



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, BY AND ABOUT
UNITED METHODISTS WITH DISABILITIES

Summer 2001 — Vol. 12 Issue 1 No. 45

FROM WHERE I SIT By Jo D'Archangelis

Jerry Lewis, once a very funny man but now Grand High Poohbah of the MDA

Telethon, said in a recent television interview: "If it's pity, we'll get some money. I'm just giving you the facts. Pity...if you don't want to be pitied for being a cripple in a wheelchair, don't come out of the house."

Lewis is right: Pity does drive donations, and there's no getting around it. But he's also wrong: It's not pity that would keep us cripples in wheelchairs inside our houses; it's...*sidewalks!*

Sidewalks and wheelchairs do not mix. Most able-bodied people are not aware of this elemental law of physics, and even if you tell them about it, they don't believe it until they get into a wheelchair themselves or start pushing one.

A few months ago, our church's Missions Commission Chair asked me to participate in the annual CROP Walk, an event in which people from different churches in our community walk (jog, run, wheel) four kilometers to raise money for hunger projects.

At first I demurred — there was no way either I or my batteries had enough energy to travel four kilometers around the roller-coaster terrain of Fallbrook. No problema, I was assured. A "push team" of volunteers from my church would supply the necessary "push power." Team pushers, one person per handle, would periodically rotate on and off throughout the hilly course.

However, there turned out to be another "problema," one not anticipated by the team pushers even though they were duly warned. Herein are listed several things you quickly learn about

sidewalks from a wheelchair perspective:

1. Not all streets are lined with sidewalks. Sometimes it's a dirt path,
2. Only a small percentage of sidewalked intersections in any given area have curbscuts.
3. Even if you are fortunate enough to get yourself on a real sidewalk, you are then faced with a veritable plethora of refuse cans, Postal Service boxes, bus benches, utility poles, potted trees, and directional signs narrowing said sidewalk to a width barely able to accommodate a skinny person walking, least of all a wheeled person rolling.
4. Driveways cut into sidewalks have to be navigated while tilted at a precarious 45-degree angle, unless you can make a wide de-



Sidewalks and wheelchairs do not mix. Most able-bodied people are not aware of this elemental law of physics, and even if you tell them about it, they don't believe it....

sometimes it's nothing but weeds and beer cans.

tour around them which you often can't.

5. Sidewalks are deeply engraved with various teeth-jarring, bottom-bouncing cracks and occlusions.

After a few blocks of this Obstacle Course From Hell, team pushers resorted to what most of us in wheelchairs do naturally — *they took to the streets*. While two people pushed me along the traffic lane, one walked behind us, backwards, on the lookout for oncoming traffic and/or a sheriff's car. When a car approached us from behind, the lookout would yell and we'd make for a space between parked cars along the curb and wait there until it was safe to resume our cruising.

We managed to "walk" the entire circuit of four kilometers without incurring any injury other than, or so I heard, some next-morning aching muscles. I myself barely broke a sweat, except when one pusher would hand off to another in mid-transit momentarily leaving only one pusher at one side or the other, and I would find myself careening towards the gutter or the center line before being righted again.

I must say, it was the most excitement I've had in a long time, and I'm looking forward to participating in next year's CROP Walk (and, amazingly enough, the team pushers — well, most of them anyway — agreed to take me on again, but only on condition that the batteries were removed from my wheelchair first).

But before then I'm thinking of petitioning our local governing body to have "wheelchair lanes" added to all of Fallbrook's thoroughfares. After all, bicycles have special lanes, so why not special lanes for wheelchairs? Gee, I wonder if I wrote Jerry Lewis, if he would support wheelchair lanes for all us cripples out here.

My special thanks to Pastor Dennis, Larry, Marilynne, Jim, Paul, and Marlin for their able and dedicated pushing. J. D.

WHEELS AND WINGS

A Watercolor By
Melina Fatsiou-Cowan

(Reproduced by permission
of the artist.)

This and other works of art
by Fatsiou-Cowan
may be viewed in full color at
<http://disabilityculture.org/Melina/>





EIGHT CHARACTERISTICS OF A DISABILITY EFFECTIVE CHURCH By Joe B. Webb

One of the foremost tasks of JAF Area Ministry team is helping churches to become what we call "Disability Effective." A Disability Effective Church (DEC) is a local congregation which not only includes people with disabilities in all aspects of the church's life but which [also] models, teaches and promotes ministry to people affected by disability in its larger geographical and denominational sphere of influence.

We have identified the "Eight Characteristics of a Disability Effective Church." Churches use these criteria to expand their vision, to evaluate their disability ministry program, and to focus on the future steps they need to take. As you read through these eight characteristics, try to determine how many of them are true of your church.

1. Inclusive

The church has an "inclusive" philosophy of ministry. That inclusiveness extends not only across economic and ethnic barriers but also embraces people with disabilities.

2. Biblical

The church understands how the Bible regards disability and is implementing biblical principles of disability ministry....

3. Accessible

The church facilities and communications are accessible to people with

physical, visual, and auditory disabilities, or the church is implementing a plan to become accessible.

4. Practical

The church understands the practical needs of people with disabilities and their families and is implementing a plan in the community to meet these needs.

5. Evangelizing

The church is actively evangelizing people with disabilities and their families and is equipping them to grow in their relationship with Christ and with others.

6. Assimilating

The church is assimilating people with disabilities, and they make up a growing percentage of the congregation.

7. Promoting

People with disabilities hold positions of leadership and service in the church outside of disability ministry.

8. Multiplying

The church is multiplying disability effective leaders and providing leadership in its denomination or geographical region.

How did your church do in comparison to this helpful list? If your church meets six or more of these criteria, will you drop us a note and tell us about your church and its Disability Ministry

program, or contact the Area Ministry nearest you? We want to learn from you and help your church grow further.

If your church falls far short of these criteria, don't despair! Let us know how we can help you start a disability ministry in your church. Who knows, someday soon you might have a JAF Area Ministry in your city to help your church and others become "Disability Effective."

Joe B. Webb is Managing Editor of the *JAF Ministries Newsletter*. This article is reprinted from the July/August 1997 issue of the *JAF Ministries Newsletter*.

*It is a blessed thing to know
that no power on earth,
no temptation,
no human frailty
can dissolve
what God holds together.*

— Dietrich Bonhoeffer —

From *Letters and Papers from Prison*

A CHALLENGE FROM REV. JOHN A. CARR, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ASSOCIATION OF PHYSICALLY CHALLENGED MINISTERS OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

- ◆ We United Methodists with disabilities, *both lay and clergy*, must make a greater effort to confront our denomination at every level on issues of accessibility and disability rights.
- ◆ We need to find ways to better link the various disability groups within our denomination as well as work with other faith communities that are committed to disability issues.
- ◆ We need now to prepare for our next General Conference in 2004 and make our delegates and those who plan the Conference sessions more greatly aware of our accessibility issues and needs.

Please contact me (my mailing address, telephone number, and e-mail address are given below); Jo, the editor of this newsletter; or any other interested persons within your local church or Conference to share your ideas, opinions, and suggestions about these important matters.

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A non-official, non-profit quarterly newsletter published for, by and about United Methodist adults with disabling conditions

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E-Wings An e-mail version of *Wings* posted quarterly in unformatted text without graphics is available by contacting Jo D'Archangelis at JODARLIS@aol.com.

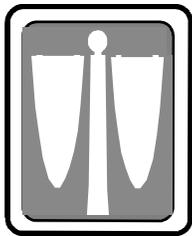
Wings Website Selected articles from *Wings* issues 1995-98 may be found at www.satcom.net/mariposa/find_wings.html.

Donations Most of the funding for *Wings*' publication and mailing comes from reader donations. There are no subscription fees. 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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REAL BLESSING

By Henri J. M. Nouwen

Not long ago, in my own community, I had a very personal experience of the power of a real blessing. Shortly before I started a prayer service in one of our houses, Janet, a handicapped member of our community, said to me: "Henri, can you give me a blessing?" I responded in a somewhat automatic way by tracing with my thumb the sign of the cross on her forehead. Instead of being grateful, however, she protested vehemently, "No, that doesn't work. I want a real blessing!"

I suddenly became aware of the ritualistic quality of my response to her request and said, "Oh, I am sorry...Let me give you a real blessing when we are all together for the prayer service." She nodded with a smile, and I realized that something special was required of me.

After the service, when about thirty people were sitting in a circle on the floor, I said, "Janet has asked me for a special blessing. She feels that she needs that now." As I was saying this, I didn't know what Janet really wanted, but Janet didn't leave me in doubt for very long. As soon as I had said, "Janet has asked me for a special blessing," she stood up and walked toward me. I was wearing a long white robe with ample sleeves covering my hands as well as my arms.

Spontaneously, Janet put her arms around me and put her head against my chest. Without thinking, I covered her with my sleeves so that she almost vanished in the folds of my robe. As we held each other, I said, "Janet, I want you to know that you are God's Beloved Daughter. You are precious in God's eyes. Your beautiful smile, your kindness to the people in your house and all the good things you do show us what a beautiful human being you are. I know you feel a little low these days and that there is some sadness in your heart, but I want you to remember who you are: a very special person, deeply loved by God and all the people who are here with you."

As I said these words, Janet raised her head and looked at me, and her broad smile showed that she had really heard and received the blessing. When she returned to her place, Jane, another handicapped woman, raised her hand and said, "I want a blessing too." She stood up and, before I knew it, had put

her face against my chest. After I had spoken words of blessing to her, many more of the handicapped people followed, expressing the same desire to be blessed.

The most touching moment, however, came when one of the assistants, a twenty-four-year-old student, raised his hand and said, "And what about me?" "Sure," I said. "Come." He came, and, as we stood before each other, I put my arms around him and said, "John, it is so good that you are here. You are God's Beloved Son. Your presence is a joy for all of us. When things are hard and life is burdensome, always remember that you are loved with an everlasting love."

As I spoke these words, he looked at me with tears in his eyes and then he said, "Thank you, thank you very much."

That evening I recognized the importance of blessing and being blessed and reclaimed it as a true sign of the Beloved. The blessings that we give to each other are expressions of the blessing that rests on us from all eternity. It is the deepest affirmation of our true self. It is not enough to be chosen. We also need an ongoing blessing that allows us to hear in an ever-new way that we belong to a loving God who will never leave us alone, but will remind us always that we are guided by love in every step of our lives.

From Life of the Beloved, copyright ©1992 by Henri J. M. Nouwen, Crossroad Publishing Co., New York. Born and raised in the Netherlands, Nouwen was a Catholic priest who served for many years as chaplain at Daybreak, a L'Arche community residence home for persons with developmental disabilities near Toronto, Canada.

PRAYER

**I asked God to let me be strong
to accomplish grandiose projects:
and God made me weak to keep me humble.
I asked God to make me healthy
to realize imposing enterprises:
and God gave me pain to better understand.
I asked God for wealth to possess everything:
and God left me poor not to be selfish.
I asked God for power to be needed by others:
and God gave me humiliation
so that I would need them.
I asked God everything to enjoy life:
and God gave me life
so that I could enjoy everything.
Lord, I didn't get everything I needed
almost against my will.
The prayers I didn't pray were granted.
Be praised, God. Among all humankind*
no one possesses more than I possess.**

— Kirk Kilgour —

(translated from the original Italian by Kilgour and an Italian friend)

In the late '60s, Kirk Kilgour played on the U.S. Olympic volleyball team. He then played on and coached a championship professional volleyball team in Rome for three years. In 1976 while doing gymnastic agility drills, he fell and dislocated cervical vertebrae leaving him paralyzed from the neck down. Years later in 1985 when asked by a friend to express how he felt about his disability, Kilgour wrote the above poem. A few years after that, the poem was made into a watercolor painting by a well-known artist and lithographs distributed to schools and organizations throughout Italy. Although not a Roman Catholic himself, Kilgour was highly honored in 1991 when the poem was used by the Vatican in a prayer card and sent to Catholics around the world.

*Original text, *men*



12TH ANNUAL EARL MILLER SPIRITUAL LIFE DISABILITY RETREAT MEETS IN JUNE

On the weekend of June 10-12, the Earl Miller Spiritual Life Retreat for Adults with Orthopedic and/or Vision Impairments met at Camp Cedar Glen near Julian, California. Turnout for the retreat, which has been held yearly since 1990, was lower than average, about 16 persons altogether. Nonetheless, enthusiasm was high among those who did attend.

Bill Tell, pastor of New Wine Christian Fellowship Church in Crestline, California, served as retreat leader this year. Using humor and biblical insight, Tell called upon attendees to examine their expectations and experiences of God. Wife, Gigi Tell, joined him in providing musical interludes and in leading sing-alongs which included both old favorites and contemporary praise music.

In between spiritual presentations, attendees walked and rolled among the cedar trees, visited the historical town

of Julian, chatted with old and new friends, relaxed — and ate.

At the end, appreciation was expressed to Bill and Gigi Tell; Tom Simmons, Retreat Dean; Norman and Helen Stockwell, Retreat Registrars; and the staff of Camp Cedar Glen for making the weekend truly accessible and inspirational. Attendees were encouraged to return next year and to invite others to come and enjoy this most unique camping experience sponsored by the California-Pacific Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church.



*Jot down now the
date of the 2002 Earl
Miller Spiritual
Life Disability Re-
treat — June 7-9 at Camp Ce-
dar Glen near Julian, Calif.*

Honor Roll Of Appreciation

We thank the following people or organizations whose gifts of time and/or money have made possible the publication and mailing of *Wings*:

Margery Chapman
Linda Ahnell
Jill Halley
Rose Heller
Lucille Fleming

Ruth Sciumbato
Mary Klein
Nina Redmond
Janiece Park
Dulcie Henwood
Rev. John A. Carr
John Henker

**Rev. Elwood &
Mary Jane Wissmann**
Jan C. Berentsen
Rev. Edward Hoffman

GOD'S PROMISES FOR DAILY LIFE

"It's impossible." *All things are possible* (Luke 18:27).

"I'm too tired." *I will give you rest* (Matthew 11:28-30).

"Nobody really loves me." *I love you* (John 3:16 & 13:34).

"I can't go on." *My grace is sufficient* (II Corinthians 12:9 & Proverbs 3:5-6).

"I can't do it." *You can do all things* (Philippians 4:13).

"I'm not able." *I am able* (II Corinthians 9:8).

"It's not worth it." *It will be worth it* (Romans 8:28).

"I can't forgive myself." *I forgive you* (I John 1:9 & Romans 8:1).

"I can't manage." *I will supply all your needs* (Philippians 4:19).

"I'm afraid." *I have not given you a spirit of fear* (II Timothy 1:7).

"I'm always worried and frustrated." *Cast all your cares on me* (I Peter 5:7).

"I don't have enough faith." *I've given everyone a measure of faith* (Romans 12:3)

"I'm not smart enough." *I give you wisdom* (I Corinthians 1:30).

"I feel all alone." *I will never leave you or forsake you* (Hebrews 13:5).

Reprinted from Rest
Ministries Newsletter,
"And He Shall Give You Rest"



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

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