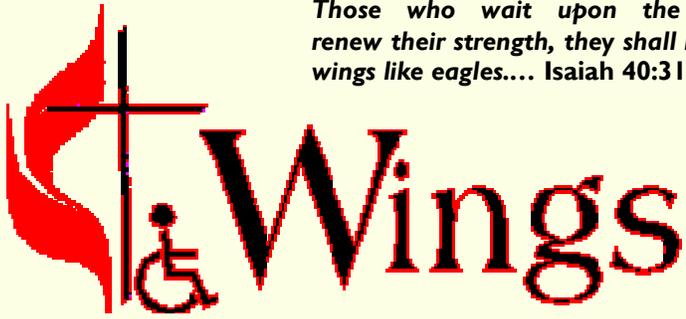


Those who wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles.... Isaiah 40:31 [nrsv]



**A FAITHLETTER FOR, BY, AND ABOUT
UNITED METHODISTS WITH DISABILITIES
SPRING 2004 — Vol. 14 Issue 4 No. 55**



FROM WHERE I SIT: A Healing Of Penguins By Jo D'Archangelis

As a child it was difficult for me to walk, so I was put into what we called a “cart,” basically an oversized baby stroller, to be taken to the local store or movie theater. One day, when I was about nine years of age, my mother was pushing me down the street in the “cart” (at that point I was rapidly outgrowing it and rode with my knees practically under my chin). Suddenly this *strange*—as in unfamiliar and also as in really weird—woman approached us, laid her hands on my head, and commanded Satan to come out of me so that I might be healed.

I don't remember what my mother or I said or did, but I do remember that the whole thing scared the holy bejeebers out of me. It was bad enough to have a disability; it was worse to find out that the Devil had set up housekeeping inside me. I couldn't sleep for days after that.

That was my one and only experience with “spiritual” healing for my disability. Unlike many other children with severe disabilities, I was never dragged from one healing service to another looking for God's miraculous cure. I was, however, dragged to several sessions with a chiropractor which proved to be equally as effectual as the strange woman's exor-

cism.

As an adult I've never had much desire to go the “healing circuit.” For one thing, I was nurtured in a decidedly non-charismatic Methodist church where, if the Holy Spirit had the audacity to move among us, she did so with slow, sedate steps. No high-intensity healings there!

For another thing, the thought of sitting with my disability exposed before people who saw it as God's punishment or as a sign of demonic possession, who spoke in unintelligible languages, and who were wont to whack the sick and the crippled on the forehead while shouting “Heal!” was not very enticing.

I remember being taken as a child to hospitals and clinics for “evaluations” of my “condition.” Doctors poked and prodded and whacked me on the knees with mallets. I was stripped to my underwear and told to “walk” in front of assembled doctors, nurses, and therapists who spoke to each other in the unintelligible language of medical-ese. Yet I knew they were pointing out everything that was wrong with me, and I inexplicably felt it was my fault that I didn't have enough strength in my “globular lymphoid” muscles to avoid

waddling like a tipsy penguin.

I guess I had had more than enough of such “healing services” in medical settings to want to try it in a religious setting. And what if the spiritual healing didn't take? Would I be blamed because I didn't have enough faith? Would the “healer” despair that his/her spiritual powers were waning? Would everyone's faith be diminished as a result? No, it was just too risky.

I always figured that if God wanted to heal me of my disability, he'd just go ahead and do it without fanfare or hoopla. So far he doesn't seem to have found fit to do so, but that doesn't bother me. God has his own reasons for doling out major miracles, and although I don't know what they are, I believe they have little to do with the particular quality of my prayers or faith or righteousness.

This is not to say that I haven't experienced God's healing in my life. I certainly have, and still am—some of it physical, as in overcoming infections, but most of it directed at the inner me, strengthening me to cope with the prejudices of society, the ignorance of religious institutions, and the frustration and depression that progressive debilitation often brings. I may not ever be able to “rise up and walk,” but that is minor compared to what God in his infinite love and wisdom has enabled me to do.

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DISABLED CLERGY CAUCUS TO PETITION CONFERENCE

The Association of Physically Challenged Ministers of the United Methodist Church (APCMUMC) will be submitting five petitions on disability issues to the General Conference meeting in Pittsburgh, April 27-May 7. "The petitions were formulated after receiving feedback from members," said Rev. John A. Carr, Executive Director of the APCMUMC, in an e-mail message.

One petition asks that a person or persons with a disability take part in designing and presenting orientation sessions or training programs for new district superintendents. This model could then be followed in planning training programs and orientation sessions for other leadership roles in the United Methodist Church.

As rationale, Carr pointed out that "more than one out of ten people in this country are born with or during life acquire a disability, and the United Methodist Church in various programs encourages congregations to welcome all of God's people to fellowship in the name of Christ."

A second petition asks that a person under consideration for incapacity leave be granted the right to be involved in the deliberations of the Joint Committee on Incapacity and to request that a minister or other professional with a disability be involved in the process.

"Often," Carr said, "decision-makers are unaware of the possibilities for ministry by someone with a disability. Discomfort, fear, and ignorance of the possibilities shouldn't determine the final

decision."

A third petition asks that the Joint Committee on Incapacity include in its composition and deliberations a person with a disability, preferably someone in ministry.

A fourth petition asks that every United Methodist school of theology offer at least one course exploring theology and disability issues. This requirement would help to ensure that persons with disabilities within the church receive a "sensitive and informed response by clergy and by church leadership," noted Carr.

A fifth petition asks that all church materials and resources be made available in relevant accessible media to people with a wide variety of needs, abilities, and disabilities.

"A large number of people with disabilities are eager to receive church materials and resources in formats they can access. We see the large professional publishing operation of the United Methodist Church assuming these costs as part of its stated policy of making materials available 'to meet the needs of all groups of our people,'" Carr said, quoting from Paragraph 1637 of the 2000 *Book of Discipline*.

Carr felt that submitting petitions is an opportunity to make changes and corrections in the *Discipline*, the United Methodist "rule book." "But successful or not," he said, "it's an opportunity to present our concerns before the political leadership of the church. It's like planting seeds for future growth. There's always the possibility that someone unexpected will decide to join us or to further our cause in other ways."

Carr urged all who are concerned about these disability issues to communicate with those delegates to General Conference whom they know or have access to. "It's very important that we strongly present these issues of justice with persistence and conviction."

Rev. John A. Carr and the APCMUMC may be contacted at 1249 Yale Ave., Wallingford, CT 06492; telephone 203-284-8278; e-mail jcarr01@snet.net; <http://gbgm-umc.org/disc/apcm.cfm>.



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

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E-Wings Two e-mail versions of *Wings* are available for those with vision impairments and computer "reading" devices, those who have difficulty handling paper and print pages, those who live outside the USA, and those who just prefer computer viewing: (1.) A strictly e-mail version in unformatted text without graphics, and (2.) A formatted version with color graphics available to those able to open attached files in MSPublisher 2000 format. E-mail Jo D'Archangelis at jodarlis@aol.com to request either, or both, of these versions.

Wings Online Beginning with the Fall 2002 issue, issues of *Wings* in their entirety may be accessed at www.cal-pac-ccd.org/. Selected articles from back issues of *Wings* 1995-98 may be accessed at www.mariposa-ministry.org.

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PASTOR WHO LOST LEG LEND A HELPING HAND

By Maureen Hayden

The Rev. Tim Bolton, senior pastor at Alford United Methodist Church in Petersburg, Ind., jokes that he's up to his neck in legs these days. Given that he should be dead, it's humor he savors.

The 41-year-old former Marine nearly bled to death on a remote jungle road 20 years ago after his leg was ripped off in an accident while on patrol in the Philippines. The incident accelerated a downward spiral into depression and more than a decade of drug addiction that decimated his marriage and nearly destroyed him. As he describes it, "I ended up homeless, hopeless, and legless." And wishing he was [sic] dead.

It's a good thing he's not, because there's a small artificial foot on a workbench in his garage, about to be packed and shipped—with a cache of limbs—to a child in Cambodia whose leg was blown off by a landmine.

Bolton still marvels each day at how his shattered life has been transformed. Now happily married, working on his doctorate in psychology, and newly assigned to a church, the father of three sees "blessings everywhere."

Eighteen months ago, Bolton started a project, Operation Arise and Walk. The name is jammed with meaning. In the garage of his rural home thirteen miles north of Ferdinand [Ind.], Bolton takes in used prosthetic limbs, repairs and restores them, and ships them off to Third World countries littered with anti-personnel landmines. He's sent more than 60 so far....

Operation Arise and Walk's title is from the story found in the Gospel of Matthew about a lame man whose faith leads him to find forgiveness and healing. "This isn't just about giving out legs," Bolton said. "It's about giving someone

hope."

Bolton knows about hope, both lost and found. At age 18, the Washington, Ind., native joined the Marine Corps and was shipped out to Beirut, Lebanon, in October 1981. He arrived just in time to help pull the dead bodies of 246 American soldiers from the rubble of the U.S. Embassy that had been

"It's like that Field of Dreams movie... Like a voice that said: 'Start this project and the limbs will come.' It's just been awesome."

bombed by terrorists.

Three years later, Bolton was on patrol in a remote jungle area of the Philippines, stationed there at his request "to get as far away from humanity as possible." Late one night, while on patrol on a motorcycle, he rounded a corner on a dirt road and was broadsided by another vehicle. The occupants of the vehicle rushed over, stole his wallet and his watch, and took off. He lay there bleeding to death. "I did something I hadn't done in a long time," said Bolton. "I prayed."

He was picked up by another group of passing motorists in an old pickup who raced him to a nearby U.S. Air Force Base. A month in intensive care was followed by another 16 months in a military hospital stateside and 35 opera-

tions. Bolton came out of the experience aged 23, addicted to painkillers, and deeply depressed. He spent 11 years that way before hitting rock bottom and landing in a homeless shelter in Anderson [Ind.]. That's where he met his future wife, Jackie. "She had a connection to God I didn't have," Bolton said. "She pulled me through." The two married in 1995.

In the late winter of 2001, Bolton was cleaning out his attic and came across two of his old prosthetic limbs. Both were worn and no longer fit comfortably. He was ready to toss them in the trash when a nagging feeling made him stop. He called several prosthetic companies and asked if he could donate the limbs.

"They told me, 'Throw 'em away. We've got enough junk,'" he said. Instead, he got on the Internet and discovered the need for limbs in other na-

tions....

Members of Alford UMC have offered to help him with the shipping expenses, but he relies on donations for everything else. That includes not just old limbs but small drills and wrenches and casting material that he sends with the limbs so they can be fitted. American-made prosthetics are often too big to fit landmine victims in Third World countries.

"It's like that Field of Dreams movie," said Bolton. "Like a voice that said: 'Start this project and the limbs will come.' It's just been awesome."

Abridged from "Pastor Who Lost Leg Lends Helping Hand With Limbs," *United Methodist Review* (Aug. 15, 2003). This story was distributed by the Associated Press. Maureen Hayden is with the *Evansville (Ind.) Courier and Press*.

For more information on Operation Arise and Walk, visit website <http://www.opaaw.fullnet.com>. Donations to assist the United Methodist Committee on Relief with landmine removal in Mozambique and Angola may be designated "Landmine Removal," UMCOR Advance No. 982575 and given through local churches.



FORMER FBI AGENT INSPIRES OTHERS By Heather Peck Stahl

Deaf since she was 18 months old, Sue Thomas began learning to read lips and speak clearly at age 3. But what makes this 52-year-old different is that her drive to “function fully in the hearing world” led to a job as an FBI surveillance assistant, a television show based on her life, and a career as a motivational speaker.

As an elementary school student in Youngstown, Ohio, Thomas was teased by her classmates for “talking funny” and was treated as an outcast. “Jesus became my best friend,” says Thomas, a member of Boardman (Ohio) United Methodist Church.

Thomas began roller skating lessons and at age 7 became the youngest Ohio

state champion freestyle skater ever. That gave her the confidence she so desperately needed, saying [sic], “Skating saved my life.”

With her newfound self-esteem, Thomas completed school and earned a bachelor’s degree in political science and international relations and was hired by the FBI in Washington, D.C., to analyze fingerprints. When FBI agents learned how well she could read lips, Thomas was asked to decipher surveillance tapes and live conversations among suspects. For three years she helped with cases involving white-collar criminals, drug dealers, and corrupt government officials.

In 1990, Thomas decided to use her

life experiences to encourage others. After taking classes at a Bible school, she began traveling worldwide encouraging people that they can do anything with God’s help.

In April 2000, Thomas was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, which limits her eyesight and mobility. Yet she refuses to complain. “God makes no mistakes,” says Thomas. “We all have some limitations, but we are all created by the same God who created us to serve others.”

[In October of 2002], PAX-TV premiered the action series, “Sue Thomas: FBEye,” based on her years as a surveillance expert. Thomas’ story has also been featured in the *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, *TV Guide*, and an...issue of *The Upper Room* children’s magazine *Pockets*.

From Interpreter (Jan. 2003). Stahl is a free-lance writer and editor who lives in Nashville, Tenn.



MENTAL HEALTH MINISTRIES MAKE VIDEOS AVAILABLE

Surveys show that 40 to 60 percent of Americans seeking help with mental health issues turn first to ministers, priests, and rabbis. “Unfortunately, the response of clergy and congregations falls significantly short of what parishioners expect of their faith leaders,”

said the Rev. Susan Gregg-Schroeder, Coordinator of Mental Health Ministries for the California-Pacific Conference of the United Methodist Church.

To provide much-needed information and support, Mental Health Ministries now has a total of 10 videos available

produced by Pacific Media Ministries for use in a wide variety of settings.

The newest video, *Mental Illness and Families of Faith*, has just been released and has already been awarded a Bronze Telly Award. The first video in the series, *Creating Caring Congregations*, was previously awarded a Telly Award. The Telly Awards annually showcase the best work of advertising agencies, production companies, television stations, cable operators, and corporate video departments throughout the world.

“Each of our videos comes with a discussion guide that includes background information, questions for discussion, and additional resources. Individual videos are available for \$20, and we are making all 10 available for \$159,” Gregg-Schroeder said.

Also available is the book, *In the Shadow of God’s Wings: Grace in the Midst of Depression*, Gregg-Schroeder’s personal account of her struggle with depression.

MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES FOR CONGREGATIONS TO USE

Book and Study Guide:

In the Shadow of God’s Wings: Grace in the Midst of Depression by Rev. Susan Gregg-Schroeder, plus a four-session Group Study Guide (The Upper Room).

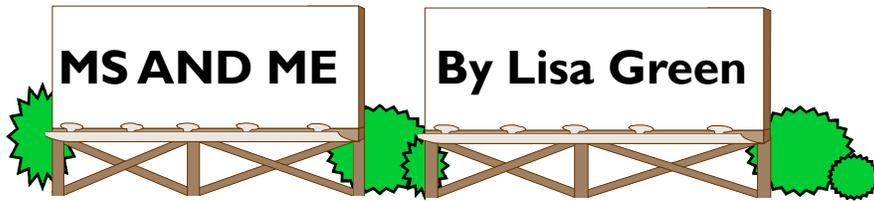
Educational Videos (Pacific Media Ministries):

Creating Caring Congregations
Teenage Depression and Suicide
Gifts of the Shadow
Eating Disorders: Wasting Away
Alzheimer’s Care and Support

Understanding Depression
Overcoming Stigma, Finding Hope
Addiction and Depression
Anxiety Disorders: Overcoming the Fear
Mental Illness and Families of Faith

For more information visit the website of the Mental Health Ministries of the California-Pacific Conference of the United Methodist Church at www.MentalHealthMinistries.net or e-mail the Rev. Susan Gregg-Schroeder, Coordinator of Mental Health Ministries, at sgschroeder@cox.net.

Based on an article in *Circuit West*, the publication of the California-Pacific Conference of the United Methodist Church.



I knew my life would have hardships. There isn't a life that goes without pain. But I never in my wildest dreams imagined that a chronic, progressive, potentially debilitating disease that had no cure would be part of my life. In fact, multiple sclerosis was so far from my thoughts that I still have this experience where I can't quite believe it is me that those "neurological nightmare" billboards are talking about. Don't get me wrong, I am not in denial; it's just that I continue to be shocked by the reality.

But who ever said I was in charge of my life anyway? Certainly I am in charge of my responses and reactions to my life, but my life has had too many inconceivable twists and turns for me to ever think that I was completely in charge. Furthermore, not all of the surprises in my life have been undesirable. In fact, some have been obvious blessings from the start and others blessings with the passing of time.

The way I see it, having multiple sclerosis is just another one of life's unexpected twists that has surprisingly brought, and will continue to bring with it, numerous blessings of various kinds, that is, if I choose to focus on the blessings rather than the pain and/or the fear.

What, you say? A blessing? What is so wonderful about feeling like your body is not your own anymore? That the neurological monster is now driving the ship? What is so great about poking yourself with a needle daily or about being considered "less than"?

Nothing, I respond. There is nothing that is wonderful about any of that. Yet, what is wonderful is that you have the opportunity to really, I mean really, learn how to live in the present moment. That is a gift in and of itself—a gift which most people never get. Consequently, they live their life with an eye so much on the

future that they forget that the moment is all that we really ever have.

My husband and his stepmother, who also has MS, hadn't talked for years. It was with the diagnosis of my disease that their relationship was reunited and healed. That is a blessing.

My mother, like any mother, is deeply pained by the reality that her child has a problem which she cannot fix. She has

had to accept her lack of power and let go, living with the deeper sense of faith not only that I can take care of myself but that God will ultimately take care of me. That is a blessing.

I don't know how God will take care of me. I imagine it won't be exactly the way I think it should be because it never is exactly the way I think it should be. Nevertheless, I have lived long enough to know that how ever it will be, I will be O.K.

From the Newsletter of the Orange County (Calif.) Chapter of the Multiple Sclerosis Society (Fall 2000).

THOU HIDDEN SOURCE OF CALM REPOSE

Thou hidden source of calm repose,
Thou all-sufficient love divine,
My help and refuge from my foes,
Secure I am if thou art mine;
And lo! from sin and grief and shame
I hide me, Jesus, in thy name.

Thy mighty name salvation is,
And keeps my happy soul above;
Comfort it brings, and power and peace,
And joy and everlasting love;
To me with thy dear name are given
Pardon and holiness and heaven.

Jesus, my all in all thou art,
My rest in toil, my ease in pain,
The healing of my broken heart,
In war my peace, in loss my gain,
My smile beneath the tyrant's frown,
In shame, my glory and my crown.

In want my plentiful supply,
In weakness my almighty power,
In bonds my perfect liberty,
My light in Satan's darkest hour,
In grief my joy unspeakable,
My life in death, my heaven in hell.

— Charles Wesley —
(18th Century)



EARL MILLER SPIRITUAL LIFE DISABILITY RETREAT

Date and place: Friday, June 4-Sunday, June 6, 2004; Camp Cedar Glen, Julian, California.

Leaders: Rev. Kimball Coburn and Pam Coburn. Rev. Coburn is a Spirit Evangelist for the California-Pacific Conference

of the United Methodist Church.

Participants: Adult persons with orthopedic physical challenges and/or sight impairments only, plus companions or caregivers.

Cost: \$85 per person (partial scholar-

ships are available for all participants including companions and caregivers).

Registration deadline: May 15, 2004.

Retreat Registrars: Norm and Helen Stockwell; 1816 Armour Lane, Redondo Beach, CA 90278; telephone (310) 374-1535; e-mail n6ns@mailaps.org.

Sponsors: California-Pacific Conference of the United Methodist Church; Conference Council On Disability Ministries; and Conference Board of Camping, Retreat, and Outdoor Ministries.

(For more information or registration forms, contact the registrars above.)

Honor Roll Of Appreciation

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I Am Disabled And...

My feet are beautiful on the mountains for I can announce peace, bring good news, announce salvation, and say to everyone who waits in hope, "Your God reigns!"

Affirmation #8 based on Isaiah 52:7 [NRSV] by Ken Tittle and Mariposa Ministry and Mariposa Online.

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