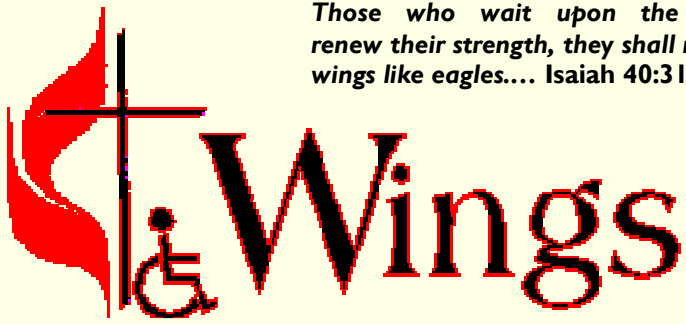


Those who wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles.... Isaiah 40:31 [nrsv]



A FAITHLETTER FOR UNITED METHODISTS WITH DISABILITIES AND THOSE WHO CARE ABOUT THEM
SUMMER 2004 — Vol. 15 Issue 1 No. 57



FROM WHERE I SIT: DOWN AND OUT IN PITTSBURGH

By Jo D'Archangelis

First I checked out the national UM newspaper, *The United Methodist Review*, to see how disability ministries and other disability-related issues had fared in that quadrennial orgy of Church legislation known as the General Conference that had recently taken place in Pittsburgh. I skimmed over paragraphs headed "Rural Churches," "Black Churches," "Korean Ministries," "Hispanic Ministries," "Youth Ministries," "Women's Ministries," "Men's Ministries," and on and on and on, but much to my unsurprise found nothing about disability.

I knew that Rev. John Carr, Executive Director of the Association of Physically Challenged Ministers, had submitted five disability-related petitions (see Spring 2004 *Wings*), so I e-mailed him to update me. I also went online to the UMC website and slogged through the arcane world of *petitions*, *calendar dates*, and *plenary actions* to see what else, if anything, had been proposed in regard to disability and what had happened to it.

Sorry to report, but from what I could gather from the website and from the info John sent me, the results don't look

all that promising for us disabled United Methodists.

A petition to publish and distribute church literature in formats readily accessible to all United Methodists, disabled and non-disabled, was dismissed as "redundant" (which probably came as somewhat of a surprise to John and those who supported it).

A petition to include someone with a disability in the designing of training programs for District Superintendents and other church leaders was voted down.

A petition to give a person with a disability the right to be included in the deliberations regarding incapacity leave or to designate a minister or other professional with a disability to represent him or her was passed with "a minister or other professional with a disability" changed to the more general "someone."

A petition requiring the Joint Committee On Incapacity to include a person with a disability in its composition was watered down to merely "encourage" the Committee to include a person with a disability and passed.

A petition requiring every United

Methodist theological seminary to offer course material on theology and disability issues was not only watered down but reduced to syrup with the request that UM theological seminaries only "raise the awareness of and sensitivity to persons with [yuck] *special needs*" (italics and bracketed commentary my own in case you weren't sure) and passed.

A petition to add physical and mental disabilities/conditions to an "inclusiveness clause" along with race, gender, etc., was...well, I'm not sure what it was. There seemed to be some haggling as to whether it was "disabilities" or "conditions" that were "mental," and then after 0 to 0 votes on a couple of amending motions, the Conference apparently gave up and laid the whole thing "on the table," which I guess means it will float around in legislative limbo for the next four years while they figure out what's "mental" and what's not.


A petition to add "disability" to a list of things on the basis of which the Church could not discriminate in employment or volunteer positions was voted down—possibly because "sexual orientation" was also proposed to be added (at this Conference the surest way to doom proposed legislation).

On a more positive note, the Americans With Disabilities Act was officially recognized and supported in an ap-
(*FWIS: PITTSBURGH continued on page 2*)

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 proved resolution nearly as long as the ADA itself, although one might wonder why, as the ADA was originally enacted in 1990, it took them so long.

All in all, not one of our better General Conferences, especially in comparison with the good disability stuff that had been passed in previous Conferences.

Yet perhaps that's the point: a lot of good disability stuff is already there on the books, but how much of it has actually been enacted on the annual conference or local church level? How many annual conferences have yet to institute Disability Committees? How many churches have yet to hear of Disability Awareness Sunday, least of all celebrate it? How many annual conferences and local churches have yet to provide true accessibility to all United Methodists—an accessibility, by the way, that is

“strongly encouraged” in our *Social Principles*, not mandated.

Codified rules and principles are little more than good intentions without the spirit, good faith, and determination of all United Methodists, from the bishops on down to the local church committees, to put them into action. Yes, progress has been made in the area of disability concerns in many annual conferences and local churches. But, apparently, we United Methodists with disabilities have a long way to go before we attain full status as a significant and highly-regarded ethnic group within the Church.



And we'll know we have arrived, not because of any great legislative success we may achieve, but because, when we skim through the pages of the UM newspaper after a General Conference, we'll find a paragraph headed “Disability Ministries.”

MOST ACCESSIBLE CONGREGATIONS IN CAL-PAC CONFERENCE HONORED

By Bruce Baraw



Wesley United Methodist Church in Honolulu, Hawaii, and the First United Methodist Church of El Cajon, Calif., have been selected as co-recipients of the second annual Most Accessible Congregation Award in the California-Pacific Conference of the United Methodist Church.

While achieving physical accessibility, both of these congregations responded to calls to be in ministry with people with challenging conditions, and through those ministries they have grown new disciples now ministering with others.

Wesley United Methodist Church's active acceptance of developmentally disabled persons grew into “The Sunshine Group,” members of which now actively participate in all aspects of worship and church life.

The First United Methodist Church of El Cajon responded to people with chronic illness and chronic pain by organizing Hopekeepers, a support group affiliated with Rest Ministries, and by creating a support group for persons affected by Alzheimer's disease.

Each of these congregations was presented a plaque and a \$500 cash award by the California-Pacific Conference Committee On Disability Concerns.

For information about making your congregation more accessible, call the Cal-Pac Conference Disability Concerns Coordinators, Reverend Jerry and Juda Carter, at 949-855-8297 or email reverendjdc@aol.com or judaathome@aol.com.

Bruce Baraw, a wheelchair user with osteogenesis imperfecta, is a member of the California-Pacific Conference Committee On Disability Concerns.



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

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

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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KEEPING THE FAITH: A MODEL OF GRACE

By Josie Byzek

It was the Lenten season of 1987. In the sanctuary, Pastor Tim Zingale sat in his wheelchair in front of his congregation, right at the edge of the chancel, which, like the sanctuary, was inaccessible. Sunlight filtered through the stained glass windows and pooled in bright reflections on the red carpet that ran the length of the aisle. In his lap, a manila folder held his sermon. Zingale's white alb, or robe, was accented with the purple stole traditionally worn by Evangelical Lutheran ministers to mark the 40-day period Christians believe Jesus struggled with Satan in the wilderness.

That Sunday Zingale was weighed down with his own struggle, his wilderness the gray-brick church with the blond pews—the last church he would ever pastor. A polio survivor, he had begun using a wheelchair just that year, and his congregation was having a rougher time adjusting than he was.

He took a deep breath, said a silent prayer, and began his sermon: about struggles with faith and the will of God—and how God accepts him in his wheelchair even if his congregation couldn't. "I am tired of those who play games with my faith by accusing me that because God's glory has not been manifested in some visible way, in total healing, that I am any less a Christian, or have a weak faith, or have a hidden sin, which an anonymous tape sent to me accused me of, since I remain in the brokenness of chronic illness," preached the gentle, soft-spoken man. "Through Christ all people, in whatever state they find themselves, are equally children of God. I am no less God's child in my wheelchair than you are walking on your own two feet."

It was his last attempt to once again explain his experience, his faith, to the church. Upon the recommendation of

the Mayo clinic he had begun using a power chair for long distances and a manual chair for preaching on Sundays. He had to, just to be able to do the services. "People could lift my chair into the sanctuary, chancel, and all that

"I believe in the theology of the cross because Jesus died on a cross, and through the brokenness of the world, we do have strength from God to go on...."
-- Rev. Tim Zingale --

stuff. I did that for a year, but then my bishop wouldn't support me any longer, and the people didn't want me there. I felt awful, and I was mad. That's when I wrote this sermon—saying God accepts me in my wheelchair even if you don't."

Even pastors who use wheelchairs are subject to the negative assumptions many Christians make of those who can't just get up and walk after a serious injury or illness—that somehow continued disability of any kind is linked to lack of faith, willpower, right living, or blessing. Yet wheelchair-using Christian pastors say that while disability can certainly cause suffering, the cause of much of that suffering is rooted in the attitudes of good Christians who subscribe to what Zingale calls a theology of glory—"that if you're right with God, then everything's right in your life, that you have health, wealth, and prosper-

ity."

Zingale's theology is quite different: "I believe in the theology of the cross because Jesus died on a cross, and through the brokenness of the world we do have strength from God to go on. How did Jesus die on Good Friday if he didn't have any kind of strength in faith?"...

Although churches that accept wheelchair-using pastors are still rare, they are becoming more common. Too late for Zingale to pastor a church, perhaps, but he is certainly a model of grace, and it wasn't easy. "I was angry at God, but I was listened to by God, and eventually that anger was replaced by a sense of peace," says Zingale.

He did not leave the Lutheran faith, nor did he become bitter when asked to leave his congregation. Instead, he "retired," which allowed him to continue preaching as a supply pastor for ministers on vacation, and he joined a Lutheran church that accepted him for who he was—St. Olaf's, in Fort Dodge, Iowa.

He also ministers via his website (<http://www.dodgenet.com/~tzingale/Sermon11st.html>). "I have an average of 350 people visit my site each week. When I was in the parish, the most people who would come to church on Sunday was about 150, so more people are reading my stuff now," he says. "So I am still ministering, and there is great joy in that for me."

Excerpted by permission from "Keeping The Faith," *New Mobility* (Dec. 2002), <http://www.newmobility.com>

I Am Disabled And...

LORD, you have promised that as you gather your people to you, among them will be those of us who are visually impaired and those of us who are mobility impaired. You will lead us with consolations. You will let us walk by brooks of water, in a straight path in which we shall not stumble.

Affirmation #9 based on Jeremiah 31:8-9 [NRSV] by Ken Tittle and Mariposa Ministry and Mariposa Online.



BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS FOR LATE-DEAFENED ADULTS

By Nancy Kingsley

Finding ways to break through the spiritual communication barrier requires the joint efforts of everyone involved—clergy, laity, and ourselves as late-deafened adults. There is room for lots of improvement on all these fronts! I often get the feeling that late-deafness is politically incorrect, both inside and outside the religious environment.

Disability ministries usually aren't concerned with issues of communication access, while ministries geared toward the culturally Deaf community generally don't meet the needs of late-deafened and hard-of-hearing people who want to participate in the hearing world and don't know sign language. Leaders of disability and Deaf ministries may show little interest in rectifying this omission, even when their assistance is sought....

I've been trying to figure out why the problems of non-signing people with hearing loss seem so unimportant to those who are reaching out to others with special needs. Is it because late-deafened and hard-of-hearing people can disappear so easily in a crowd, their polite smiles masking the anguish of incom-

prehension? Or because they frequently disappear altogether, isolation being the price they feel they must pay in order to avoid an unsuccessful struggle to fit in? Or is it because they're often ashamed of their hearing loss (which society associates with becoming old and useless) and thus don't speak up to request assistance? Or perhaps it's because hearing people usually have little understanding of the difficulties resulting from a hearing loss, because they constantly forget to make the necessary accommodations, or because they may resent making them in the first place?

I've found it particularly frustrating to encounter words implying that my needs are being provided for when they're not—terms like "inclusive" or "deaf and hard-of-hearing" when CART (real-time captioning) and assistive listening devices aren't offered. I don't feel included when I attend a program about religious access issues where an uncaptioned disability-ministry video is shown....

A disability ministry's failure to provide appropriate communication access

at its gatherings is similar to scheduling these events up a flight of stairs, yet people rarely seem to realize this. I continue to receive invitations to attend programs of a ministry that previously informed me that it doesn't have the resources to provide CART. I feel invited and uninvited at the same time; I wonder if I'm expected to leave my hearing loss at home for the evening and come along and have a good time?

Houses of worship aren't covered by the Americans with Disabilities Act, but they are covered by the moral obligation to welcome everyone who wants to participate. And a welcome includes more than the mere issuance of an invitation; the guest must be made to feel at home....

Lips hidden by a microphone; lights turned down; a noisy background; conversation flowing swiftly between several people; questions from members of the audience—these kinds of situations tend not to be recognized as potential barriers. There is little awareness of the need to provide captioning and other visual input for late-deafened people. Arranging for appropriate access may require much creativity and persistence, and it can be tempting to walk away from the challenge, but withdrawing also has a price....

Concerned about appearing "different," people with hearing loss are often reluctant to use communication assistance even when it's available; others passively accept deprivation as inevitable or give up after a few unsuccessful efforts to improve a situation. Many are afraid of bothering anyone with requests for help... Gaining admission requires a willingness to continue to ask, seek, and knock until the door is opened....Are we ready to follow through?

Nancy Kingsley lives in Closter, N. J., and is active in the UMCD (United Methodist Congress of the Deaf) and in ALDA (Association of Late Deafened Adults). Her column may be accessed at www.churchear.org/newpage1.htm.

Abridged from "The Late Deafened Spiritual Connection: Breaking Down Barriers," Signs of Change, the UMCD newsletter; originally published in ALDA News.

DEAF MINISTRY: ST. MATTHEW UMC IN MESA, ARIZONA

St. Matthew United Methodist Church in Mesa, Ariz., began its deaf ministry under the leadership of Diana Williams, an Associate Pastor and native signer, in 1985. Today the church's deaf ministry includes: Sign interpretation of the three Sunday morning worship services, an adult Sunday School class with deaf members, a signing choir, a Deaf Bible study, a sharing and support group, sign interpretation of UMW and UMM meetings when requested, sign language classes, a video and book loaning library on sign language and deafness, and a monthly Deaf Vespers with communion.

For more information contact: St. Matthew United Methodist Church, 2540 West Baseline Road, Mesa, Ariz. 85202-5403; telephone: (602) 838-7309 or 838-7311; fax: (602) 838-7354; e-mail: st matt@goodnet.com.



WHICH ONE IS WHICH?

By Beth Porter



*By the hungry, I will feed you,/By the poor, I'll make you rich,
By the broken, I will mend you,/Tell me, which one is which?*

-- Refrain of a contemporary hymn --

Recently, my friend Ellen and I were dining in a restaurant on Toronto's Danforth Avenue. Ellen has a developmental disability. A middle-aged man was seated alone at a nearby table, and after sizing him up, Ellen attempted to engage him in conversation: "Eating alone?" He nodded and looked away, seeming embarrassed by the attention of this stranger. "Wife and kids at home?" Again, a nod. "Three kids, eh," she persisted. This time, a look of surprise. "A boy and a girl...." "A boy and two girls!" the man responded, smiling. The connection had been made.

Ellen is free to be herself, and she loves to reach out to others. Also, like many people with developmental disabilities, she is capable of a keen sensitivity. I wondered, what was this man's story? Did he need the reminder of home and family? Ellen's freedom and sensitivity sometimes produces behavior that is experienced as "inappropriate," but her inappropriateness can deeply enrich others' lives.

When Ellen and I attended the funeral of a mutual friend, I was embarrassed to see that Ellen had situated herself in the midst of the grieving family at the graveside. While the casket was being lowered, she was speaking intently to the bereaved husband. Later, he told me that at this moment of great pain Ellen had said to him, "It is only her body in the casket. She is with God." He continued, "Of all the words spoken to me, Ellen's were the most comforting. They seemed in a remarkable way sent to reassure me."

These little incidents can be seen as parables. Is it not, above all, a relationship with each of us that God wants? And do we not believe that God also, often in unexpected ways, reaches out in truth and kindness to us beyond the

norms of the "should's" and "ought's" with which we assess ourselves and others.

Relationships are what life is all about for most people with developmental disabilities—not productivity, nor ideas, nor even religion. Perhaps this comes partly of being dependent on others, perhaps partly of not being distracted by the abilities and pressures with which others live. In any case, people with developmental disabilities, created like all of us in God's image, reveal the absolute priority that God gives to relationship with us. They are likely to note the slightest change in visage or bearing of those around them and to know who needs a hug or a prayer. At times, through their anxiety, they reveal hidden tensions between others.

A corollary of the importance they accord to relationships is that they excel at forgiveness. Ellen and others like her often experience not being included and not given equal respect. Their gift for accepting others as they are and overlooking slights is a model for the rest of us, calling us to prioritize our relationships over our indignation and reminding us of God's constant gracious forgiveness.

Sometimes people with developmental disabilities are sentimentalized as be-

ing almost angelic. Being dependent is in itself no source of joy or virtue. People with disabilities are every bit as human as the rest of us, just as capable of human failings, and usually less able to disguise negative inclinations.

Whether or not this shadow side is in evidence, an encounter with someone with a disability can challenge us. It can arouse guilt, fear and even revulsion, because the person may seem unattractive or unpredictable or because they awaken our awareness of our own handicaps. In front of their neediness and our own, our deepest inclination may be to flee.

How is it then, that some people are transformed by their relationships with people with developmental disabilities? I believe that when we risk to be drawn into relationship, fear and guilt drop away and we gradually discover a profound mutuality: a reciprocity that surprises and disarms, and reminds us of God. As with the man in the restaurant, there's a process that takes place in us as we begin to recognize the gift in the relationship. As with our friend's husband, it can lead to wonder and gratitude. It is a theological event—a discerning of our common humanity through which God becomes visible. We ask ourselves which of us is the giver and which the receiver....

Beth Porter writes on the topics of faith and spirituality while serving with the pastoral team at L'Arche Daybreak, a communal residence for people with mental and physical disabilities near Toronto, Ontario.
From *Alive Now* (Nov./Dec. 2001)

CONSIDERING ASTERS



Growing through cold,
roots pushing dark earth,
shoots rising to the light,
green spikes plain, unlovely,
opening purple in autumn,
swelling, swaying,
almost to break the stem,
or the heart.

So, Lord, pull us, graceless,
flawed, unsightly; pull,
pull us from the cold earth
of our ordinary.
Pull us to the beauty
you see, the splendor,
the shining you see.

— Eleanor Cowles —
From *Alive Now* (March/April 2002)

*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*:

**Linda Ahnell
Jill Halley
Margery Chapman
Joe Rollins
Virginia Clark
Lucille Fleming
Nina Redmond
John Henker
Nell Hong
Ruth Sciumbato
Fred & Jessie Fahnstock
Rev. Ed Hoffman
Rev. Hal Dallke
Marie Losh
Nancy Bunyan**

A COMMUNAL PRAYER FOR HEALING

○ Lord of mercy and love, we are of thee as thou art a part of us,
in breath, in life, in thought, in action,
and in every aspect of our being.

In thee we move;
in thee we live;
in thee we are.

Send forth, we pray, thy healing power upon this gathering
with love incomprehensible, love unlimited, love unbounded.

Lord, we are here waiting to receive, waiting to know,
waiting to become as Jesus taught us — whole and complete.
Make our thoughts one, one with thee and one with each other.

○ Lord, we pray for healing —
healing of our brokenness, healing of our ills,
healing of our souls, healing of our hearts,
healing of our memory, healing of our life-giving sources.

Come, Holy Spirit, come. Come, Holy Spirit, come.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

— Rev. Dr. Dennis Ginoza —

**Rev. Dr. Dennis Ginoza is Pastor of the Fallbrook
United Methodist Church in Fallbrook, Calif.**

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