



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]**

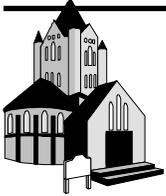
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A Faithletter For, By and About
United Methodists With Disabilities



Winter
1999



WELCOME?

FROM WHERE I SIT By Jo D'Archangelis

Some time ago the following question was posted to an on-line disability discussion group:

"If the church 'practiced what it preached' about the teachings of Jesus, would it not be a 'given' that PWD's [people with disabilities] would long ago have been given accessibility, etc.?"

That is, as someone remarked, a "good question." If only coming up with a "good" (that is, clear, comprehensive and plausible) answer were half so easy!

But as a start, I think a "good" answer would have to take into account the dual nature of the Christian Church: [1.] the Church as the Body of Christ instituted by God and sustained by the Holy Spirit and [2.] the church as a group of fragmented denominations instituted by well-intentioned but frail human beings and sustained, much too often, by misguided perceptions and faulty theologies.

If the church truly followed the teachings of Jesus, no one group—women, African-Americans, the poor, tax-collectors, homosexuals, least of all persons with disabilities—would ever be denied the opportunity to fully participate either as clergy or laity in its sacraments, fellowship, or functions.

Yet throughout its history, and even into the present, the church has excluded or at least restricted access to one or another group because of the very human failings of fear, ignorance, prejudice, and hostility. Worst of all, church people have often fashioned theologies and Biblical dictums to justify such exclusion and/or restriction. "This is the will of God," they solemnly intone.

Well, yes, until the day some church leader gets a "divine revelation" or "re-considers" the scriptures and determines that the exclusion of, say, red-headed special prosecutors isn't God's will at all! In fact it's just the opposite—red-headed special

prosecutors are to be welcomed into the church with open arms. Of course you realize it's not God's will that changes; people just "suddenly" get a better grasp of it.

Now the stance the church has taken towards PWD's in particular is a mixed bag at best (but then PWD's

We [people with disabilities] have always had access to the Body of Christ. Slowly but surely we are gaining access to the church.

are a mixed bag at best). To a large extent, we have been the "invisible people"—more or less out-of-sight and out-of-mind, shut away in institutions or back bedrooms.

We weren't able to get to the church. If we were able to get to it, we couldn't get in. If we could get in, we were considered mentally or physically incapable of contributing to the life and mission of the church. Not knowing what to do with us, the church more often than not studiously ignored us.

When the church did take notice of us, it was usually as poor creatures to be taken care of in Christian charity. It could never quite make up its mind

though if we were demon-possessed or divinely blessed (a heavy burden for us to bear either way).

We were recipients of the church's largesse but not bearers of it. We were cursed by God and therefore cast out from the church. We were God's "special children" already in his kingdom and therefore didn't need the salvation the church preached. However the church tried to explain us, it rarely saw us as part of itself—as necessary to its functioning as any "normal" member of the Body of Christ.

Too bad—both for us and for the church. If any one group can be said to manifest the reconciling, transforming love of God and to be most fit to extend the ministry of healing to others through the church, surely it is people with disabilities.

We have always had access to the Body of Christ. Slowly but surely we are gaining access to the church. Needless to say, no "divine revelation" has opened the way for us—just the gradual erosion of ignorance and fear, myths and stereotypes.

God's will—the inclusion of all his children in his Church—remains the same; it is human beings within the church who come to change and to grow in their understanding of and commitment to that will.



- Have you ever been to the UM Disability Retreat?
- Would you like to attend the UM Disability Retreat?
- Have you absolutely no interest in the UM Disability Retreat but would like to have a fun time with United Methodists With Disabilities (UMWDs) and their families and friends (FUMWDs)?

UMWD/FUMWD GET-TOGETHER PLUS DISABILITY RETREAT REUNION

SPECIAL GUEST SPEAKER:

THE REVEREND WILBUR JOHNSON
Retired United Methodist Minister and Post-Polio Survivor

Saturday, February 27, 1999 • 12 noon-3 pm
Bender Fellowship Hall • Fallbrook United Methodist Church
1844 Winterhaven Road • Fallbrook, California 92028
[760] 728-1472



A catered luncheon will be provided at no cost to those attending. Please RSVP Jo at [760] 723-2668 or e-mail her at JODARLIS@aol.com no later than February 23.

'A Talk Over Tea' Devotional**GOD HOLDS ME BY MY RIGHT HAND**

By Lisa Copen

My hands and wrists are fragile. When I'm in a situation where shaking hands is expected, I awkwardly try to offer just a smile; other times I "cringe and bear it." The slightest brush against my hand in the wrong way causes me to gasp in pain and draw my hands close to my chest. Since I live with rheumatoid arthritis, oftentimes I hurt myself by moving too quickly or [by] forgetting and moving in a natural, not protective mode. If I grasp my wrist firmly enough, I am able to absorb the stabbing effects.

My husband can hold my hands, but he is the only one. You see, he knows just how to be firm yet gentle. He can help me out of a boat without pulling my wrist too hard. He knows to be cautious when he's helping me get my coat on. He knows when to offer his hand in assistance and help me without squeezing too much. He understands [that] despite the pain wrists and hands feel, they long to be touched, to be held, to be warmed. He knows how to rub them gently when they are swollen and red. He gets me ice every evening to put on them. When they have been in casts, he

has cut the food on my plate, tied my shoes, and done a couple dozen other things that one takes for granted. Is there any doubt why I trust his touch?

Our Father has a similarly perfect touch, a gentle yet firm grasp on us. [The psalmist] Asaph writes, *Yet I am always with you. You hold me by my right hand.* [Psalms 73:23]

Asaph admits that he could not be without God because God is always



Five years ago Lisa Copen, at the age of 24, was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis. Feeling isolated and depressed, she found few resources that spoke to her faith. So in 1997 she founded "And He Will Give You Rest," a Christian-based newsletter ministry for people who live with chronic illness and/or pain. Providing both practical and medical information with a spiritual perspective as comforting as the cup of tea that serves as its logo, the newsletter now has over 1000 readers. Recently Copen was a featured workshop speaker at the 10th Annual Christian Council on Persons with Disabilities.

holding on to his right hand. He never leaves our side. He understands that we have bruises and soreness and places where we hurt in our hearts and in our bodies. But we trust that God knows precisely how to soothe all of our hurts. He knows how to hold our hand so that we can find comfort, assurance, and confidence.

Do you remember the joy you felt when you held the hand of your first love? Do you remember a time when you felt awkward and self-conscious

until someone reached out to touch your hand and you gained strength? When we hold God's hand, we have his strength available to us. We find that all things are possible through him.

I saw a young girl the other day in the grocery store who was fighting the firm grasp of her mother's hand. The girl yanked and pulled and lifted up her feet trying to get her hand away from her mother's hold. Still her mother held onto her tightly. Perhaps her mother knew the hidden dangers in the store. Or perhaps she just didn't want her daughter to wander away and become lost. She was protecting her for her own good.

God is our parent who says, "I will go the distance with you." We may lead him to some places that he knows we shouldn't be. We may become lost or even tempted by life's dangers. We may have

scars from the pain of our world, but God tightly holds onto our right hand and doesn't let go. He knows that we need his guidance, his strength, and [his] comfort.

Reprinted from the *And He Shall Give You Rest* newsletter by permission of Rest Ministries, Inc.

In the past year the following programs and support resources have become part of Copen's ministry outreach to men and women on illness journeys:

- ◆ "HopeKeepers" Support Groups [start-up kits are available for churches and other interested groups]
- ◆ "Friend Indeed" Pen Pal Program
- ◆ Rest Ministries, Inc., Website [www.ixpres.com/jlcopen]
- ◆ On-line Assembly Bulletin Board
- ◆ "Share & Prayer" E-Mail Support List

For a sample copy of the newsletter or further information about these programs, e-mail Lisa Copen at rest@ixpres.com, call 619-237-1698, or write to: Rest Ministries, Inc., P.O. Box 502886, San Diego, CA 92150. 12 monthly issues of the newsletter are \$15.



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 *Wings*

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Jo D'Archangelis, Editor, Wings

Editor's Mailing Address

592 West Ammunition Road, Apt. 1
Fallbrook, CA 92028-3191

Editor's Telephone/Fax

[760] 723-2668 (please call before faxing)

Editor's E-Mail Address

JODARLIS@aol.com

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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" (or "FUMC") and mark it "Wings Newsletter." Mail it to the church address below.

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CLERGYWOMAN HAS 'BRUSHES WITH THE SPIRIT'

By Charley Lerrigo

Four years ago a 207-pound glass partition fell from the ceiling of a restaurant and struck the Rev. Donna Fado Ivery on the head. The injury she sustained has resulted in four years of continuing, often painful disability.

Ms. Ivery, a clergy member of the California-Nevada Annual Conference, has also turned the pain and healing into a series of paintings she calls *Brushes of the Spirit*. The paintings communicate the feelings for which it was hard to find words. With her commentary and poetry, they also speak of a spiritual journey:

"The character of pain and the persistence of healing."

Ms. Ivery's brain injury made speaking and concentration "toilsome." That's when she turned to painting to express herself. In one self-portrait, characterized by the effect of a shattered mirror, Ms. Ivery depicted how her brain injury feels. "Everything appears very skewed and out of whack," she writes. "There are huge glitches where there should be continuity."

In a wash of pain, she says, it was a struggle to address an envelope, negotiate a doorway, walk a block with a cane. It was difficult to figure out how much water and grain to use when cooking rice.

Her rehabilitation included a regime of meditation for healing. "There were times that even thinking words to pray was difficult," she remembered. "So I'd do my deep breathing, focus on absolutely nothing, and position myself so that I wouldn't be in the way—that is, trying not to usurp the energy needed for my body's memory and rebuilding."

In her thoughts, "an image or color would often bubble up, and not go away. So I would simmer with it, and then paint it—not in a thinking way, but in a feeling way." And every time that she "touched truth in a painting," she says, "The 'brushes of the Spirit' are at work. A marvelous 'healing motion' is unveiled."

To Ms. Ivery, her paintings become an act of the spirit. She referred to the Apostle Paul's letter to the Romans in which he says "in our weakness, we just don't know what to pray, that the Holy Spirit will speak for us in 'groans too deep for words,' and make

petitions on our behalf to God."

A year after her injury, the South San Francisco pastor was being plagued by a chronic headache. That experience also became a painting, which include pieces of a broken mirror glued onto the painting to portray the "scraping process, the unknown depths of the sea." One day, the sun reflected off the mirror shards, and "the painting brightened and took on a completely different appearance.

"I had to change the name of the painting to *Healing Headache*

"Healing in God's image--'wholeness'-- is a promise to be realized by everybody, including those whose 'new being' fully embodies pain and disabilities."

because the 'brushes of the Spirit' taught

me that the places of deepest pain are also the places of the brightest light and brightest healing. Living with pain is easier to cope with when I realize that the character of pain is to cry out for healing, and not just to defeat me."

Twenty-seven months after the accident, on a "pain-laden day" Ms. Ivery did another self-portrait, *Formed by Tears*. "At first I didn't like the painting at all," she said. "Tears represented succumbing to unhappiness while surrounded by blessing. Then, after awhile, as I studied the painted image, it came to me that, here, tears are beautiful."

In a painting called *Broken Gift*, Ms. Ivery worked "with the truth that I had greatly improved, greatly improved, but still had broken gifts that were likely to stay broken. I was mourning the truth that the common

notion of healing as being restored to where I was pre-injury just wasn't going to happen. The 'brushes of the Spirit' reminded me that to heal has to do with 'making whole.' Healing in God's image—'wholeness'—is a promise to be realized by everybody, including those whose 'new being' fully embodies pain and disabilities."

Lerrigo is editor of the California-Nevada Conference edition of the *United Methodist Review*. This article is re-printed from the *United Methodist Review* (May 29, 1998).

Editor's Note: Unfortunately, we can't reproduce Ivery's art, but we can re-print her poem, "Formed By Tears," which captures in words the essence of Ivery's painting of the same name.

FORMED BY TEARS



Welled-up eyes,
so very deep in
knowing.
Tears streaming
soften facial lines
harshened by desert
realities.
Tears flowing
wash my soul
awaken my
connection to
Holy Waters moving
above, below, about,
and within
all living presents.
Tears overflowing
touch
Fullness of feeling
Fullness of living
Fullness of compassion
Fullness of sorrow
Behold Beauty by Nature
I am a woman formed
by tears



— Donna Fado Ivery —

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We affirm that God heals, a healing which can remove disease, deformity, disability and their effects;
That God's healing can come through prayers, faith, medicine, concern, appliances, therapy;
That healing can take the shape of patient endurance, companionship in pain, honest realism, quiet encouragement, healthy compensation, diversion and humor;
That God's healing can correct injustice in society, provide opportunities often denied, release people from confinement, equip and inspire reform;
That this divine healing produces victory over human limitations, for the persons with disability and for the society that regards disability as more prominent than the person;
And that God's healing enables the person, in his or her own understanding and in the appreciation of the community, to become a whole being.

Statement of the Council on Christian Unity
(paraphrased by Dr. Harold Wilke)

LOCHER'S LECTERN: A 'PODIUM OF ACCESS' FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

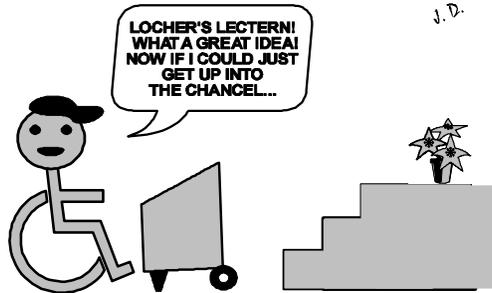
Calling the centrality of access in Biblical and church teaching, retired California-Pacific Conference minister, Dr. Don Locher, calls his latest wood-working project "an idea whose time has come!" The project? A lectern adjustable to different heights enabling people with mobility limitations to assume leadership roles in services of worship.

Inspiration for the lectern came from a conversation with a friend (and former classmate at Occidental College), Martha Griswold, executive director of an independent living center for people with disabilities in the Pasadena (Calif.) area. Herself a wheelchair user with spina bifida, Griswold pointed out the need of a reading stand in church for persons in wheelchairs or with other mobility limitations, or even for people with limited stature including children.

In an informal survey of several pastors in the conference, Locher found only two who remembered people in wheelchairs reading

scripture during a worship service, and this was done from the floor in front of the chancel area with a Bible placed on a flimsy metal music stand.

Locher checked with the General Board of Global Ministries, Health and Welfare Division, for church access



standards. "There were many standards suggested—wider doors, wheelchair seating, larger type, restroom access, sound amplification—but nothing about providing access to the chancel area."

An accomplished woodworker, Locher has fashioned prototype models of the adjustable lectern, equipped with a sliding pull-out tray and two wheels for mobility, in a variety of designs and different woods

for some local churches. Eventually, he hopes to develop several different lectern patterns adaptable to the individual needs of churches.

Serving as Special Assistant to Bob Edgar, President of Claremont School of Theology (Claremont, Calif.), Locher has faculty members spreading the word about the special lecterns. One of them is Dr. Kathy Black, Professor of Religion and Homiletics, who has a neurological condition that makes it difficult for her to stand while giving sermons. She calls the convenience and adaptability of Locher's lectern "a blessing."

Locher adds: "Hopefully, one day soon, all local church sanctuaries will proudly provide 'the podium of access,' a powerful symbol of the church's most central of themes—access for everyone."

Based on articles from *Circuit West*, publication of the California-Pacific Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church, and from the Newsletter of the Claremont School of Theology (Claremont, California)

Some congregations delay making necessary restroom changes thinking them "less important" than other building projects. But, in the language of many people with disabilities, "If we can't go, we won't come!"

§§§§§§

Don't hide your ramp under a bush!!
— The Rev. Paul Feuerstein—

From *That All May Worship: An Interfaith Welcome to People With Disabilities*, Ginny Thornburgh and Ann Rose Davie, (c) 1992 by the National Organization on Disability [Washington D.C.]

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