



Wings

...Those who wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.
Isaiah 40:31 [NRSV]

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A Faithletter For, By and About
United Methodists With Disabilities



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A FRESH WIND RISING

By Ken Tittle

Anual Conference, June 17-21 in Redlands, Calif., brought together some 1500 clergy and lay leaders (plus spouses) from United Methodist congregations in Southern California and Hawaii and beyond—a diverse group ethnically and theologically. This was a particularly memorable Annual Conference for some of us, partly because of a tradition-breaking “healing service” on the morning of the 19th.

To my knowledge we have never had a “healing service” at Annual Conference before. In the historic grandeur of the University of Redlands chapel, there were in the assembly a number of “charismatic Christians” experienced in bold prayings and miraculous healings, but there were also many with a distaste or distrust of such services.

Probably none of us anticipated a Pentecostal style healing service, and in fact there wasn’t one. The preacher’s sermon did not even address “prayer for healing” as it is usually understood. To the Rev. Willie Forman (who said he had come not to preach a healing service but simply to preach) “healing” was an integral part of worship, not something to be separated or singled out.

After the proclamation of the Word, the worship leader explained the anointing process and thanked members of the “Coalition of United Methodist Disability Ministries” for serving as anointers. Ushers directed worshipers toward anointing stations at all points of the sanctuary. There each person was anointed with oil and received a little cloth square symbolic of the story of the woman who reached out to touch Jesus’ robe and was healed, a healing that naturally flows to all of us as we reach out to Christ.

My wife Diana and I, generally able-bodied, stood at apparently the only station without a physically disabled anointer. Those whom I could see at other stations were Lola, post-polio, in her chair; then Pita, in her new

motorized chair; then Ralph, post-polio, in his motorized chair; then Aida, SCI quad; then Santiago, SCI para; then Hector and Gylda, both with severe cerebral palsy; then Abby, with her guide dog Mills; then Norm in his scooter and Ana, brain-injured, in her Quickie. (I later learned that Alma, post-polio with limited vision, was anointing in the balcony with Norm’s wife, Helen.)

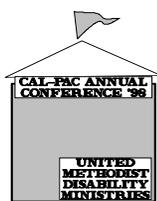
Over the next fifteen minutes or so, nearly everyone in that large congregation bowed or knelt down to be ministered to by someone with a physical disability “in the name of Jesus the Christ, our Savior and Healer.”

A closing hymn, a closing response, a closing prayer, and thus concluded one of the most remarkable worship services I have ever known. It seems to me that God did a marvelously radical thing on that Friday morning but did it subtly like a fresh wind rising out of the west. I can only hope that that wind touched the hearts and minds and spirits of the participants on both sides of the anointing process

as much as it touched me.

Our own Abby Vincent served as Team Co-leader for the Faith and Healing Worship Service. With the imperturbable General Mills at her side, Abby worked to pull everyone together for the service and was herself pulled into giving the Call to Worship. One observer later wrote that she gave the Call “with the confidence and clarity and sincere delivery that made its own statement about the abilities of people with disabilities in the life of the church.”

Our deepest appreciation to Abby and to the other anointers with disabilities, who persisted in spite of obstacles to provide a visible presence; to Pita Alonso-Redondo, Lola Ruvalcaba, Ana Maria Mendes, Nancy Burns (Deaf Ministries), and others for stocking, staffing, and bannering the booth; to the Rev. Paula Ferris, Chairperson of the Conference Worship Committee, and to the Rev. Karl Stuckenberg, Team Co-leader of the Healing Worship Service, for their understanding and helpfulness; and to all the drivers—without whom, literally, this most wonderful service could not have taken place.



FROM WHERE I SIT

By Jo D’Archangelis

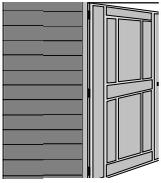
Noticing the presence of UMWDs at Annual Conference this year, someone remarked that it looked as if we finally had a foot in the door. Myself, I prefer the image of the camel with its nose inside the tent—an image usually applied to something basically unwelcome which starts out small but eventually grows into a huge disruptive force leaving little room for the “normal” inhabitants.

Not that we are basically unwelcome or that we are seen as trying to crowd everyone else out. It’s just that to others we can sometimes appear as a rather ungainly, homely creature, all spindly legs and humps and bad breath. Some people can be uncomfortable around us, not knowing exactly how to deal with us or where to put us. After all, the tent *is* kind of small and cramped (one might even say, practically inaccessible to the likes of camels). Maybe we were lucky just to get our nose inside.

I had been to Annual Conference one time before, in 1991, but only for an awards ceremony. This year I was hoping to participate in the Healing Worship Service on Friday morning as an anointer and then return Saturday afternoon to put in some time at our United Methodist Disability Ministries booth.

The Worship Service was an iffy proposition from the start. Jill, my sister and “long-distance” driver, worked on Fridays, but she agreed to bring me up on

(FWIS continued on page 3)



OPENING THE DOORS

By Ven Griva



When the Escondido First United Methodist Church was built more than three decades ago, its sanctuary was designed with a wide stairway leading to the main entry. Inside its lofty hall, with its heavy-beamed ceiling and its awe-inspiring stained glass windows, flights of stairs lead to the balcony, a raised section of pews on the main floor, the choir loft and the church office.

It's a fine church, constructed to inspire and last. There was only one problem. "As it was designed and built the church was not very accessible for people with disabilities," said Nick Nichols, chairman of the church Special Needs Committee.

Nichols' matter-of-fact statement is not an indictment of the people who first designed and built the church. It's an indication of how times have changed.

When the building was constructed nearly 33 years ago at the corner of Kalmia and Fourth, near downtown Escondido, access for the disabled wasn't an issue. There were no state laws requiring wheelchair access in public buildings. But as time has passed, time and effort have rectified that oversight.

It's the mission of Nichols and fellow committee members Pat McAvoy, Bonnie Tardell, Norm Pitstick, Ruth Argersinger, Jeff Hunt, Ruth Lawson, [Vicki Tarlap], and associate pastor [Earl Guy] to make people with special needs feel at home in the 1300-member congregation.

It's a need the committee is uniquely qualified to address. Nichols said two members of the Special Needs Committee need the assistance of wheelchairs, one member is blind and two have hearing disabilities. But none

of that slows them down.

The most recent piece of physical evidence in the committee's quest for accessibility is a chair lift. This makes it possible for disabled people to traverse the stairs leading to the church's main office.

Previously, pews were shortened to make room for wheelchairs. Special audio equipment is available for the hearing-disabled. Over the years, two wheelchair ramps were added, one from the street and another from the main courtyard of the church complex.

At the top of one ramp there is an automatic door that can be opened with the push of a button. Another such door for the other ramp is in the works, said Ned Jones, a member [of] the church board of trustees.

Jones proudly says the church is serious about serving people with special needs. "We can accommodate six wheelchairs during any service. The state only requires five," Jones said. "We have two ramps, and the state only requires one."

For Nichols, who often advises other churches on access issues, the committee's work isn't best represented by chair lifts, automatic doors, and the special audio devices. It's about education. He says what's important is that able members of the flock learn to make people with disabilities feel welcome.

"Education is a big item for us," Nichols says. "We explain why the disabled feel unwelcome at a church, or anywhere else for that matter."

Nichols said that sometimes able-bodied people are afraid to strike up a conversation with someone who is different out of fear of saying the wrong thing. Nichols said breaking that silence can go a long way toward

making anyone feel at home.

Re-printed from the *North County Times*
[Escondido, Calif.; May 22, 1998]

"Gathering Place,"

a series of contemporary worship experiences on Saturday evenings at First United Methodist Church in Escondido, Calif., will present the Rev. Lance L. Hayes, Pastor of the Deaf Culture Church in Mira Mesa, Calif., on Saturday, August 22, at 6:30 pm. Signing and signing interpretation will be provided. Everybody is welcome to attend. Address: First United Methodist Church, 341 So. Kalmia St., Escondido, Calif. 92025. Telephone: [760] 745-5100.



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Founder/Editor
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Editor's Note: In an e-mail interview, Patricia McAvoy, one of the "wheelchair" members of the Special Needs Committee at Escondido First UMC, updates the above article:

"We have funding now for the front door entrance ramp. We are waiting on the permits from the city before beginning. We also have the go-ahead on at least three more pew cutouts.

The debate is still on as to where they are to be placed. We are holding out for complete inclusion and want some of them in the center closer to the front—about four rows back would [be] ideal...We are also working on plans for a restroom for those not able to do stairs. The restroom will be unisex and will be reserved for disabled only...They [the church] will have to make a[n accessible] restroom by law for they are planning an improvement expansion of the narthex area. We have the final touches being made to the accessible restroom in the patio area making it an additional to the restrooms (male and female) in the social hall. They are already accessible. I have begun signing ASL to the music at our Saturday evening service for [the] last couple weeks now."

STRUGGLES WITH UNSEEN FOES

By Linda T. Bowersox

Looking at me as I sit in the beautiful, warm sun next to the tranquil swimming pool, no one would ever guess the pain and frustration I felt just two hours ago struggling to walk from my van and up the five steps that lead into our building.

From there another two-hundred yards (that seem like two-thousand) to reach the ever-so-welcome door... Good, I left it unlocked so I wouldn't have to struggle with the miserable key. Finger coordination is not my best feature.

Inside our condo, thankfully on the first floor, I invariably stumble over the attractive straw floor mat which I like too much to discard. Phew! Home at last. I fall on the couch amidst packages, my body aching and tears of anger streaming down my face.

Steps, keys, floor mats—just a few of the myriad frustrations in a life with multiple sclerosis. Often one frustration follows another, and my clumsy, weak hands drop and spill food as I later fix a meal for my husband, Larry.

After seventeen years of marriage with a good man who couldn't deal with illness, an inevitable divorce brought me several more years of the pain and loneliness that seem endemic to people in my situation. Then God brought me Larry—the light of my life Larry who doesn't mind

cleaning up my spills or pushing my wheelchair—and I thank *him* for him every day.



Many days I face such depression and exhaustion that I can barely get out of bed. Yet when I cry out to God, he reminds me that in spite of my pain, I still have legs that work and a husband coming home to massage them for me, and this gives me the incentive to get up.

Another frustrating but invisible characteristic of MS is the inability to concentrate (an MRI showed this to be caused by plaque buildup in the brain affecting the cognitive area). When I read something, I have to read every sentence at least twice and then don't remember what I've just read! I rarely read books any more because it takes too long.

Conversation is even worse. Within seconds my mind is jumping from one subject to another, and I may start talking about the moon when the other person is describing a beautiful sunny day! Again God reminds me that even though my comprehension may be limited, at least I have eyes to see with and a tongue to speak with.

I only wish that everyone out there had my blessings: faith in an amazing God and a Larry helping them daily to conquer their unseen foes.

Linda T. Bowersox resides
in San Diego, Calif.



(FWIS continued from page 1)

Saturday. For several weeks I left the worship service in God's hands, believing that if he really wanted me there, a driver would drop from heaven into my lap. At least, that's what I told myself. Actually I dithered constantly and, unwilling to "impose" myself on others, I exerted little effort to find someone.

Then Ken about a week before the service offered to drive me to the University of Redlands. He and wife Diana were taking two vanloads of PWDs from Calexico to Redlands on Thursday evening (a distance of 200 miles?). They were all going to stay on campus overnight. Early next morning he would come down to Fallbrook (60 miles?), pick me up, and get me there in time for the service.

One little hitch developed: On Wednesday Ken learned that there was no accessible housing available on campus. After several frantic phone calls, accessible lodging was finally found in Moreno Valley, a 40-minute drive from Redlands. But now, transporting the group from Moreno Valley to the chapel at Redlands on Friday morning left Ken no time to pick me up.

I was disappointed but, being all too familiar with the complicated logistics and obstacles (both anticipated and otherwise) of transporting and housing PWDs, I understood. (Unlike 800-pound gorillas, camels cannot sleep just anywhere they want to.)

Jill and I arrived at the Conference late Saturday afternoon and found the "Disability Ministries" booth tucked between the "Native American-Samoan-Korean-Westphalian Ministries" booth and the "Shalom-Urban Renewal-Rural Evangelism" booth (or something like that).

Lola and Ana were there and had been for several hours. Inside the booth it was hot and stuffy, and we three wheelchair ladies tried to look as cool and as alluringly winsome as being Methodist allowed.

But very few people paused at the booth to check out what it was we were up to. Occasionally we'd get a glance or a tentative smile, but most seemed oblivious to us (and, believe you me, it takes remarkable presence of mind to ignore a camel in one's vicinity). Finally, determined Ana parked herself in the middle of the sidewalk and stuffed pamphlets into hands of startled passersby.

As you can see, being a camel isn't a piece of cake. But hopefully when Annual Conference rolls 'round again next year, we'll be able to get the whole bloomin' head inside the tent—complete with bulging eyes, brown teeth, and scruffy facial hair.



THE DISCIPLES

Hurting, they came to him.
Healed, they followed him.
Grateful, they gave to him
what they had
and what they were.

Blessed, they became a blessing
and went out to all the world in

his name.

Those who are hurt
and healed
grateful
and blessed
still move among us
in his name.

—Ann Weems—

From *Kneeling in Jerusalem* ©1992 by
Ann Weems [Westminster/John Knox Press]

HAROLD WILKE EMPHASIZES JUSTICE AND UNITY AT DISABILITY RETREAT

Embracing the World, the Ark of the Covenant at Our Side was the theme of the 1998 Earl Miller Spiritual Life Retreat for Persons with Disabilities held May 29-31 at Camp Cedar Glen near Julian, California.

True to the theme, this year's leader, Dr. Harold Wilke, took the approximately 40 persons attending the retreat "around the world" in a stunning *tour de force* that combined autobiography with the sociology and theology of disability.

Born without arms 83 years ago, Wilke, a minister in the United Church of Christ, recounted stories of his childhood in Missouri where he learned independence and determination. He told of his education at Union Theological Seminary in New York City, his chaplaincy in a VA hospital in Kansas, his travels to Germany and Sweden and England as a consultant in rehabilitation, and his giving of the invocation at the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act in Washington D.C.

Dealing with disability both pragmatically and spiritually, he spoke

of the importance of adaptation in everyday living, of disconnecting disability from sin, of justice and the ADA, of making churches accessible, and of the Christ-like significance of suffering and servitude.

In a homily at the Sunday morning Communion Service, Wilke reminded the group assembled of the essential unity of all peoples with disabilities throughout the world. And he exhorted them to include persons with mental illness and retardation in their quest for justice and accessibility.



Tom Simmons (Riverside) once again served as Retreat Dean while Norm and Helen Stockwell (Redondo Beach) handled registration. Santiago and Pita Redondo (Calexico) provided musical inspiration.

Attendees, who ranged in age from 10 to 87, included: Jill Halley and Chris Halley (San Clemente), Cathy Halley (Santa Barbara), Tammy Simmons and Louise Stolte (Riverside), Jo D'Archangelis and Ruth Owen (Fallbrook)...

Zelle Hammond (Rancho Palos Verdes), Lupita Rios, Emma Pando, Ken Tittle, and Amilkar Alonso and

canine friend Shadow (Calexico), Lola Ruvalcaba (Holtville)...

Raphael and Aida Zavala, Hector and Gylda Gonzalez, Ana Lilia Canchola, Leticia Grosh, Maria Rios, and Daniela Sullivan-Marzahl (El Centro), Ana Maria Mendes (Heber), Kath Duncan (Dunoon, Australia), Chris Olsen, Penny Fowler-Smith, and Phil Bull (Birchgrove, Australia)...

Rev. Will Johnson and Stevens Jackson (Richmond), Bruce and Dee Baraw (La Mesa), Larry and Linda Bowersox, Rita Roberson, and Marie Munns (San Diego), Abby Vincent and guide dog General Mills (Culver City), Alma Enyeart (Hacienda Heights), and Cindy Smith (Lakeside).

Special thanks to Rev. J. Stewart Kreiss and the Outreach Committee of First United Methodist Church in Upland, Calif., for their contribution of \$75 to the Cal-Pac Conference Disability Retreat Campership Fund.

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In Remembrance

We first met Tyler Nakashima at the Earl Miller Spiritual Life Retreat for Persons With Disabilities in 1993. He had driven himself down to Camp Cedar Glen from Davis in northern California, a distance of some 500 miles. Tyler died in December of last year. We shall fondly remember his letters of encouragement and his generous support of *Wings*.



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

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