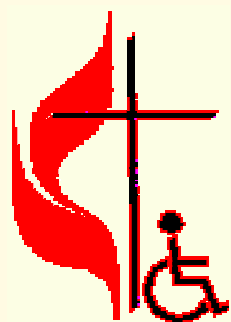


Those who wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles....Isaiah 40:31 (NRSV)



Wings

A FAITHLETTER FOR UNITED METHODISTS WITH
DISABILITIES AND THOSE WHO CARE ABOUT THEM
Fall 2009 — Vol. 20 Issue 2 No. 78



FROM WHERE I SIT: THE SOLOIST AND GIFTS OF GRACE By Jo D'Archangelis

A few weeks ago I watched the DVD version of the movie, *The Soloist*. Based on a true story, it tells of the friendship between an *LA Times* columnist, Steve Lopez (Robert Downey Jr.), and a homeless man, Nathaniel Ayers (Jamie Foxx), who lives with schizophrenia and displays amazing musical talent.

Generally panned by reviewers and ignored by moviegoers, *The Soloist* proved to be, for me at least, a beautifully performed, directed, written, and photographed film. More than that, many themes in the movie resonated with me and my life experience as a person with a disability.

The soundtrack consists mainly of Beethoven, and one sequence depicts in animated abstractions what Ayers sees in his mind while listening to a Beethoven symphony—somewhat similar to the fireworks one may see at an open air concert that snap, crackle, and pop in time to the music.

Noticing the euphoric expression on Ayers' face whenever he plays the violin or cello, or just listens to music, another character remarks that Ayers is

experiencing "grace." Music provides him respite from the tormenting inner voices and squalid poverty that characterize his daily existence.

For me, grace also comes in the form of music, or in the form of a good novel or a good movie. Such "grace experiences" can take us temporarily out of ourselves and provide us with relief from the strains and stresses of our lives. It's not clear if the word "grace" as it is used in the movie has religious significance, but I like to believe that all "grace experiences," whether great or small, euphoric or merely pleasant, are true gifts from God.

On the other hand, *The Soloist* does not sugarcoat the disturbing aspects of severe mental illness or of life on the streets. There is no "uplifting" Ayers-is-cured-from-his-illness-and-appears-as-soloist-with-the-Los-Angeles-Philharmonic-to-thunderous-applause ending. In fact, Ayers consistently refuses to see a psychiatrist, take medication, or even admit that he has an illness. When Lopez arranges for a small, private recital featuring Ayers

playing the cello, Ayers freaks out.

In one telling scene, Ayers refers to Lopez as "God," and up to this point their relationship has indeed been more of benefactor/recipient than of friend/friend. Lopez finds Ayers a place to live, provides him with a cello and music lessons, and even reunites him with a sister whom he hasn't seen in years. But Ayers doesn't want to be "fixed," and this is particularly frustrating for Lopez, especially when Ayers in his paranoia physically attacks Lopez. What more can Lopez do? Someone then points out that perhaps the best gift Lopez can give to Ayers is just "to be there."

This can be a hard lesson for many people to learn. We like to see ourselves as the conduits through which other people's lives are made better. But sometimes the obstacles blocking our good intentions are just too great, or sometimes the objects of our giving don't need, or don't even want, the help we are prepared to give.

It's especially frustrating for those of us with disabilities who would like to be on the giver side of the relationship. We often feel we don't have the mental or physical capabilities to help other people. But this isn't so. All of us, disabled or non-disabled alike, have the capacity to "be there" for others, to offer words of encouragement and comfort, to listen with open minds and

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hearts, to share in the silences—in short, to be bearers of God's grace.

Too artsy perhaps for some and too real for others, *The Soloist* was nonetheless for me a true "grace experience," both unsettling and moving in its virtuosity.

To those readers who might be considering renting the DVD, be advised that *The Soloist* is rated PG-13 for some nasty words, sexual references, violence, and disturbing scenes depicting mental illness and life on the streets. And, oh yes, there's all that Beethoven too.



HOMELESS AND UNITED METHODIST

By Marta Aldrich

Ask members of Hobson Church about Darrell "Cowboy" Sprung, and they describe him as church caretaker, unofficial janitor, chairman of hospitality ministries, assistant to the pastor, sometimes-cook, and resident theologian. He is also homeless.

Ask Cowboy about Hobson, and he says the Nashville, Tenn., church is his home, and its members are the closest thing he has do a family. "They make you feel welcome here," Sprung says. "It don't matter whether you drive a BMW or a bicycle. This church is after the person inside."

Sprung was 8 when his parents died in a car accident, and 16 when he ran away from an orphanage. With a sixth-grade education, he wandered the country, hitchhiking to wherever he could find work, mostly on ranches or construction sites. He has smoked most of his life and struggles with alcoholism. He has never married.

Today at age 55, he owns four or five changes of clothes and two sleeping bags. He sleeps under a bridge on the outskirts of Nashville because he likes to be alone sometimes. Because of extreme bronchitis, he no longer works. He says it's because of several pastors and church friends that he has settled in Nashville. "They're always willing to talk if I have a problem," Cowboy says. "They have time for me and let me know they care. They love me, and they're trying to understand my problem. To me, that means a lot."

Hobson Church is where Cowboy gets his mail. He has keys to the church and can sleep there whenever he wants, usually when his bronchitis acts up. He...usually drops by the church every day to do odd jobs. "People here like Cowboy because he is real," says the Rev. V. H. "Sonnye" Dixon, Hobson's pastor. "He cares about people. There have been times we've had deaths in the church family and nobody showed up at the funeral but Cowboy. He will take money from his disability check and buy something for someone else."

For Cowboy, the church is his favorite place. He likes the way its members don't judge homeless people and the way worship ends by holding hands in a big circle... "We got a little chapel upstairs. Sometimes, I'll go up there and sit and pray and think a bit. This church is my sanctuary..."

Abridged from *Interpreter Magazine* (Jan. 2004). Aldrich is a freelance writer in Franklin, Tenn.



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

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THE MESSAGE AND THE CHALLENGE

By Joyce Brownlee

Editor's Note: Brownlee and her sister, Joann Orendurff, serve as Co-Chairpersons of the United Methodist California-Pacific Conference Committee On Disability Concerns (CCDC). The following is based on an e-mail message that Brownlee posted on August 14, 2009.

Joann and I are scheduled to speak at a Disability Awareness Sunday service at the Nestor (Calif.) United Methodist Church, Russ Locke, Pastor. Observing Disability Awareness Sunday is something we need to push our churches to do. The purpose and mission of the CCDC is to educate all churches in the Conference on accessibility improvements, both physically and attitudinally, and on recognizing the gifts and graces that people with disabilities of every kind can bring to the church.

I am in the process of composing and sending informational letters to our Bishop Mary Ann Swenson, the District Superintendents, and our churches explaining the importance of following the resolution passed at the 2008 California-Pacific Annual Conference session making the last Sunday in September Disability Awareness Sunday. A designated offering is to be taken and used to further the work of the CCDC.

This offering is especially important now since the Conference has frozen all funding. There will be no CCDC meetings until further notice, and all committee business will be conducted by e-mail as the need arises. Conference Center facilities will no longer be available on the weekends, which means no use of phone or video conferencing.

This in effect keeps some CCDC members with disabilities from full participation! Yet we are still working to bring the message of disability awareness to our churches—from providing qualified speakers to talk on the subject of disability awareness to any church in the Conference requesting it, to providing Accessibility Audit materials to help a church determine if it has architec-

tural/communication barriers that restrict persons with disabilities from fully accessing its ministries.

The challenge is to get local churches to realize their need to learn and apply information about disability awareness. Our churches are incomplete when physical, communication, and attitudinal barriers keep some of us from being full participants. To make our churches open to persons with disabilities, we build ramps, make accessible restrooms, and provide sound amplifiers. And when we talk about accessibility, we usually talk in terms of such physical barriers.

However, the emphasis should not be on buildings and devices but on people and relationships, on inviting

people into each others' lives. Churches are critical in this regard. We as people with disabilities need to be able to access all church facilities so that we, like everyone else, can fully participate in worship and fellowship. Remember—we are *all* part of God's family!

Note: When church facilities are used by persons in the community—e.g., preschool programs, child daycare centers, adult daycare programs, free clinics, Scout or AA meetings—the facilities are considered to be “a public accommodation” and must comply with access guidelines set forth in the Americans with Disabilities Act.

To request a speaker or a copy of the Accessibility Audit for a church in this Conference, contact Joyce Brownlee, e-mail: Genwidow@cox.net, phone: 619-660-1486; or Joann Orendurff, e-mail: Joannorendurff@sbcglobal.net, phone: 619-449-2082. There is a charge of \$10 to copy and mail Accessibility Audit materials; speakers are provided at no charge.

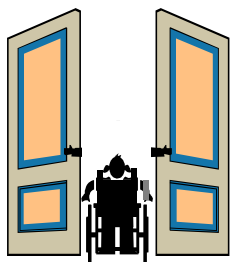


DID YOU KNOW IT SAYS IN THE UMC BOOK OF DISCIPLINE...?!?

Disability Awareness Sunday

Disability Awareness Sunday...shall be observed on a date to be determined by the annual conference. Disability Awareness Sunday calls the Church to celebrate the gifts and graces of persons with disabilities and calls the Church and society to full inclusion of persons with disabilities in the community. If the annual conference so directs, an offering may be received and the funds used by the annual conference to promote the work of creating architectural and attitudinal accessibility in local churches....

From The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church (2000), §265(4).



WORSHIP IDEAS FOR DISABILITY AWARENESS SUNDAY

By Helen R. Neinast

Preparation and Setting

Disability Awareness Sunday is both a celebration and a challenge.

We celebrate the lives and witness of those with disabilities who contribute so much to our faith community. We also open ourselves, our churches, and the Church to the call to full inclusion and full accessibility for those with any disability—physical or mental. This is an opportunity to raise awareness and to find solutions to the physical, architectural, communication, and attitude barriers to those with disabilities.

Suggested Hymns

"We Meet You, O Christ" (*UM Hym-*

nal 257)

"Through It All" (*UMH* 507)

"All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name" (*UMH* 154, *Mil Voces Para Celebrar* 60)

"It Is Well with My Soul" (*UMH* 377, *Mil Voces* 250, *Let Us Worship* [Korean-English] 304)

"Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us With Your Love" (*UMH* 432, *Mil Voces* 288, *Let Us Worship*, 179)

Scriptures

Genesis 1:26-27 "We are created in God's image"

Mark 2:1-4 "His friends lowered him down through the roof"

I Corinthians 12:22-27 "The body of Christ"

Psalms 103:8, 13-14, 17-18 "The Lord knows our frame"

Some Ideas for the Service

This Sunday gives your church the chance to challenge its hospitality toward and inclusion of all persons in the life of the church. Ask persons with disabilities to participate in worship as liturgists and leaders in worship. If there are no people with disabilities, this is a good time to examine why that is—is the church open and actively seeking to make itself open to all? You could invite someone who is or works on behalf of persons with disabilities to preach this Sunday.

Set the scene for today's service. If it were possible to gather all the disabled people into one nation, that nation would number over 650 million women, men and children. That nation would be the world's third largest country, after China and India. (World Health Organization statistic)

That nation would have the least access to education. Many disabled people receive little or no education, especially in developing countries. That nation would have the highest unemployment rate in the world and be the poorest nation on earth. It would have the least access to any sort of transportation. And, it would be the least evangelized nation with the lowest proportion involved in a church.

Try to interpret for your church the status of the disabled in the United States and beyond. Go to www.icdri.org/Statistics/mainstats.htm. This site gives an extensive look at statistics and public policy regarding people with disabilities....

Sermon Notes

People with disabilities are trying to be included in the life of the faith community. They, too, want recognition of their values as children of God worthy of unconditional love and acceptance.

(WORSHIP continued on page 5)

LITANY AND BENEDICTION FOR DISABILITY AWARENESS SUNDAY

Litany

Leader: We come together today as people with different skills, different abilities, different disabilities.

People: We come, however, as one body in Christ.

Leader: We ask God to help us be compassionate toward all, even as God has been compassionate toward us.

People: Gather us together, in compassion and in faith. Help us to welcome and honor everyone in this community.

Leader: Regardless of physical strength and ability,

People: Regardless of differences of mind or spirit,

Leader: Open us, O God. Make us accessible to your Spirit, and accessible to all your people. Amen.

Benediction (Adapted from Romans 15)

May the God of hope
Fill you with joy and peace
So that you may abound in hope
By the power of the Holy Spirit.

From *Interpreter Magazine* (May-June 2004).

(WORSHIP continued from page 4)



Hunger and malnutrition world-wide are the number one cause of disabilities. Accidents and disease are the leading cause of disabilities in the parts of the world where hunger is not a factor. However, even if we are fortunate enough to live without material deprivation and with outstanding medical care, all of us face the toll that aging takes. Eyesight, hearing, mobility, memory—these disabilities await most all of us. Disabilities do not know boundaries of age, race, sex or social status. And yet disabilities are the biggest barrier to full participation in our churches. Someone has pointed out that a person in a wheelchair is not disabled in a community or building...that is wheelchair-accessible.

Genesis tells us that we are created in the image of God. Yet we are all different—skin color, personalities, mental and physical capabilities. This passage, then, must refer to something besides the physical. God is spirit, and to be created in the image of God is to have a spirit that is in God's image. And yet we—like Jesus—are incarnate. It is with our bodies and our minds that we live out our lives. So to have a mind or body that is different is not a judgment on our relationship with God but is a statement about our humanity.

As we read the Bible it is clear from beginning to end that God wants to be in a relationship with each and every one of God's creatures. Therefore, it becomes clear that our God is a God of accessibility—to all—and that we therefore must make our churches, and our hearts, accessible to all...

Adapted and abridged from *Interpreter Magazine* (May-June, 2004). Ideas were submitted by students at United Methodist seminaries.

BEYOND HUMAN WISDOM

By Jon Will Pitts

My carpool to work met daily in my church's parking lot. We often noticed trash and litter there. As a member of the grounds committee, I felt obligated to clean up the trash, but a disability limits my movement. I made a tool from a broom handle and a nail, but the nail kept bending or coming out. I couldn't find any tool at the hardware store that would allow me to pick things up without bending.

I prayerfully meditated over this situation. How could I do God's will concerning this problem? As I considered this, I was inspired to design a tool. The hard, pointed end of it can be used to pick up paper; the other end has a hook to pick up empty bottles or cans. After my disability retirement, I formed a small company that

has produced and distributed these tools, saving many people physical pain and exertion and helping to preserve the beauty of God's creation.

So far, hundreds of the tools are used by those who collect cans along the roadway, by conservation groups, and by others. Though I do not make a profit from the tools, I find satisfaction in helping to care for God's world. By relying on God's inspiration, we can solve our problems in ways that honor God.

From The Upper Room (Jul./Aug. 1994).



JOIN FRIENDSHIP MINISTRIES FOR A WEBINAR ON "AUTISM & CHILDREN'S MINISTRY" NOVEMBER 3 AT 2:00 P.M. (EST)

This is a great opportunity to discover ideas for sharing God's love with children who have Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)—without needing to travel to attend a workshop. Led by Nella Uitvlugt, Executive Director of Friendship Ministries, this free 60-minute web seminar will explore:

- The differences among children with ASD
- Strategies for including kids with ASD in children's ministry
- Developing a Spiritual Formation Plan for children with intellectual disabilities.

To sign up, go to Friendship Ministries website <http://friendship.org> and click on "events"; then click on "Free Webinar." You'll receive instructions about how to log in on your computer for the visual component of the webinar, as well as how to call in via phone for the audio component. For those who cannot make this time, Friendship Ministries will be recording the webinar and posting it on their website.

From Friendship Ministries e-newsletter (Oct. 2009).



APPLES OF GOLD

A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver.
— Proverbs 25:11 (NRSV)

- Don't Worry
- Everything Will Be All Right
- Every Cloud Has A Silver Lining
- Tomorrow Is Another Day
- If At First You Don't Succeed Try Try Again
- Things Have A Way Of Working Out
- Patience Is A Virtue
- It's Always Darkest Before The Dawn
- What Will Be Will Be
- Don't Give Up The Ship
- The Best Is Yet To Come
- Hang In There
- Hakuna Matata
- Don't Worry Be Happy

Slightly expanded from a list submitted by Jerry Carter, Diaconal Minister in the California-Pacific Conference of the United Methodist Church.



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FAITH

Faith isn't the ability to believe long and far into the misty future. It's simply taking God at his Word and taking the next step.

— Ioni Erickson Tada —

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