

DISABILITY NEWS

Vol. 1 Issue 1 Nov. 2005



a publication of UnitingCare, SA

from the Editor....

Welcome to "Disability News"

Welcome to the first edition of Disability News. The aim of this publication is to provide disability-related resources to church members and congregations. These resources may take the form of stories, poems, prayers, biblical insights, children's resources, topical issues, useful web links, or so much more.

Whether it be through prayers, stories or biblical insights used in worship or small group settings; children's books that find a place in the Kid's Club curriculum; adult literature that finds a place in the resource centre; or poems, topical issues or upcoming events that are advertised in the church newsletter, these resources are designed to enrich the life of your congregation.

Traditionally, people with disability have been viewed as being marginal to the life of our society and to our churches, who, because of their "problems", have been viewed as objects of pity or charity—people who need to be helped.

However, people with disability have a right to claim equal access to the Body of Christ, and be allowed to make an equal contribution. Indeed the church is the richer for their inclusion.

It is the aim of this publication to affirm the place of people with disability, and their stories, within the fabric of congregations.

Enjoy the read.

Rev Trevor Whitney
Disabilities Ministry Chaplain
UCA, SA Synod
UnitingCare Commission
trevor@sa.uca.org.au

The Mutuality of Love — Agnes' Story

I found myself sitting next to Agnes as she lay peacefully half asleep in her bedroom. Agnes was an elderly woman who had lived her life with a significant level of intellectual impairment. She had been in the grips of dementia for many years. She offered little in terms of verbal communication but valued company.

Agnes was close to death.

I sat there for some time by her bed stroking her arm, saying little.

Eventually I felt it was time to leave, but as I began to move she lifted her arm and gently but decisively took hold of my hand and placed it next to her prostrate body. I sat with her for some considerable further time.

I was humbled. Here I was a UCA chaplain, a "professional carer", there to care for her and yet, through her simple gesture, my professional status melted away.

I felt vulnerable, wounded, the one who really needed love.

And in Agnes' gently clasp I did indeed feel loved and valued.

In recent years the Uniting Church has been encouraged to think of making its church buildings more physically accessible. As a result some congregations have installed ramps, provided disability car parks, and made their toilets accessible. Such improvements are commendable. May they continue.

However beyond these functional adjustments to church architecture the critical issue for our congregations is that of building personal, mutually enriching relationships with the likes of Agnes, of welcoming the likes of Agnes, and what they offer, into our midst.

For whilst the church is driven by the credo, "love our neighbour" Agnes tells us that love of neighbour includes allowing our neighbour to love us, and meet us at our point of pain.

It's what can be called a **mutuality of love**. That is, 2 people making themselves vulnerable to the God-given love of the other.

*As we seek to embrace
Agnes may we allow Agnes to
embrace us.*

Rev Trevor Whitney

Index

From the Editor	1
"The Mutuality of Love"	1
Issue: YPINH	2
Poem	2
Review	3
Story: Community Link	3
From the Lectionary	3
Kid's Books	4
Helpful Sites	4

Young People in Nursing Homes

The issue of young people (i.e. teens to the age of 65) with disabilities living in nursing home accommodation is one of the most urgent national issues facing the disability sector, and our State and Federal Governments.

Due to a critical lack of appropriate community-based accommodation there are over 6000 young people living in such institutional care across Australia. The young person may find him or herself largely isolated from family and friends, with his or her closest relationships being with people who may be anything from 10-60 years older.

It's an untenable situation for young people and the elderly alike.

It also places severe financial strain on the aged care sector as a young person's care may require more than twice as much funding as that of an elderly person, if that young person is to receive appropriate medical care.

Cooperation between State and Federal governments is critical to the freeing up of funding for the development of more appropriate community-based accommodation for these young people living with disabilities.

....poem by a young person with Young Onset Parkinson's Disease living in aged care accommodation

I AM HERE WAITING

my biggest fear is that you'll not see me here

I am not lost

am not to be found

I am here

you may see the stare

you may see the emptiness of expression

you may see the stillness

I am here

waiting for you to come

I still have joy

my spirit still sings

I have all the love

open the door

come into my room

I am here

I am here waiting

I just can't move

can't open the door and come out

my biggest fear is that you will not see me here

don't walk on by

*by Michael Leo Koonz
"Voices from the Parking Lot"*

a prayer ♦♦♦

LIVING OUR GIFTS

Loving God, author of all gifts;

We praise and thank-you for all
the gifts you have entrusted to
us.

Pour out your Spirit upon us
so that,
true to our baptismal promises,
we may form faith communities
that recognise and promote the
gifts in all people
so that we may all share in the
mission of Jesus.

Inspire us to be a Church that is
welcoming and accepting,
and which sees everyone as an
expression of Christ.

May our faith communities nur-
ture and commission all members
to live our particular gifts as a
reflection and imitation of Jesus'
life.

Give us the courage to be the
light of welcome in the darkness
of exclusion,
a voice of gentleness in the wil-
derness of the unheard,
and an outstretched hand of love
to those longing for community.
Amen.

*Author: Trish Mowbray
Copyright: Australian Catholic
Bishops Conference 2004*

Reviews Reviews Reviews

"In the Shelter of Each Other,"

South Australian Council of Churches Task Group on Disability Issues

This 5 part study was produced in 2002 to celebrate people with disability. It has been developed by the South Australian Task Group on Disability Issues and is a product of the South Australian Council of Churches.

Week 1: Encouraging a deeper understanding of all people – made in God's image.

Week 2: Together as brothers and sisters in Christ – relationship with Christ.

Week 3: Together as the Body of Christ – the faith community.

Week 4: Together as partners in God's world – the wider community.

Week 5: Together as partners in God's word – the journeying community.

It is designed to inspire a vision about people with disabilities as being essential to the wholeness of the Body of Christ.

A good small group discussion starter.

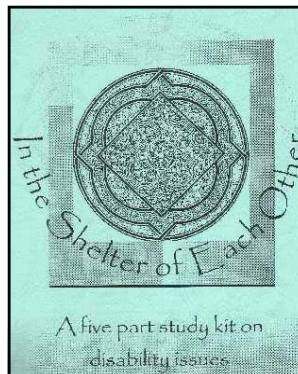
Study book \$5 Video (one / group) \$10

Copies available from S.A.C.C.

GPO Box 2106 Adelaide 5001

Phone (08) 8221 6633

Fax (08) 8221 6644 Email: sacc@picknowl.com.au



"Dancing with Dementia: My Story of Living Positively With Dementia" Christine Bryden

Christine Bryden was a top Canberra civil servant and single mother of three children when she was diagnosed with dementia at the age of 46.

This book is an intimate first-hand account of her experiences of living with this progressively degenerative condition. She explores the effects of memory loss, difficulties with communication, and the growing challenges presented by seemingly simple tasks. Through such exploration we are able to appreciate someone who has sought to not just live, but indeed, in her own words, "dance with dementia."

Through her own experiences she offers suggestions as to how carers and professionals can, in practical ways, assist those struggling with this impairment.

Her insights are telling, such as, *As we become more emotional and less cognitive, it's the way you talk to us, not what you say, that we will remember* (p.138).

Her awareness of her own self-identity is remarkable.

This book will be of much assistance to all seeking to relate as meaningfully as possible to someone living with dementia. It offers much practical wisdom for pastoral carers.

A most helpful and insightful read.

"I'm choosing an attitude of dancing with dementia. I'm choosing to be a survivor"

Christine Bryden
"Dancing with Dementia"
p.164

Jessica Kingsley Publishers
London, 2005

*available through Dymocks Bookstores

STORY

Community Link
Westminster &
Minda

Since 2002 I've been involved annually in organising about 100 year 8 students from **Westminster School** to come in their class groups, as a part of their community development programme, to **Minda Inc.** for sessions of activities with the Minda residents, all of whom have their own intellectual impairment.

Over the years the students have joined in with resident activities such as music, dance, art, craft, or working at recycling, or potting plants. The aim for the students is to develop greater awareness of people with disabilities, seeing them as *"real people"* and not simply as those who look, walk or talk *"funny."*

Student feedback has been encouraging.

- Some have talked about being helped to make Christmas decorations by younger residents.
- Some have laughed about their efforts at doing the "Chicken Dance"
- Some have shared with each other about the "life story" an older resident opened up to them about.

... And yes, there was comment about *"differences."*

- different speech
- different behaviour
- different interests

Residents told how they enjoyed the company of the students.

It's just possible these students left Minda with a wiser and more accepting understanding of people who live with disabilities.

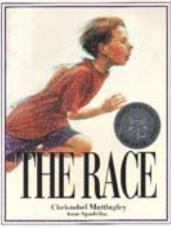
Our Kids' Clubs, Youth Groups and Worship Services can only be the richer for opening our arms to people who perhaps look or walk differently, or who see with difficulty, or talk more slowly.

Adapted from article by

Rev Trevor Whitney

Disabilities Ministry Chaplain

KUCA News, June 2003, p.25



THE RACE

By **Christobel Mattingley**
 Illustrator: **Anne Spudvilas**
 © 1995

Published by **Scholastic**
 ISBN: **1 86388 225 1**
 Children's Book Council of Australia
 Honour Book

Greg wants to join in but he doesn't quite belong. And he's always last - in spelling, in mental arithmetic, and in races, even though he can run very fast.

Then one day a new teacher arrives... and Greg finds what he had lost - the words he didn't hear.

... or have a look at these !!

Wish by Felice Arena
 (theme: Down Syndrome)
 A novel for the 9+ age group

Red Sky in the Morning by Elizabeth Laird
A family comes to terms with a child born with severe impairments
 A novel for the 10+ age group

Helpful Sites for Disability Resources

UnitingCare SA
www.unitingcaresa.org.au/disability

Sth Aust'n Council of Churches
www.sacc.asn.au/Disability/tgodi.html

EnableNet - mega disability info
www.enable.net.au/

Dec. 3rd is *International Day of People with a Disability* (see www.nican.com.au/int_day/index.asp).

It would be opportune to reflect on the Advent texts from a disability perspective. Here are some ideas and discussion issues from two of the lectionary texts for **Advent 2**, the Sunday closest to the International Day.

Psalm 85:1-2,8-13 A God who Reconciles

A possible historical backdrop to this text could have been the Jewish exile in Babylon. Be that as it may God is depicted as coming to a people who yearn to have their fortunes restored (vv.4,6). God is seen as offering forgiveness (v.2), steadfast love (vv.7,10), peace (v.8), faithfulness (vv.10,11), and righteousness (v.13).— In other words, God is one who desires intimate and loving relationship with these suffering people.

Today, NT images of the church, such as *Body of Christ*, also express the image of a Christ who seeks intimacy and loving relationship amongst the members of that Body, as an expression of God's love for creation.

Issue for discussion:

- Who are the ones living with disability in your community who may experience social isolation? How might the notion of an intimate and caring God be expressed with these people?

Mark 1:1-8 Prepare the Way

John proclaims the kingdom that is to be ushered in by Jesus. A fundamental quality of this kingdom is repentance (v.4), expressed through baptism and the confession of sins (v.5). This commitment to the one who was soon to come was a commitment that also dared to offer hope to a people who had been waiting so long for the coming Messiah.

Today, the Christian church affirms the idea that the Kingdom of God, as ushered in by Jesus, seeks to offer hope to all people, including marginalised people such as those with a disability who find themselves living in institutional or supported community-based accommodation. However, whilst nearly 20% of the population live with some form of impairment, a much smaller percentage find a spiritual home in the church.

Issue for discussion:

- What might be a message of hope to people with disabilities who are institutionalised or who live in isolation in the community? (remember that people with disabilities have often found themselves the targets of evangelical zealots who saw disability as sin, and hope as physical healing from disability)