



...Those who wait for 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
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FROM WHERE I SIT: THOSE NOT-SO-HANDY HANDHELD DEVICES By Jo D’Archangelis

As someone with limited hand function, I have never found handheld electronic devices to be all that handy. Take remote controls. You have to be able to lift and aim them at exactly the right spot—or, alternatively, find some way to secure them to a hard, flat surface so that they don’t slide around—and then firmly press the buttons in the exact center for them to work. Several years ago, I had to give up listening to recorded music simply because it became too difficult for me to access my stereo with the remote control.

The newer remotes, all ergonomically-designed with their sloped tops and rounded bottoms to fit the shape of the hand, are even worse; I find it impossible to secure one to a flat surface, least of all poke its buttons. Whenever I want to turn my TV on or off, change the channel, or adjust the volume, I have to call someone to do it for me (assuming that someone is available which they often aren’t).

Some years ago, I gave up reading paper-and-print books because turning pages became too difficult for me. (One exception was the Bible and that only

because Bible software was already in place on my computer.) Recently, I started to have page-turning problems with magazines and newsletters—even with the aid of a decidedly low-tech eraser end of a pencil. So I thought of getting an e-reader, in particular that super-duper version with which you can read books and magazines and also listen to music.

But to make sure that I could successfully manipulate one, I imposed on a church friend to lend me his for a few days. First, I had to figure out how to prop it up at a good reading angle and, second, secure it so that it wouldn’t slide and topple over when I tried to poke the buttons. After all that, however, it turned out that the buttons were too tiny and poorly positioned for me to press. As for the “touch screen,” no way was the eraser end of a pencil going to serve as an effective conductor. And any kind of “voice recognition” feature?

Fuggedabowdit. “Haven’t these people heard of ‘universal design’ (i.e., designing a product to be accessible to both disabled and non-disabled users)?” I fumed to

my e-bud Tim, a website designer. He understood my exasperation and then suggested that since my computer was fairly well disability-accessible I go to a certain website where I could download—for free—an e-reader app to be used on a PC.

When I checked into it, I found that magazines were not available for this particular app. However, since most of the magazines I subscribe to are available online or in digital versions or, like *The Upper Room* devotionals, are sent to me daily via e-mail, this wasn’t a major drawback. (As for newsletters, if they aren’t available as e-mail attachments, they just don’t get read.)

Anyway, I immediately downloaded the e-reader app and a few days later downloaded (also for free from the same website) a music app which enables me to listen to music on my Windows Media Player. Once I am parked in front of my computer, I can easily access a bestseller or a concerto whenever I want.

Suh-weet.

One e-book I have read is the recently-published *Amazing Gifts: Stories of Faith, Disability, and Inclusion*, by Mark I. Pinsky. The book focuses on several individuals, both disabled and non-disabled from various faith traditions, who have developed disability ministries or been affected by such ministries.

About a year ago, Pinsky e-mailed (FWIS: *HANDHELD* continued on page 2)

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me asking if I would like to be included in a new book he was putting together on faith and disability (it seems that Ginny Thornburgh had sent him the *Wings* in which I had related my woeful tale of "Communion gone awry"). Seeing the published product a year later, I'm glad I said "yes." *Amazing Gifts* is a very well-written and comprehensive look at disability ministry. And I don't say this just because I—along with Richard Daggett, member of Downey, Calif., UMC—are featured in Chapter 43!

(To the right is an article by Mark Pinsky reprinted from the *Wall Street Journal* and on page 3 more information about *Amazing Gifts* and its author.)



HOUSES OF WORSHIP MAKING GOD MORE ACCESSIBLE

By Mark I. Pinsky

The television commercials were disturbing: Traditional-looking churches barring or physically ejecting racial and ethnic minorities, gay couples, and people with disabilities. One tag line was "Jesus didn't turn people away. Neither do we." The national campaign, which aired several years ago, was sponsored by the liberal United Church of Christ. "We included people with physical disabilities in these commercials in a wheelchair or with a walker as an extension of the call and hope that churches would be intention-

ally inclusive of 'all the people,'" said the Rev. Gregg Brekke, a spokesman for the denomination.

Instead, the imagery provoked grumbling from some denominations because of its implied critique of other church traditions. But at least when it came to the physically handicapped, the criticism had more than a grain of truth. Churches, synagogues, mosques and temples are places where people with disabilities might not expect to feel excluded, isolated or patronized. Yet that has often been the norm.

For years congregations have effectively excluded the disabled from worship by steps, narrow doorways, and strained attitudes, or segregated them in "special" services. Houses of worship (except those with more than 15 employees) were excluded from the 1992 Americans with Disabilities Act, which, among other things, bars discrimination against people with physical or intellectual disabilities, including access and architectural barriers, in public accommodations and transportation.

Most faiths' scriptures mandate corrective steps, and pragmatism may soon require them. The U.S. Census in 2000 counted 54 million disabled individuals, one in six Americans, and that number is probably growing. Wounded Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans are swelling this population. Thanks to neonatal care and technology advances, at-risk infants with severe disabilities now survive into adulthood. Most significantly, the boomer generation is aging and getting ill. Many of them may develop disabilities but still want to pray at houses of worship.

There are challenges to accessibility and inclusion, even for people with the best intentions. The elderly and people with disabilities provide uncomfortable

(*HOUSES* continued on page 3)



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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E-WINGS Two electronic versions of *Wings* are available: 1. A full newsletter-formatted version with color graphics in PDF format, and 2. A partially-formatted text-only version without graphics in Microsoft Word Document format (screen readers seem to work best with the Word Document version). Attached files in PDF format can be opened with Adobe 6.0 or higher software which is easily downloaded from Adobe.com at no charge.

WINGS ON THE WEB Selected back issues of *Wings* in PDF format and Word Document format plus information about the newsletter and its founder/editor may be found at the United Methodist Association Of Ministers With Disabilities (UMAMD) website, www.umdisministers.org. Click on the *Wings* banner near the bottom of the home page.

DONATIONS *Wings* is an all-volunteer undertaking, but financial assistance is needed for printing and mailing costs as well as for the purchase and maintenance of the computer equipment used by the editor. Most of our funding comes from reader donations. There are no subscription fees. If you think *Wings* is worth it, please make out a check or money order payable to "Fallbrook United Methodist Church" (or "FUMC"), mark it "Wings," and mail it to Fallbrook United Methodist Church; church address: 1844 Winterhaven Road, Fallbrook, CA 92028; phone: 760-728-1472; fax: 760-728-7433; e-mail: FUMC1887@sbcglobal.net.

Basic Angel	\$5-\$14	Major Angel	\$15-\$24
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Awesome Angel	\$100 or more		

(HOUSES continued from page 2)



reminders of life's fragility and of death. Those with mental disabilities can distract during solemn moments. Religious people generally want to be sincere, welcoming and open, but, like everyone else, they often lack the experience to respond the right way.

And, to be sure, money is an issue, especially for smaller, cash-strapped congregations. "When it comes to spending for architectural accessibility, there is sometimes reluctance on the part of finance committees," said Rabbi Lynne F. Landsberg, senior adviser on disability issues at the Washington-based Religious Action Center, the social-justice organization of Reform Judaism.

In addition to shouldering the burdens of poverty if they are no longer able to work, and the high cost of medication, treatment and rehabilitation, would-be worshippers "may feel socially stigmatized by their inability to provide financial support for their congregations," according to the rabbi, who suffered traumatic brain injury in a car crash. As a result of their shame, they may not come to services even when they are accessible.

But there are also some potential benefits for congregations that are willing to make the investment in architecture and attitude in order to become more welcoming. Mainline congregations with declining memberships, for example, would have much to gain. More families with a disabled member would attend religious services, experts say, if congregations would make efforts to open their buildings and programs. Older people tend to attend services in greater numbers than the young.

The good news is that some churches, synagogues, mosques and temples are already getting ready for the coming influx of the disabled, tapping technology and simple thoughtfulness to reach out in creative ways to this faith-hungry community:

At Blessed Sacrament Catholic

Church in Norfolk, Va., priest Joe Metzger instructs an 11-year-old autistic girl in an empty sanctuary, while wearing vestments, so she'll feel at ease making her First Communion.

At Bet Shalom Congregation in Minnetonka, Minn., no sanctuary steps lead to the pulpit; congregants approach it using a long ramp, symbolizing that all people come to the Torah equally.

At St. John's Episcopal Church, in Charlotte, N.C., and St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church in Exton, Pa., adult members with Down Syndrome serve as altar servers, "greeters" and Sunday morning ushers.

As these examples suggest, it takes more than just automatic door openers, large-print Bibles, and improved signage to make a congregation disability-friendly. In recent years, sometimes under pressure, numerous Christian and Jewish denominations have also established national outreach networks to make their congregations accessible.

Through groups like Joni Eareckson's Joni and Friends Disability Center, evangelical megachurches have become increasingly involved in this effort.

"Of all the barriers to full participation and inclusion, the barrier of unexamined attitudes is the most difficult to address," said Ginny Thornburgh, director of the American Association of People with Disabilities' Interfaith Initiative. Its goal, she says, is "to bring the powerful and prophetic voice of the faith community to the 21st-century disability agenda," and to involve all religious communities. "There are no barriers to God's love," Ms. Thornburgh says. "There should be no barriers in God's house."

Adapted from the *Wall Street Journal* website (originally published September 9, 2010). This article in greatly expanded form also serves as the Introduction to Pinsky's new book, *Amazing Gifts* (see below).

AMAZING GIFTS: STORIES OF FAITH, DISABILITY, AND INCLUSION By Mark I. Pinsky, Foreword By Ginny Thornburgh (Alban Institute: Feb. 2012)

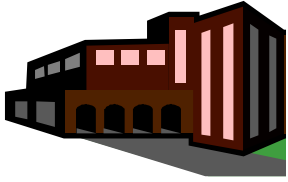
In *Amazing Gifts* Pinsky tells sixty-four stories about the way faith communities welcome and affirm people with disabilities in worship, ministry, fellowship, and leadership. Churches, synagogues, temples, mosques, and other congregations do this not only because it is the right thing to do but because they are made better by the gifts of all people.

Mark I. Pinsky is the author of several popular, critically acclaimed books, including *The Gospel According To The Simpsons* and *A Jew Among The Evangelicals*, and he was religion reporter for the *Orlando Sentinel* from 1995 to 2008. Columns by Pinsky on faith, disability, and inclusion have been featured in *The Wall Street Journal* and *USA Today*, and he was the subject of a feature article in the *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* (Summer/Autumn 2011).

Ginny Thornburgh is the director of the Interfaith Initiative at the American Association of People with Disabilities. She and her husband, former U.S. Attorney General Dick Thornburgh, are leading advocates for people with disabilities.

Amazing Gifts is available at alban.org and amazon.com or your favorite bookstore. To order from Alban call 800-486-1318 ext. 244; fax 866-448-4391; or mail The Alban Institute, P.O. Box 933433, Atlanta, GA 31193. The 6"x9" paperback edition (231 pp.) is \$18.00 (handling and delivery charges may be added to orders). Kindle, Nook, and eBooks editions are also available (Kindle \$9.99). ISBN: 978-1-56699-421-7 AL421.

Adapted and abridged from publisher's flyer.



IF NOT THROWING WIDE, INCHING OPEN DOORS (PART 2) By Kenneth Briggs

(The following is the second part of a two-part series on theological seminaries and disability access. Part I appeared in the Winter 2012 issue.)

The unevenness of school policies can be bewildering to prospective students, as is illustrated by the experience of a student with a hearing impairment who applied to and was accepted by four seminaries. Three indicated they couldn't pay for a signer. The fourth, and the school where he now studies, promised to provide him what he needed.

Denominations, of course, have their own standards that differ from those of seminaries; completion of seminary is only one part of the process. A call to the ministry carries weight, but most congregations are chiefly concerned

with a candidate's ability to perform the tasks of a pastor. "Most denominations have no prohibitions," notes Robert Anderson, [president of the Center for Religion and Disability in Birmingham, Alabama], "but congregations want to see a leader who represents what the religion embodies as ideal. If a person is disabled, they wonder, 'Could that person help in time of need? Make hospital visits, and so on?'"

To Mary Bodily, age 62, the problem is real. She graduated from San Francisco Theological Seminary, having used a wheelchair as a result of polio, and has sought ordination as a Presbyterian

minister. For years, she had been a contract specialist for the National Air and Space Administration and had raised two sons. She speaks glowingly of the seminary. "They courted me," she said, "They sought me out, coaxed me until I completed the application, and gave me a scholarship I hadn't even asked for."

The stumbling block came after graduation when she tried to be certified as the prelude to ordination. It hasn't happened, for reasons she believes relate to her disability. "Everything is great until they see me," she said. "It's the story of my life. I can do the job. I just want to be interviewed." Of those with disabilities who do get ordained, she said, "Most don't use chairs. They have learning disabilities, low vision, or other things that are not so obvious."

If church and seminary dilemmas on disability are to be resolved, seminary educators say, a transforming theology of disability is needed to light the path. Several books by scholars have already pointed the way by highlighting some central questions. To Kathy Black of Claremont (California) School of Theology and author of one of those books, *A Healing Homiletic*, the stigma of disability has been borne by Christianity.

The Old Testament's onus on temple officiating by persons with disabilities (Leviticus) melds with various New Testament misunderstandings of healing and disability to leave a negative image on contemporary thinking. The residue of this tradition is to associate disability either with sin or as a "special blessing" singled out for punishment or chosen to suffer for a higher good. Is disability itself acceptable as a mark of personal creation or happenstance, one that should be embraced rather than submitted to a miracle worker?

"Deafness—is it a problem or not?" asked Dr. Deborah Creamer of Iliff Theological Seminary (Denver, Colorado) whose doctoral dissertation was titled, "The Withered Hand of God." Creamer has taught a course in disability

(*THROWING continued on page 5*)

LISTENING, LEARNING By Roberta Porter

As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace. — 1 Peter 4:10 (RSV)

Often I look around
And compare myself
To others;
I see myself lacking,
Ordinary.

But as I turn to Scripture,
I hear good news!
In God's creative plan,
Grace is varied,
And each is gifted
For service.

As I lean toward God
And listen
In prayer's process,
I am aware
That ordinary
Can be transformed
As it is given to God
And given away.

Praise God
For varied grace!

From *Alive Now* (March/April 1997).

Porter lives on the Oregon Coast with her husband, Jim,

(*THROWING* continued from page 4)



ity studies, one of a handful of such classes offered by seminaries across

North America.

Assuming a general climate of hospitality toward such studies, the difficulty of finding a place for it in a crowded curriculum remains. The emergence of a challenging theology of disability may help create space for it next to the pastoral courses on relating to disability and the attitudes that surround it. Other disability advocates promote a more limited objective: making it a component in such courses as Bible, Christian ethics, and church history.

Seminaries seem receptive, at least in theory. Anderson's center has completed its own survey of theological schools. Though the bulk of its findings has not been released, Anderson underscored two results that may be telling. While 82 percent of seminary respondents said they had never intentionally examined their curricula through the lens of disability, an equivalent 83 percent of the academic leaders saw the need for "greater attention to human experiences of disability in graduate theological education."

Ginny Thornburgh, [trustee of Princeton Seminary and director of the Interfaith Initiative program of the AAPD], is hopeful that the Christian experience can become enriched by such insight. What it would mean to persons with disabilities and the whole congregation is reflected in a scene she envisions. "A baby is born and the pastor from First Presbyterian Church goes to the hospital. He says to the parents, 'We don't know much about spina bifida—but I can tell you this. We won't leave you. We will journey with you in your ups and downs. This is a wonderful child of God.' That would change everything."

From *In Trust*, the magazine of the Association Of Boards In Theological Education (New Year 2005).



LAUGHING AT THE DEVIL

By Rev. David R. McMahill



I have lived with aggressive Crohn's disease all of my adult life. Some manage to control it without surgery and achieve long periods of remission from active symptoms. Others lose their entire intestinal tract and must receive all fluids and nutrients intravenously.

To date I have had eleven major surgeries and about a hundred hospitalizations. At age thirty-two I had my first colostomy surgery. I now have an ileostomy which has been revised several times.

In my twenties, with still much bowel remaining, I enjoyed remission and resumed distance running. Even some years later I could compete in a dozen road races. In between, flare-ups brought me close to death.

In recent years, because of the loss of most of my intestine, I struggle to avoid dehydration and electrolyte imbalance. Twice, refusing to relinquish the electrolyte drink I must sip regularly, I have been denied admission to public events. One was a baseball game, the other at the 1993 General Synod [of the United Church of Christ].

Long ago I decided not to hand over to this fierce disease my life, identity, and deep sense of calling to ordained ministry. A defining moment happened shortly after my first colostomy surgery. While registering at a United Ostomy Association meeting, I noticed the pre-registration nametags of "Sue

Smith, ileostomate," "Ray Jones, urostomate," "Nat Doe, colostomate." I crossed out "colostomate" on mine and added in tiny print, "Child of God, son, husband, father, brother, minister."

Some thought that I was just being cute, but it was then and remains an important issue. Persons with disabilities should not be defined by what does not work. We are people first.

During a recent sabbatical I started writing a book tentatively titled, *Laughing At The Devil: Resources For Living With Chronic Illness*. I began to think systematically about how, despite its great liability, living with Crohn's has become a gift for ministry and how those same gifts might be discovered by others in unique circumstances.

We develop these competencies in response to a personal need. Most spiritual resources do not show up ready to use but require considerable shaping and refining. When first emerging, they may collide with something else already in place.

Part of my ministry is to assist persons in the course of pastoral conversation to find their own way to one or more of the spiritual resources:

- * Finding voice in the midst of a powerful, sophisticated, medical culture
- * Discerning how to receive needed help without losing sense of self
- * Listening deeply to others' voices
- * Praying [boldly] when tending to

(*LAUGHING* continued on page 6)

TWO BEAMS OF THE CROSS

Christ's appearance in our midst has made it undeniably clear that changing the human heart and changing human society are not separate tasks, but are as interconnected as the two beams of the cross.

— Henri J. M. Nouwen —

(LAUGHING continued from page 5)



pray cautiously

* Laughing at the medium for experiencing God's grace and mercy

* Seeing the life that God has put in us when all the world sees is disability

* Recognizing signs of grace and mercy around and within us

...People will ask questions from spiritual struggles that they suspect I also have encountered. The most common, "Don't you ever wonder why God allowed a disease like this that can be so physically painful and debilitating and socially isolating to happen to you?"

I just do not blame God or connect God with the onset of this crummy disease. What does amaze me is the abundance of God's grace and blessing. Over and over it lifts me out of despair, giving me the capacity to see what a blessing my life is by God's grace and to laugh at the devil.

Excerpted from *That All May Worship and Serve*, the newsletter of the United Church of Christ Disabilities Ministries and Mental Illness Network (Jan./Feb. 2003).

McMahill, an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ, served for 25 years in parish ministry. Since 1995 he has been the minister for the Eastern Association, Minnesota Conference UCC.



"I'M TYLER"

By Rev. Dallas (Dee) Brauning

A perfect back flop knocked the wind out of Tyler Greene. "Then," remembers his pastor, "he let out this jubilant scream." Even though Tyler had already gone horseback riding and water rafting, the Rev. Tim Ensworth of First Congregational United Church of Christ in Waterloo, Iowa, assumed Tyler would not jump off the rock into the water below. Wrong. "Cerebral palsy and all, he climbs the back of the rock and takes off," Ensworth recalls.

Surprised? Don't be. This is Tyler.

This fall, Waterloo School Superintendent R. Jones replaced his opening address to the district's 1,700 employees with a screening of a new DVD produced by one of Waterloo's own. *I'm Tyler: Don't Be Surprised*, a 15-minute disability awareness tool, was created by 16-year-old Tyler Greene as his Eagle Scout project, with the help of his father, Paul.

"I know the world needs to hear what it says," Tyler says, speaking to Tiffany Clarno, who serves as the UCC Disabilities Ministries representative to the UCC Youth and Young Adult Board. "My dream is to do good things that are right and of value. I want to work on equal rights." He then says.

"I'm not sure where that will take me."

Church member Dee Vandeventer and her staff at ME&V, an Iowa-based marketing, communications and fundraising company, donated time to assist Tyler with the video project. Tyler's cousin, Max Lind, with the help of a photographer friend, designed the DVD's cover art and a promotional website, www.imtyler.org. "We had an incredible production team," Paul Greene said.

In the video, viewers are introduced to significant persons in Tyler's life, all who see Tyler for what he can do, not what we can't. They are practicing the "ability awareness" that Tyler teaches. "Through promoting 'ability awareness,'" says Paul Greene, "Tyler is determined to change the disempowering way the world interacts with people with disabilities." The "ability awareness" phrase came to Tyler from a Scout merit badge program called "disability awareness" that his dad teaches. "Except," Tyler explains, "my dad takes out the 'dis-'"

David Clark, clerk of the church council at Boston's Old South UCC and a member of the UCC Disabilities Ministries board, describes Tyler's DVD as "an exceptional job for a person in his stage of psycho-emotional development." Clark, who also has severe cerebral palsy, is fully integrated in the world. A web designer and computer troubleshooter since college graduation, Clark was on the original technology team that developed the web accessibility tool, known as "Bobby."

"I don't want people to be amazed that I get up every morning and have a job," Clark says. "Having a job to me is ordinary. When anything is viewed as extraordinary, expectations are not the same."

Tyler shares Clark's view, saying that, once people get to know him or once

(TYLER continued on page 7)

A "DISABILITY FRIENDLY" CHURCH By Margo Wells

In recent years, First United Methodist Church in San Diego [Calif.] has gone to great lengths to be code-compliant with federal and state laws on accessibility. Several parking lots are designated for those who are elderly and/or disabled. It also offers two elevators, wheelchair ramps, and handrails. Amplified hearing-aids, large-print bulletins, and accessible restrooms are available. Wheelchair cut-outs are offered in the pews, and large TV monitors are mounted in the sanctuary. Communion can be served in the first pew for those who cannot ascend the chancel steps. Trained ushers courteously help those with disabilities. This "Disability Friendly Church" is remarkable considering it is built on a steep hill.

Wells is a United Methodist living with multiple sclerosis.

(TYLER continued from page 6)



he gets to talking with his friends, any initial preoccupation with his disability quickly fades away. "It really does not take long," Tyler says. "Like a minute and it is gone."

The Rev. Jeanne Tyler, co-pastor of Saint Paul UCC in Keokuk, Iowa, who also manages cerebral palsy, has said she views the realities of people with disabilities as being similar to those "living on the margins." "It is being an outsider, someone to fear or humiliate," she said in 2004, speaking at the UCC-related Leaven Center in Troy, Mich. "Humiliation is about disempowering someone."

That's why Tyler's church, First Congregational UCC in Waterloo, focuses on empowerment. More than 12 years ago, when Ensworth became its pastor, the church's 150-year-old building already had been adapted architecturally for inclusion, including the addition of an all-floors elevator, covered entry way, ramp approach and automatic door.

Tyler was born in 1990 as the third child of Gina and Paul, and the brother of Lucas and Molly. The family has been deeply connected with their church for five generations....

"Everything about Tyler is about perception rather than reality," says Tony Lorsung, Tyler's Boy Scout leader, who has known Tyler since his pre-Cub Scout days. "At first, I felt sorry," Lorsung says. "[But] when Tyler joined Cubs, I realized, why should I feel sorry about him if he does not feel sorry for himself?" Lorsung goes on, "Tyler is an outgoing person about who he is and about his vision of his future. Why should he be separated and not do the things he wants to do? To me, he does not have a disability anymore."

Tyler, an active teenager who has earned a karate yellow belt with a blue stripe, plays softball and enjoys the internet. But he's also direct. His activism speaks to what many disabilities awareness advocates are saying: "Will

you be able to see past my wheelchair and my speech challenges to appreciate my abilities?"

Tyler's confirmation co-teacher, Hannah Carse, remembers Tyler's frank response when some spoke to him about "a cure." "If I were constantly waiting for a cure," Carse remembers Tyler saying, "I would think that I am not okay or whole now. I don't ever feel like I am waiting to be whole. This is who I am."

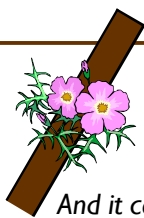
The Rev. Bob Molsberry, pastor of St. Paul UCC in Belleville, Ill., and vice-chair of UCC Disabilities Ministries, acknowledges that disabilities are a part of a person's identity. "Human beings are not perfectible," Molsberry said in a nationally-televised interview that aired in August. "Disability is not the defining

aspect of any life. It is part of our human diversity. What we need is inclusion so everyone can be at the table. Fix the steps, bathrooms, doors—whatever needs accommodation."

Tyler is a national member of the Kids as Self Advocates' speak-out task force. He wants to see young people with disabilities and those with special health-care needs have control over their own lives and futures. "KASA has been a huge factor in my realizing the rights I actually have," Tyler says.

It was theologian Paul Tillich who once said, "We have learned how hard it is to preserve genuine hope. We know that one has to go ever again through the narrows of a painful and courageous 'in-spite-of.'..."

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AARON'S ROD By Lori Ciccanti

And it came to pass, that on the morrow Moses went into the tabernacle of witness; and behold, the rod of Aaron for the house of Levi was budded, and brought forth buds, and bloomed blossoms, and yielded almonds. — Numbers 17:8 (KJV)

When I think of Aaron's rod, the first idea that comes to mind is fruitfulness: using the talents that God has given us for His purpose and glory. The story of Aaron's rod began with a dispute among the leaders of Israel regarding the ministry of Moses and Aaron. In response to their complaints, God instructed Moses to collect their staffs, each bearing the name of one of the twelve tribes. The next day, Moses found that Aaron's rod had not only budded and blossomed but had produced almonds!

I read an interesting story in a Bible study guide about a mother who began reading and personalizing Scripture for her two mentally-challenged children. Before she knew it, these Scriptures were already having a tremendous effect in the lives of others. Having a similar experience, I see God's Word making a remarkable difference in the life of my autistic son.

God appointed each of us with a variety of ministries, according to His will. As the body of Christ, we must be careful, however, to serve Him with humility and to work together, respecting the unique individual gifts of our fellow believers.

Let us each examine our lives. Are we producing fruit that will bring honor and glory to Christ? Despite our various backgrounds or disadvantages, the budded rod is a symbol of God's power to enable us to bear fruit for Him that will last forever.

Abridged and adapted from the Presbyterian Church in Canada devotionals website, PCCWeb (daily.presbycan.ca); March 14, 2009. Ciccanti may be e-mailed at DLAlsina@mchsi.com.

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So Tyler knows that "hope" is a big factor in his life. "If you have hope you have a reason for doing things instead of aimlessly wandering around," he says. "We, as a family, ruled out 'can't' a long time ago. I think if we [used] that word, we wouldn't be very far. For us it's always not a matter of whether 'I can,' but just a matter of 'how.'"

Tyler says he hears competing messages in our society: "You can do anything" and "You can't do anything." "It is really hard, when you hear all the mes-

sages to figure out, who should I listen to?" Tyler says. "Dad helps with that. You cannot go through life not questioning anything. If you really, really want to do what is right, you may have to take a few risks."

For Tyler, God is "like your father, your best friend, the one who created everyone. God watches over us and will always be there to love and protect us no matter what." "I kind of believe that God has a plan for us," he says. "I think God believes that the world needed some help. I think what God has planned for me is to help people

understand, to educate people about ability awareness. It is life-long."


Surprised? You shouldn't be.

Adapted and abridged from United Church [of Christ] News Portal (October/November 2006). Brauninger, pastor of First Congregational UCC in Burwell, Neb., is an executive committee member of UCC Disabilities Ministries and editor of the denomination's disability newsletter, *That All May Worship and Serve.*

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Jo D'Archangelis, Editor



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