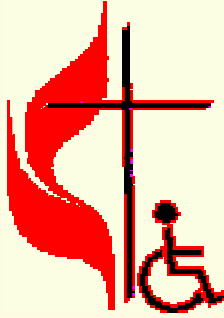


Those who wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles....Isaiah 40:31 (NRSV)



Wings

A FAITHLETTER FOR UNITED METHODISTS WITH DISABILITIES AND THOSE WHO CARE ABOUT THEM
 Spring 2009 — Vol. 19 Issue 4 No. 76



FROM WHERE I SIT: SIGNS OF THE TIMES

By Jo D'Archangelis

Someone once called economics the “dismal science.” I don’t know about that “science” part, but “dismal” certainly seems to apply to the economic condition of our nation—and much of the world—right now. “Signs of the times” are everywhere: homes foreclosed, jobs lost, benefits cut, credit evaporating, and the downward spiral continues.

Such negative signs appear in even the least obvious of places. For example, we mail out over 830 copies of the snail mail version of *Wings* quarterly. If someone has moved and left a forwarding address, the USPS forwards the newsletter and also advises us of the new address. If no forwarding address is on file, the USPS returns the newsletter to us. In the last few months alone, returned newsletters have revealed a large number of UM churches in this conference that have “gone under,” so to speak, while both returned and forwarded newsletters have revealed a large number of people who are no longer at the same address.

Of course, it is more reasonable to blame the loss of the churches on a dis-

mal economy than it is to blame that same economy for the increased migration of people from one place to another. After all, people move when times are good and when times are bad. Still, there seems to be a lot more moving than usual, and one can assume that at least some of the people had to move because of economic pressures.

Some signs are more obvious. One of the recently returned newsletters had been addressed to DAMI (Disability Awareness Ministries Inc.), an organization devoted to making faith communities in the state of Minnesota fully accessible to those with disabilities. Since DAMI had been on the *Wings* mailing list for several years, I checked its website (now only in minimal operation) and found that because of “insufficient funding” DAMI had been forced to close its office in July of last year and this after 17 years of service!*

I am sure that this particular closing is just the tip of the iceberg and that there are many more disability awareness/accessibility programs throughout the nation, if not the world, that have

been negatively impacted by (to use current econo-jargon) insufficient funds, economic constraints, and re-allocated resources. No, I won’t bewail the “unfairness” of it all as I realize that in these circumstances programs of all kinds suffer cuts and that priorities have to be made (although I must add that even in flush times disability ministries are not what you would call “top priority”).

Instead, I will suggest that no matter how insufficient our funds and constrained our economy, we can still re-allocate our own resources and give of ourselves, our time, our energy, our ideas, and our creativity to make sure that much-needed services, ministries, and programs survive during this long drought.

In the Bible Jesus refers to the leafing of the fig tree as a sign that summer is near (see, e.g., Matthew 24:32). As of this writing, there are few if any signs of the economy turning around; yet we have to believe that someday little green leaves—a job found, a house moved into, a benefit restored, a new church built, a disability program expanded—will begin to sprout. The times they may not be a-changing much for the better right now, but they *will* change, and with a little patience, faith, and optimism we can look forward to the coming of a fruitful season.

***See page 6 of this issue for a piece on disability ministry reprinted from a DAMI newsletter.**

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FRIENDSHIP HOUSE BREAKS NEW GROUND

When a ceremonial shovelful of dirt was dug from the site for Friendship House on September 12, [2006], ground was broken in more ways than one. The Western Theological Seminary [Holland, Mich.] project, named in honor of Friendship Ministries, is an innovative new Christian living community that provides inclusive housing for seminary students and adults with cognitive impairments.

Eighteen seminary students and six adults with cognitive impairments will live together in Friendship House, with the space divided into six apartment units, each housing four residents and including common living, dining, and patio areas. The facility will also include the space for a Resident Director and an apartment for visiting guests.

Throughout the planning process, designers kept in mind the project's goal of being "a safe, affordable, independent environment where individuals value and support each other." An essential contribution to this environment will be a weekly Friendship Bible Study group which will meet at the house.

For Bob and Deb Sterken, this opportunity for their son, Rob, represents a dream come true: "Since Rob's birth, we have always been concerned about his future, especially housing. He has far fewer options than our other children have had. He requires a unique environment so he can live semi-independently, and we are confident the Friendship House can provide this. We see living at the Friendship House as a terrific opportunity for Rob that will enable him to take his rightful place in God's Kingdom. The future looks bright for Rob, and this is both a comfort and relief for everyone in our family."

The urban location of Friendship House on the grounds of Western Seminary is ideal. Not only will resi-

dents have easy access to seminary facilities, but an easy walk will bring them to downtown services as well.

Says Matt Floding, Dean of Students at Western Seminary, "Friendship House is something like grace—completely unexpected and amazing. Out of two sets of needs, additional student housing for Western and safe and community-oriented housing for persons with special needs, has come one incredible opportunity. The inclusion of these new friends in WTS housing will impact everyone in the seminary community. And every pastor graduating from Western will carry in

their heart a heightened awareness, sense of compassion for persons with disabilities, and basic ability to minister [with] them and their families. That's good news for the Church and its ministries."

Friendship Ministries is honored that this exciting new venture bears our name. It is the hope of everyone involved in the project that the Friendship House model will be duplicated to benefit other communities....

Slightly abridged from *Extras*, the newsletter of Friendship Ministries (Winter 2006-2007).

For information on developing ministries with and for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in your faith community, access www.friendship.org.



A non-official quarterly newsletter for United Methodists with disabling conditions and all others interested in the issues of disability, accessibility, and the church

FOUNDER/EDITOR COMPUTER LAYOUT/GRAPHIC DESIGN

Jo D'Archangelis

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JONI EARECKSON TADA: WALKING BY FAITH

By Peg Carmack Short

Editor's Note: The following is the second and last in a two-part series reprinted from a lengthy interview with Joni Eareckson Tada, one of the true "pioneers" in disability ministry, originally published in *Significant Living* magazine two years ago.

PART TWO: ADVERSITY AND TRIUMPH

Q: Joni, we've already talked a bit about your past, but I wonder if we might focus a little on the days after your accident. I believe you were already a believer, is that correct?

A: Yes, but my life in Christ was at best mediocre. I wasn't passionate about Jesus, and my relationship with him certainly wasn't intimate. But all that changed after my spinal cord injury in that diving accident in 1967. At first I was very depressed and despairing; I had no hope. I thought that happiness was inextricably linked to "life on my feet" or "life with my hands."

Q: Then how were you able to move from that despair and begin moving forward with your life?

A: I became tired of being depressed. I

learned that people need to have hope, and I finally began to hope that life could be better, that there would be a day when I would smile or even laugh.

"The weaker I am, the more I lean on the Lord; the more I lean on him, the stronger I discover him to be."—Joni Eareckson Tada

Someone put a little framed Bible verse by my bedside table in the hospital. It read, "Be still and know that I am God." I began to see that my "physical stillness" might force me to learn more about the Lord and just how sustaining his grace really is! So, finally, there was a night when I offered a weak prayer, *Oh, Lord, if I can't die, then please show me how to live.* It was a faint prayer, but God began to move in my life through

my mustard seed-sized faith. That's when hope began to blossom!

Q: Many of our readers, or one of their loved ones, may be facing unexpected adversity. Can you share some of the things that sustained you?

A: I was miserable shortly after my accident, but I was so grateful—even in the midst of my misery—to have friends and family who kept me connected to reality. They didn't allow the accident or my quadriplegia to "redefine" me. I was still Joni. These friends didn't treat me like an invalid; they treated me like their friend. Also, back then, I was tremendously encouraged through singing hymns. The words to *Be Still My Soul* resonated powerfully. And I

also found great comfort in the Psalms—especially those that dealt with depression or discouragement such as, "Why art thou downcast, O my soul?"

Q: Your life has been a wonderful example of overcoming adversity to people worldwide. How can one learn to surrender and triumph in life's desert experiences?

A: The only way to triumph in adversity is to take God and trust him at his word, to believe that there are no real accidents in the Christian's life (Romans 8:28), that his strength can see you through anything (2 Corinthians 12:9), that he knows and understands and that he hasn't forgotten you (1 Corinthians 1:3), and that there is a plan and a purpose (Ephesians 1:11). It's much better to live that way, than to live in denial, bitterness, or discouragement.

Q: What would you say to those who feel they can no longer cope with the overwhelming events in their life?

A: If I were to park my wheelchair next to someone and I knew that person was struggling trying to cope, I would say to them honestly, "Believe me, like you there are many days I wake up, even after almost 40 years in this wheelchair,

MOURNING By Edith Parker

I mourn	Knowing I can share myself
I wish	Pleasure in friends
For ease	Joy in listening
Ease of movement	Sharing
Comfort in writing	The spontaneity of a hug
Ease in thinking	The sharing of a meal
Hope	All these are part of my life
Laughter	It is a good life
Inspiration	Not one to mourn
I wish for these simple things	One to rejoice in
The comfort of living	So be it
inside my skin	Amen

(08/08/02)

(JONI INTERVIEW continued on page 4)

(JONI INTERVIEW continued from page 3)



and think, Lord Jesus, I can't go on...I don't have the strength. But also like you, I must not allow my emotions to go down that dark and grim path. And so I pray, Jesus, I don't have the strength, but you do. May I borrow your smile for the day? And honestly, by the time I'm up in my wheelchair, my perspective brightens. The weaker I am, the harder I lean on the Lord; and the harder I lean on him, the stronger I discover him to be. Every day I wake up and I have to remember that truth that 2 Corinthians 1:9 tells me, 'These things have happened that we might not rely on ourselves, but on God who raises the dead.' And if he can raise the dead, then he can raise your hopes, too. I don't think God calls any of us to go through anything that was not first endured by our Savior. The Bible says, 'In this world you will have trouble.' Life is supposed to be difficult (that is a fact that many people just can't fathom, but it's true)."

Q: For even the most faithful Christian, extreme adversity is a challenge. What can people do to help themselves as they struggle with difficulties?

A: I can't answer that question better than with 2 Corinthians 4:9-12; 16-18 (MSG), "We've been surrounded and battered by troubles, but we're not demoralized; we're not sure what to do, but we know that God knows what to do...our lives are at constant risk for Jesus' sake, which makes Jesus' life all the more evident in us...so we're not giving up. How could we? Even though on the outside, it often looks like things are falling apart on us, on the inside God is there making new life; not a day goes by without his unfolding grace. These hard times are small potatoes compared to the coming good times, the lavish celebration prepared ahead...there's far more here than meets the eye because the things we see now are only here today and gone tomorrow. But the things we can't see now will last forever."

Q: So what will Joni Eareckson Tada be doing in the future?

A: This year [2007] we will be opening the Joni And Friends International Disability Center in Agoura, California. From our new headquarters, we will be taking more wheelchairs and Bibles to additional developing countries around the world. Also this year we will hold 19 Family Retreats for stressed-out moms and dads of dis-

abled children. All this and much more! I've been blessed so much; I just have to pass on the blessing. It's what God would want me to do.

Excerpted from "Keeping Faith," Significant Living (Jan./Feb. 2007).

For information about starting a disability outreach in your faith community, visit www.joniandfriends.org.



GOD'S SPECIAL CHILD: A DEVOTION By Lori Ciccanti

Sons are a heritage from the Lord, children a reward from Him. — Psalm 127:3 (NIV)

How does this Scripture apply to those of us who are faced with the tremendous task of caring for children with special needs? For some parents, the worst fear is having a child who is handicapped. As the mother of a son with autism, I understand the unique struggles of families with a member who is disabled. Yet the Psalm describes children as an inheritance and a reward. It also illustrates the need for total dependence upon God to build a successful home, and it clearly says that without the Lord's help, our efforts are in vain (v. 1).

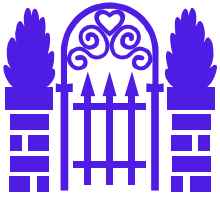
Some parents at a support group I once attended were asked about the contributions their children had made to their lives. Some of their thoughts included: learning how to depend on God; being able to love unconditionally; appreciation for what comes from the heart, not just the mind; compassion; and perseverance.

Our children teach us many things, but most importantly, they teach us to submit our wills to God and to trust in his wisdom and unfailing love. My son, now an adult, has helped me to understand and appreciate how God has worked through many circumstances not only in spite of but because of my son's handicap. The apostle Paul reminds us that God uses some of our situations to bless others, thus bringing glory to himself: *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows.* — 2 Corinthians 1:3-5 (NIV)

Scripture reveals to me that my son is a heritage of the Lord—God's special child. It is an honor that God has entrusted him to my care, a reward that will be treasured in my heart forever.

Adapted from the daily devotion on the Presbyterian Church in Canada website (www.pcc.org), Jan. 11, 2009.

Ciccanti, who resides in Ocean View, Del., may be e-mailed at DLAlcina@mchsi.com.



HISTORIC CHURCH GETS UNCONVENTIONAL RAMP

By Robert Behre

Anyone working on the third oldest church building in downtown Charleston, [So. Carolina], a church that wrote an important chapter in the city's history of race relations—wouldn't want to disfigure it. But Old Bethel United Methodist Church at 222 Calhoun St. has an aging congregation, and some find it increasingly difficult to climb the several stairs leading to the front door.

A conventional handicap ramp might mar or distract from the modest wooden structure, built in 1797 in a simple meetinghouse style and remodeled in the late 19th century. Still, something needed to be done. "This definitely has been a big issue for this church because some of our parishioners are not as able as they once were to come in the doors from the stairs," the Rev. Carlton J. McClam says....

Architect Dinos Liollo says the guidance on keeping the ramp as subtle as possible came from church members who wanted to make sure that people's

eyes remained on the historic church and not any addition. He calls the ramp the most challenging part of a major restoration project that has stretched over two years.

To make the ramp as subtle as possible, it was lengthened so its slope is gentle enough that code didn't require handrails. Instead, only concrete curbs frame it. Also, it's half concrete, half grass, a move that makes it less noticeable. "It reinforces the sense that this is just a side yard that's been buckled up to meet the door," White says.

The ramp actually doesn't even touch the church; there's a quarter-inch gap between it and the door. For just outside the door, the one place where a rail was required, the architects designed a copper-clad planter....

The overall work on Old Bethel Methodist Church is being done in three phases, and two are now complete. The first phase involved repairing the windows and doors, painting,

replacing the siding and dealing with structural issues. All the windows were made operable, the doors were re-hung and repairs were made as subtly as possible....

The second phase included a new metal roof, a handicapped entrance, handicapped bathrooms and an upgrade of the electrical system. A final phase would add new cushions, refinish the floors and perhaps add a more expensive and less visible air conditioning system....

The work will go a long way toward preserving a church that, while not Charleston's fanciest, embodies the city's complicated racial past....Two centuries ago, the Methodists conducted extensive missionary work among African-Americans in the state and some white Methodists were even persecuted because of a perception that they were pushing for abolition. Old Bethel was founded and paid for by parishioners of both races.

"When it was across the street, the balcony was used by the blacks and the first story was used by the whites," McClam says. In 1834, black members began to resist being relegated to the balcony, and the disagreement continued through the decades leading up to and following the Civil War. By 1876, the white and black Bethel members formally separated, and the black congregation was given the old building, which it moved across the street.

The church now has about 200 members, some of whom are descendants of the 1880 congregation. To those who lament how segregated Charleston becomes every Sunday morning, the church's existence is a sad chapter in the Holy City's history. But by preserving Old Bethel and its history for generations to come, the congregation has given everyone something to be glad about.

Abridged from the *Charleston Courier And Post*; originally titled "New Ramp At Historic Church Gets Unconventional Touch" (Dec. 8, 2003).



CROOKED BUT FRUITFUL

By John W. Walters

Jesus said, "You will know them by their fruits." — Matthew 7:16 (NRSV)

I was mowing in a large pasture when I came to an old apple orchard. The smell of apples made my mouth water. I began to look for the fruit on the large trees, but they were all bare. Then I noticed a small, old, crooked apple tree that had been uprooted by the wind many years ago. The main root of the tree had still made contact with the earth, and the trunk of the little tree had turned almost 90 degrees, pointing upward again. That little tree was loaded with delicious fruit. Although that small, crooked tree was ugly and gnarled, it was still bearing fruit. All of us are imperfect, but like that tree we can continue to grow and bear fruit for God if we will remain rooted in God's will and constantly look toward Jesus Christ.

From *The Upper Room* (Jan./Feb. 2001).



BARRIERS IN GOD'S HOUSE

By Ron Cottone

The topic of removing barriers came up in a recent discussion. A parishioner was telling me about the many improvements her congregation had made to their building to make it more accessible. An elevator and ramps had been installed along with other features in washrooms and hallways that improve access to people with mobility impairments. The list of remodeling improvements was impressive. It seemed that anyone could get into the building and use its facilities.

Wondering if other areas were accessible, I asked if they made large-print bulletins available, if hearing assistance devices were offered, and if alternatives to wheat products were available for communion or community dinners. None of these things had been considered. Were people with disabilities intentionally invited to participate in programs and serve on committees? No, they were not. Realizing the job was not finished, the parishioner replied that they had more work still to do.

Barriers to access occur in at least three forms: architectural, communicational, and attitudinal. Once we have made our building physically accessible, we need to ensure that those who enter can communicate and be included.

From **DAMI NEWS**, the newsletter of Disability Awareness Ministries, Inc. (Nov. 2005).

Cottone was Executive Director of DAMI. (Due to insufficient funding, DAMI was forced to close its office in July of 2008 after 17 years of service in the state of Minnesota.)



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Marie Losh

WORDS TO LIVE BY



"I am not a big, fat panda! I am *the* big, fat panda!"

— Po, in *Kung Fu Panda*.

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