

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, BY AND ABOUT
UNITED METHODISTS WITH DISABILITIES

Spring 2003 — Vol. 13 Issue 4 No. 52

“Do you know why I wear the clerical collar?” I don’t suppose any of us had given it much thought. Few clergy seem to wear the collar in the United Methodist Church, and those who do, wear it mainly at worship services. Is it different in the United Church of Christ?

No, that isn’t it. You can tell it is a matter of some pride with him that he, a man with a noticeable disability, is an ordained minister in Christ’s Church. But more importantly, as he points out, the visual juxtaposition of armlessness and clerical collar sends a positive message to people even as it jars their expectations. You realize then how much Dr. Wilke appreciates the value (and power) of symbolism.

Later on while eating supper, you notice something else about him remarkable for a man his age: his physical flexibility. He slips off his left shoe and brings his foot up to the table. He has socks especially made to fit like gloves between his first and second toes. He grasps a spoon with those toes, dips it into his soup, and brings it to his mouth in one clean movement.

You are at first fascinated (apparently he is also accustomed to people gawking at him in amazement for he goes on eating and drinking and talking without missing a beat). And as food intermittently falls into your lap from weakened hands and fingers, you even find yourself envious of Dr. Wilke’s marvelous toes.

After a few minutes though, you’re neither awestruck nor envious. Nor does it cross your mind that sitting next to an octogenarian contortionist wearing a clerical collar and sporting a wristwatch on his ankle (“extra links in the wristband,” he explains, anticipating your question) is particularly unusual. It all seems perfectly natural and ordinary. And in fact it is perfectly natural and ordinary — just people sharing soup and salad and bread and God’s blessings.



FROM WHERE I SIT By Jo D’Archangelis

On February 25 a friend e-mailed me that the Rev. Dr. Harold Wilke had died. He was 88 years of age. I had the privilege of meeting Dr. Wilke twice — once in 1997 when I visited his home in Claremont, California, to interview him for an article in this newsletter and again when he served as leader of a disability retreat I attended in 1998.

Born without arms, Dr. Wilke was an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ. He was also a writer, lecturer, teacher, chaplain, consultant in rehabilitation medicine, and disability activist. His 1976 book, *Creating The Caring Congregation*, is a seminal work in the field of disability and church accessibility.

When President George H. W. Bush signed the Americans With Disabilities Act in 1990, Dr. Wilke gave the invocation. Later when the President was handing out souvenir pens, Dr. Wilke took one in his toes and plopped it into his breast pocket.

This issue of *Wings* is dedicated to Dr. Wilke. Below are excerpts from a column I wrote about him in the Spring of 1998, and featured inside are two pieces by Dr. Wilke: an article on accessibility (page 2) and a prayer (page 3).



When you first meet him, your impulse is to reach out and shake his hand — until you realize with a start (and even though you knew it beforehand) that he has no arms.

Apparently the Rev. Dr. Harold Wilke is accustomed to right arms shooting out at him and then just as suddenly recoiling and to embarrassed, confused looks on people’s faces for he immediately puts you at ease with some warm and welcoming remarks

and you feel as though you had in fact shaken hands with him.

I had more or less invited myself and a few other United Methodists with and without disabilities to visit Dr. Wilke at his home with the ostensible purpose of taping an interview with him. The real reason was to

... As food intermittently falls into your lap from weakened hands and fingers, you even find yourself envious of Dr. Wilke's marvelous toes.

come face-to-face with a true pioneer in the disability movement while he was still with us....

Silver-haired and trim at the age of 83, Dr. Wilke is very much with us, and his health still allows him to criss-cross the country giving talks and receiving awards, albeit at an increasingly slower rate (his wife Peg once admonished him, “Harold, remember you’re not 70 anymore”). He stands quite straight for a man his age and gives the impression of being taller than he actually is.

At one point in the conversation, he asks, seemingly from out of nowhere,

THE EARL MILLER SPIRITUAL LIFE RETREAT

for adults with mobility impairments and/or vision impairments, plus companions, caregivers, and adult family members, will be held from **Friday, June 6, to Sunday, June 8, 2003, at Camp Cedar Glen** near Julian, California. **Retreat leaders will be Rev. Jerry & Juda Carter**, Disability Ministries Coordinators of the California-Pacific Conference of the United Methodist Church. The **cost is \$80 per person** (camperships are available), and the registration deadline is May 15. **Contact persons are Norm and Helen Stockwell, Registrars**, 310-374-1535, n6ns@mailaps.org, and **Tom Simmons, Retreat Dean**, (home) 909-351-8544, (work) 909-444-7066, tommyboy_92503@yahoo.com.

(A flyer/registration form is enclosed in this newsletter. Flyer/registration forms may also be downloaded at www.cal-pac-codm.org/ or requested from Tom Simmons.)



HARD QUESTIONS AND STRAIGHT ANSWERS By Dr. Harold Wilke

Some Things For Congregations And Other Faith Communities To Consider In Regard To Accessibility For People With Disabilities

WHO are *they*? “They” are those persons who are “different” from us because of any handicapping condition, including blindness, lack of hearing or speech, or other disabilities. The elderly? Yes, we know we have them, but more and more of them are staying away, finding the steps too difficult, the print too small, and the sound system inadequate for aging ears. Have these persons become “confined to their homes,” or excluded from our building? Census data show a rapidly growing segment of older people. Are we ready for that number with their needs? We may call them “shut-ins,” but they’re really “shut-outs.”

All persons of all ages with disabilities — blind, deaf, wheelchair users, retarded or developmentally disabled, persons with hidden disabilities — comprise over 10% of the total population of every community. We say, “We don’t have any of them here!” and we are right, of course, because most cannot get in or if in cannot easily participate.

WHAT is accessibility? Simply put, accessibility is the mark of a congregation which is easily open to all people **Architecturally, In Communication, and In Attitude.** The first step in developing accessibility is to honestly assess our congregation or faith community in each of these areas.

WHERE are *they*? People with disabilities are living in every neighborhood and in every segment of the population. They may be in private homes in some back bedroom, known only to the pastor for pastoral calls. They may actually be at work in the community but not active in the congregation, having “given up” on religion, church, or synagogue. But they are out there, a group growing rapidly every year due to accidents in home, on highway and at work, and thanks to better medical care that keeps alive those who in previous years would have died.

WHY should accessibility be a priority for us? For one thing, because every Evangelism Committee ought to understand the potential of 10% of our neighborhood *un-churched*. For another thing, because it involves the basic meaning of our congregation. Since every congregation is a symbol of the whole family of God and God’s word is to the whole world, then every local congregation is a microcosm of that whole world. Thus, every congregation is itself handicapped if it does not have persons with disabilities within it. Jesus’ parable is clear: The one sheep outside of the fold is just as important as each of the ninety-nine within the fold. For people as well as dollars, do we understand this applica-

tion of the parable of the Lost Sheep?

WHEN is the right time to start? How about today?

HOW do we start? By forming a committee advocating these concerns and by careful involvement of key persons, including persons with disabilities, in the congregation so that everyone can be helped to “get on board.”

Answering in positive action all of these questions — “Who?,” “What?,” “Where?,” “Why?,” “When?,” and “How?” — can make us truly inclusive, truly fulfilling God’s call that we be the whole family of the Divine, so that all people may become part of the healing community that is the church!

Adapted from “Occupancy In This Building Is Limited To Everyone,” *The Caring Congregation: Journal of the Healing Community*

I Am Disabled And...

It is you, LORD,
who gives speech to mortals,
who makes them mute or deaf,
seeing or blind.
As you are always with me,
I need not fear
because of my disabilities.

Affirmation #4 adapted from Exodus 4:11-12 (NRSV) by Ken Tittle and Mariposa Ministry and Mariposa Online

COMPUTER WINGS

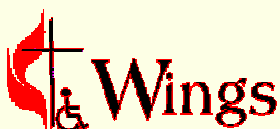
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Beginning with the Fall 2002 issue, issues of *Wings* in their entirety may be accessed at

www.cal-pac-ccdm.org/

Our thanks to Rev. Keith Andrew Hwang at the Cal-Pac Conference for designing and maintaining the new Council On Disability Ministries website!

Selected articles from back issues of *Wings* 1995-98 may be accessed at www.mariposa-ministry.org (And while you’re at it, please note the new URL for Mariposa Ministry.)



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Correspondence Send all correspondence — including feedback, original writings, items from other sources, and changes of address — to Jo D’Archangelis, Editor, at **Mailing Address** 592 West Ammunition Road, Apt. 1 Fallbrook, CA 92028 **Telephone/Fax** [760] 723-2668 (please call before faxing) **E-Mail** jodarlis@aol.com

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SMALL AND GREAT MIRACLES

By Joni Eareckson Tada

Wouldn't it have been wonderful to live in Old Testament times to see firsthand God's miracles? Watching the Red Sea part and witnessing the sun stand still would have blown me away. Those larger-than-life miracles would have "wowed" me over.

But in contrast, look at the New Testament. Those miracles were a little more in line with the limitations the Lord put on himself. Instead of parting rivers, the miracles of Jesus got their makings from dirt and spit for a blind man's eyes. A little boy's brown bag lunch of fish and bread kick-started another miracle when Jesus fed the multitudes. Water sitting around in jugs waiting to be turned into wine. Small stuff. Simple stuff.

The point? Jesus stayed within the bounds. He limited himself. Even though he was God in every sense of the word, he did things in a wonderfully human way. His miracles were flat and factual, pulled from dirt, water and wine. He did so to touch our hearts and minds, not to "wow" us or blow us away.

Case in point: Remember in Luke 4:40 when everybody from the surrounding countryside brought sick or disabled people to see Jesus? It could have panned out this way:



"Okay, all you blind people sit over here. And listen up all you who have a contagious

disease...you guys sit way over there. Now! Where are the deaf? Okay, you deaf people gather on that hill over there. Calling all paralyzed people! Okay, okay, get yourselves in a group in the front here. Now, everybody in position? Everybody ready? Here goes! One, two, three..."

Then with high drama and a wave of his hand, Jesus would shout, "Be healed!"

Aren't you glad it didn't happen that way? No grand-scale miracles of epic proportions. Instead, Luke 4:40 records that Jesus healed individuals, not a crowd, "...laying his hands on each one." His most gentle touch was reserved for the deaf person, and he had nothing but tender words for the blind person who reached out to him. He ministered to each one individually. And in so doing, he performed divine feats in a very loving and human way.

That's what is so amazing about Christ. Although the fullness of the

Godhead dwelt in him, he didn't make high drama of it. He glorified the Father, but not in a showy way. As someone has said, "Unlike the unapproachable 'smoke and fire' of the Old Testament Mt. Sinai, Jesus makes himself approachable through the love and tears of the New Testament Mt. Calvary."

That's the kind of miracle God wants to do in your life today. He encounters people with disabilities in

this age with the same tenderness he showed 2,000 years ago. You are not a face in a sea of nameless people whom he divides into groups like "the deaf," "the blind," or "the paralyzed." You are an individual to him — an individual with unique needs unlike any other's.

So ask [God] to touch your life today. His response may not be of epic proportions, but don't worry. He'll respond. His miracle may be smaller, but just as significant. Personal, but just as powerful. Because he's divine, yet, oh, so human, you can trust he cares.

Reprinted by permission of JAF Ministries, from "Thoughts From Joni,"

PRAYER

O God, Creator,

Maker of humankind in your own image,
Who creates the earth, our Eden, our dwelling place,
Pure and undefiled,
Who places divinity within each of your children,
God, Creator, help us to keep our bodies and minds
Temples of your Spirit and images of your Divine Being

O God, Liberator,

You whose concern begins with liberation,
Who commands oppressors: "Let my people go!"
Who desires the loosing of shackles of slavery,
Destroying chains which hold down people with disabilities,
God, Liberator, free your people!

O God, One God, Whole, Wholly Holy,

Who sees us as whole
Even when those about us would make us less,
Who reminds us that a rose is still a rose
Even with a petal missing,
God, Wholly Holy, help us to claim the wholeness you grant.

O God, Peacemaker,

Who desires that all humankind live as one family
Of nations and peoples, in harmony with one another,
Beyond divisions of gender, of class,
Of ethnic origin, of ability/disability,
God, Peacemaker, enable us to live in harmony
With each other and at peace within ourselves.

O God, Healer,

Who wills that hurt be healed, Violence be ended,
Healing take place, Destructive powers be shorn of strength
Even before their evil impact is felt,
And that, hereafter, none shall be hurt or destroyed
In all your Holy Mountain.

To you, O God, we pray in all your many names

With joyous confidence and trust,
Knowing you have called us into being as your children,
Your royal priesthood,
The whole world in your hands From the very beginning of time;
And that underneath,
Upholding, sustaining and supporting your whole creation,
Are your own everlasting arms. Amen.

— Harold Wilke —

Part of a presentation at the United Nations, July 9, 1992, and at the Vatican Conference on Pastoral Care, Rome, November 1992



REWARDS OF A DIFFERENT KIND By Ruth A. Sheets

I did not think myself especially unique when I was young. My father, an older sibling, and other relatives also wore thick glasses and struggled to see. I figured that was just the way some people were. I expected to find many people like me. School, however, showed me the rarity of severely impaired vision. Each day, I was reminded of my exceptionality — always the only one unable to see the board, or write on the lines, or read standard print. Special teachers introduced adaptive equipment that further emphasized my differences, but also enabled me to accomplish many of the things I wanted to do.

It was my good fortune to grow up in a family among other people considered different. Occasionally I wished to be “like everyone else,” but mostly I like who I am and would not trade my situation for anyone’s. Believe it or not, I learned to find rewards as well as challenges in diversity.

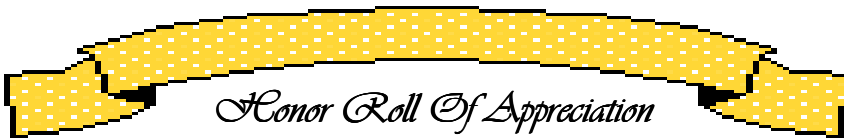
Some of the difficulties of blindness are readily understood, but the benefits are probably less obvious:

- Persistence in the face of discrimi-

- nation
- Reliance on characteristics more dependable than appearance
- Appreciation for diversity
- Refusal to judge, recalling the pain of judgment received
- Knowledge of Braille — I can read when the electricity is off and maintain continuous “eye contact” when preaching
- Self-assurance when confronted by reservations about my abilities
- Interdependence, ability to graciously give and receive help

Texture, timbre, aroma, and taste give color, shape, beauty, and clarity to the world. Through them I recognize a friend, enjoy favorite foods and movies, teach, maintain a home, and lead worship. In them, I experience the vitality, strangeness, and wonder of life. Limited vision requires me to turn to the non-visual to provide information sufficient to effectively interpret the environment. I would not choose to be fully sighted. Opportunities to use in meaningful ways the many gifts God has given me are far more important.

From *Alive Now* [Sept.-Oct. 1995]



Honor Roll Of Appreciation

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Joni and Friends Family Retreats

Joni and Friends, an organization accelerating Christian ministry in the disability community, is having several retreats this summer for families with at least one member with a disability:

June 9-13

Bonclarken (I), North Carolina
Mission Springs (I), California

June 16-20

Spruce Lake (I), Pennsylvania

June 23-27

Spruce Lake (II), Pennsylvania
Oakwood Inn, Indiana

July 7-11

Camp Allen, Texas
Murrieta Hot Springs, California
Bonclarken (II), North Carolina

July 12-16

Mission Springs (II), California

July 14-18

Shawnee, Ohio

July 28-August 1

Spruce Lake (III), Pennsylvania

August 8-12

Lakeview, Texas

Registration forms may be requested from Joni and Friends, P.O. Box 3333, Agoura Hills, CA 91376; phone: 818-707-5664, 818-707-9707(TTY); e-mail: familyretreats@joniandfriends.org. For quick and easy registration: www.joniandfriends.org/retreat

Christ did not say: You will not be troubled, you will not be belaboured, you will not be disquieted; but he said: You will not be overcome.

— Julian of Norwich (14th C.) —

From *Julian of Norwich: Showings* (Paulist Press, 1978), © 1980 by The Missionary Society of St. Paul The Apostle in The State of New York

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