844 Winterhaven Road
Fallbrook, CA 92028
Telephone: [760] 728-1472
Fax: [760] 728-7433

Home Address

592 West Ammunition Road, Apt. 1
Fallbrook, CA 92028-3191
Telephone/Fax: [760] 723-2668
(please call before faxing)

Editor's E-Mail Address
JODARLIS@aol.com

Wings Website
www.satcom.net/mariposa/wings01.html



Pssst! Wanna Be An Angel?

We need your financial support to continue publication and to expand the readership of *Wings* nationwide. If you think *Wings* is worth it, please make a check or money order payable to the "Fallbrook United Methodist Church" and mark it "Wings Newsletter." Mail it to the church address above.

Basic Angel	\$6-14	Major Angel	\$15-24
Super Angel	\$25-49	Mega Angel	\$50-99
Totally Awesome Angel	\$100 Or More		

(Donations are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.)

HAROLD WILKE: ARMLESS MINISTER FINDS SUPPORT IN "EVERLASTING ARMS" OF GOD

Editor's Note: Born without arms, a young Harold Wilke was discouraged by his church pastor from entering the ministry. He ignored his pastor's advice and was eventually ordained a minister in what is now known as the United Church of Christ. For well over half a century he served as teacher, military chaplain, and church administrator. Today he devotes his time to lecturing and writing in the areas of disability, religion, and rehabilitation. In February of this year, a small group of U M W D ' s and FUMWD's visited the Rev. Dr. Wilke at Pilgrim Place, a residence community for retired clergy and other religious workers, in Claremont, California. The following is based on an interview conducted with him during that visit.



Why did you found Healing Community/The Caring Congregation, in 1974 the first organization to deal specifically with issues of religion and disability and, even now, the only international, interfaith organization of its kind?

The Vietnam War. I remember one young man whom I came to know on one of my visits to Vietnam and whom I saw again later in San Francisco. He said, "Wilke, when I got home from this thing, people spit on me. They know that I had been in Vietnam, and they thought we oughtn't to be there, and so they took it out on me. Is that right?" I gathered together an interdenominational, interfaith group of leaders, and out of that we created Healing Community. Our mission was simple: the church, the local congregation, has a responsibility for healing—healing divisiveness, healing attitudes—and for acceptance of individuals. Very quickly we became a national organization and developed units in various places across the country.

How soon did emphasis on healing after the Vietnam War shift to disability concerns?

Early on I realized that there are a lot of people to whom the response of the community is negative. Another factor was when I served as chaplain and professor at the Menninger School of Psychiatry and realized the importance of the human psyche as it responds to disability. Reading Freud, I was struck by the implied concept of a psychological support system that we aren't consciously aware of but which is there for every human being from the beginning. Now Freud, who

was certainly anti-religious, could also have recognized what the Old Testament meant by "underneath are the everlasting arms" and "the eternal God is thy refuge." God's support system is there for us all the time, even before we ask for it. We in the disability community need to call that [support system] into being, recognize

"The household of faith needs to see itself as a 'house' of faith that is accessible and acceptive of individuals who far too often are kept on the outside."

its presence, and rejoice in it.

What is the primary goal of Healing Community/The Caring Congregation?

That every congregation in this nation be architecturally accessible and attitudinally welcoming. The few surveys done indicate that something like only 10% of Christian congregations, nationally, are accessible and acceptive. But it is not only with [regard to] physical disability; there are other parts of our community that have difficulty in being accepted. The disability community in a sense also includes gays and lesbians. We must recognize that all of us are children of God and that the Church needs to respond in the same way that God through Jesus responded to people who were on the outside looking in.

Is accessibility a matter of charity, i.e. Christian love, or of

justice?

Both. But more, accessibility is a matter of what the Church itself teaches, the theological position that *all* of the children of God need to be in God's temple. The household of faith needs to see itself as a "house" of faith that is accessible and acceptive of individuals who far too often are kept on the outside. We are going to be celebrating a new millennium in a few years. I think it's time for the Methodist Church and my own [UCC] denomination of elders to recognize a millennial hope in which the Church is fully inclusive and fully acceptive.

How do you think God views disability?

God's word in the Bible is very clear. God stands beside all of the children of the Divine. "Underneath are the everlasting arms." "The eternal God is thy refuge." No matter what the situation is for the individual, God is there beside her or him.

Secondly, God does not bring retribution in the form of disability on an individual because of some sinful act. In the Book of John, Jesus meets with a blind man, and his disciples ask him who sinned, this man or his parents, that he should be blind. Jesus answers that no one's sin is to blame; rather, the man's blindness is an opportunity to demonstrate God's power.

Thirdly, regardless of the individual's personal situation, the love, nurture, and support of the

(WILKE continued on page 4)

FEAR IS THE RIGHT HAND TO LEFT

Fear is the right hand to left
Once you give in you give up
The left hand becomes a handshake with death

Don't hide it or build it up
Size or false strength have no valor
Seduction in beauty may tempt
All the lies they disguise and carry on with
Now they no longer have the will to fight against us

Let go of the fear
It's an unwanted place
Soon to be swallowed by the face of death
Whether it's in the back or blunt up front
Hold on to the will to conquer fear
Don't let go of our father's guiding hand of faith

—Bruce Lynn Sanders—

1998 Cal-Pac Annual Conference

OPPORTUNITIES FOR UMWDs TO SHARE THEIR GIFTS AND GRACES

Editor's Note: UMWDs (United Methodists With Disabilities) are urged to make their presence felt this year at the California-Pacific Annual Conference either by attending as guests or visitors (very few UMWDs, if any, will be Conference delegates) or by participating in one or more of the events listed below. Only by being as "visible" as possible can we successfully pursue our goals of Access, Awareness, and Acceptance.

✓ Persons with disabilities of any and every kind, lay or clergy, Methodist or non-Methodist, are wanted to serve as anointers—applying oil to the foreheads of those asking for intercessory prayer—at the Faith and Healing worship session at the California-Pacific Annual Conference, University of Redlands, Friday, June 19. If you are interested, contact Abby Vincent at 10834 Pickford Way, Culver City, CA 90230, telephone: [310] 559-4989, e-mail: avincent@ix.netcom.com.

✓ A loose—very loose—coalition of deaf and disability ministries in the Cal-Pac Conference, including Wings, the Task Force on Deaf Ministries, and Mariposa Ministry, is planning to have a booth at the Annual Conference this year. Its purpose will be to enlighten Conference members about the importance of deaf and disability ministry to the discipleship mission of the United Methodist Church. The booth will be in place during the entire duration of the Conference, June 17-21, and will display a variety of materials and resources in regard to deaf and disability ministries. Volunteers are needed to assist in setting up, staffing, and dismantling the booth. Any ideas about presentation would be most appreciated too. Dr. Ken Tittle, founder and co-director of Mariposa Ministry, is "Booth Co-ordinator" and can be contacted at: 905 Encinas Ave., Calexico, CA 92231, telephone: [760] 357-4768, e-mail: ken_tittle@bigfoot.com.

✓ Volunteer workers are wanted to build a Habitat-For-Humanity house at Redlands during the Cal-Pac Annual Conference June 17-21. Local United Methodist churches are asked to donate funds and/or building materials. For further information, contact Toni Ethridge, Conference-Habitat Project Co-ordinator, P.O. Box 6006, Pasadena, CA 91102, telephone: [818] 767-5197, e-mail: tonibear01@aol.com.

WESTERN JURISDICTION CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED METHODIST CONGRESS OF THE DEAF

August 21-23, 1998 Alton Collins Retreat Center Eagle Crest, Oregon
Contact: Laurel Glass or Holly Elliott
1300 NE 16th Ave., #1408 Portland, OR 97232
[503] 280-2347 Voice [503] 280-2348 TDD [503] 280-2349 Fax
LaurelGlass@compuserve.com

(WILKE continued from page 3)

community of the faithful need to be there for this individual.

And, finally, God ascribes wholeness to every individual, and wholeness in a real sense has nothing to do with disability. Early on in the Old Testament Abraham is judged righteous in the sight of God even before his circumcision, which is a sign of that justification. God ascribed justification and wholeness to him before that physical act. That means God sees us as whole regardless of the particular mental, emotional, or physical situation which is ours.

Dr. Wilke's latest book, *Angels on My Shoulders and Muses at My Side*, a collection of autobiographical essays, will be published by Abingdon sometime this year.

Honor Roll Of Appreciation

We thank the following persons or organizations whose gifts of time and/or money have made possible the publication and mailing of Wings.

Margery Chapman
Annette Roth
Roy & Mary Klein
Jill Halley
Pete & Ruth Sciumbato
Angelina Jones
Jack & Char Tarr
Hylton & Dorothy Sanders
Faith Moser-Whipple
Lucille Fleming
Mary R. Horn
Rev. Alyce Mullen
Linda Costal
Dulcie Henwood
Linda Bowersox
A. A.*

*Angels Anonymous



*"A Faithletter For United Methodists With Disabilities
and Those Who Care About Them"*

Fallbrook United Methodist Church
1844 Winterhaven Road
Fallbrook, CA 92028

Non-Profit Org.
Bulk Rate
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 35
Fallbrook, CA

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED