

# Breaking Barriers

everybody belongs everybody serves

ISSUE #72 WINTER 2006

△ A Ministry of Disability Concerns of the Christian Reformed Church

## Silence Can Be Broken

By Michael Tulp, Orillia, Ontario, Canada

There's no such thing as a coincidence. My friend Amos agreed with me. We met when I was visiting my son in Ames, Iowa. We enjoyed a few chats at the Dutch Bakery. One conversation sweetened my day because he listened when I tried to put into words how I felt about living in a world of silence. I'm hard of hearing.

Amos described a book, which contained a chapter by the Japanese author, Taisei Yamamoto, called *Different Silences*. As a woman in her culture, Yamamoto wrote that she lived with silence all her life. She felt hemmed in and voiceless. Quoting a Japanese poet, she wrote, "The strongest prisons are built with walls of silence."



We looked at each other, and I saw that he knew these walls, as did I. Looking down at the table between us, swirling a spoon round in my cup, I found it difficult to speak.

I watched four men who laughed and swapped stories, clearly enjoying each others' company, meeting at the same time at the same place each day.

"I shy away from talking about myself," I thought. This is mine to endure. I then said it aloud. Amos waited quietly. He knew we had made a transition, and paused while I searched forlornly for words that would convey what I wanted to say.

Finally, I told him how I keep in good spirits by throwing myself into volunteer activities and doing things that earn the approval of others, taking initiatives that give me pride in what I have done.

He smiled; we were getting to the point. "I do the same," he said. "When I feel lonely I look for something to do." We chatted some along those lines.

"Silence can be broken," I tell Amos. Silence can be broken and the walls of what I felt to be my prison indeed come down once I find an outlet. "I was a middle child. I can still see my family and me sitting around the dining room table: two calm, passively listening parents and three siblings chatting a mile a minute. I could not always catch what they were saying, and hardly got a chance to get a word in. And when I did, what I said did not seem to carry weight." Amos smiled.

The picture of his smile has stayed with me. I did not need to fully express the feelings associated with my growing up. The need disappeared that precious moment when I found myself sitting on a rattan chair, at a small glass covered table, chatting with a person who paid attention to each word I said and responded to the feelings they concealed.

Amos reached for his coat and handed me the May, 2003, copy of *The Church Herald*. He pointed to a line he had

underlined. "Those who have come to terms with their disabilities have a gift."

I looked at him, raising my eyebrows. All persons have disabilities, and the ones with visible disabilities need to see that this is an asset rather than a disability. I wear two hearing aids. Yes, thank you, Amos, at times I may look at my situa-

## ? your thoughts

About 65,000 copies of this newsletter are being sent out. Due to expense and to enhance readability, we have decided to cut its size from 8 pages to 4. Please let us know what you think about the new format and layout, or about any other news that you would like to share. Write us at Disability Concerns, 2850 Kalamazoo Ave. SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49560, or [disabilityconcerns@crcna.org](mailto:disabilityconcerns@crcna.org).

tion and wish I were different, but then inevitably, the insight surfaces that the whole is larger than its parts.

I recall the words of Isaiah 42:16, "I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn darkness into light for them and make their rough places smooth. These are the things I will do; I will not forsake them."

Coincidence? There's no such thing as a coincidence.



## on the web

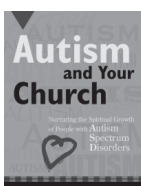
- Past issues of our newsletter in pdf
- *Breaking Barriers* in Korean
- Links to helpful organizations
- Materials to order in Braille and on tape
- Report from CRWRC volunteer, Stacy Collie, about working with people with disabilities in Nigeria



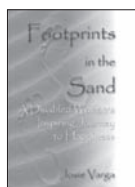
## resources



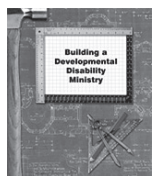
Most churches are set up for a “one size fits all” approach to ministry and worship. But one size does not fit all. *Learning Disabilities and the Church* is a manual that helps churches better serve the needs of children and youth with learning disabilities by describing practical ideas and strategies for accommodating learning challenges, discussion questions, helpful websites, and more. Read a sample chapter at [www.FaithAliveResources.org](http://www.FaithAliveResources.org) or call 1-800-333-8300 for more information.



*Autism and Your Church* is a unique resource that will help your church embrace people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) into the full life of your congregation. New from Friendship Ministries, this book outlines specific techniques that will equip leaders to meet the special needs of those with ASD and develop an action plan for ongoing ministry. For more information visit [www.Friendship.org/Autism](http://www.Friendship.org/Autism) or call 1-800-333-8300.



In *Footprints in the Sand* author Josie Varga describes her life so far: the immigration of her parents; her childhood in an Italian American, Roman Catholic family; her struggles with cerebral palsy and hearing loss; her marriage; the births of her daughters; and her battle with melanoma. Varga wrestles with the nature of disability and social prejudice. Beneath and above and through the life and world is the faithful God in whom she trusts.



Beginning with a “survey” of the local “landscape” of the congregation, *Building a Developmental Disability Ministry* guides a church leadership team through the various ministry-building stages: from planning to implementation, evaluation and ongoing ministry development. This resource was developed by Bethesda Lutheran Homes and Services and is available for order from Faith Alive Resources at [www.FaithAliveResources.org](http://www.FaithAliveResources.org) or 1-800-333-8300.

**Braille:** A variety of resources from Faith Alive have been printed in Braille including Sunday school materials for children and youth such as *Bible Way*, *LiFE*, and *Walk with Me*, as well as books for adults including *Space for God*, the *Psalter Hymnal*, and much more. Search for “Braille” at [www.FaithAliveResources.org](http://www.FaithAliveResources.org) or call 1-800-333-8300.



**DVD:** “I’m Tyler: Don’t Be Surprised.” Tyler is a typical high school student who happens to have cerebral palsy and some other challenges. His mission started as an Eagle Scout Project and has grown to a dream to educate the world about Ability Awareness. He believes that what a person, any person, CAN do is much more important than what he/she can’t. The people in Tyler’s life who have seen this and practiced Ability Awareness have made all the difference in the world to him. Order the DVD for only \$5 at [www.imtyler.org](http://www.imtyler.org).

## Help with Inclusion

By Barbara Newman,  
CLC Network



**True or False:** Several years ago, a family attended a church. One of the children was in a wheelchair. After the service, an elder approached the father and said, “Your family is welcome here, but please don’t bring the one back in the wheelchair. He’s too distracting”.

**True or False:** A Sunday School teacher returned a child with autism to his parents and said, “Please don’t ever bring your child back to Sunday School. We can’t handle him here.” The family took turns staying home with him for 4 years.

**True or False:** Many churches have a desire to include individuals with special needs, but they don’t always know how.

If you answered True to all of these statements, give yourself an “A” for the day. Although you may have earned a perfect score, many of our church communities want to raise their scores when it comes to including individuals with disabilities. Taking to heart the picture of the body of Christ painted in I Corinthians 12, church communities are waking up to God’s call to utilize the gifts of each person while supporting their needs.

CLC Network comes alongside churches to offer that piece so many churches believe is lacking – expertise. For many years, the Christian Learning Center has partnered with Christian Schools to build inclusion opportunities for children who have unique gifts and needs. In addition, we have offered services for adults to allow each one to have a place within his or her community. For the past few years, we have also been partnering



## letters

Dear Servants of God,

A dear lady gave me a copy of your publication. Enclosed is a gift to order a subscription. My daughter, Sharon Rose, named after “Jesus, Rose of Sharon”, is a quadriplegic as a result of a serious vehicle accident on March 3, 2006. We would like to share *Breaking Barriers* with Sharon and her care givers. Thank you. May God continue to help you help others. Because He Lives!

Love, Mr. & Mrs. Wendell Thiele

with churches to help support their desire to become vibrant, whole communities – embracing and supporting those with special needs.

This partnership between the CLC Network and a church may include the following:

- **G.L.U.E. teams:** Judi Warner helps churches set up a support team around an individual or family, called a G.L.U.E. team for giving, loving, understanding, encouraging.
- **Speaking:** Barb Newman might speak at a worship service, conference or training, perhaps highlighting information from one of her two books: *Helping Kids Include Kids with Disabilities* and *Autism and Your Church*.
- **Profiles:** Individualized profiles of children and youth with special needs allow Sunday School teachers, youth group leaders, or adult leaders not only to understand better the individual but also to discern how to utilize this person’s gifts while supporting the needs.

For more information, feel free to contact CLC Network at 616-245-8388 or e-mail Judi or Barb through their website [www.clcnetwork.org](http://www.clcnetwork.org).



## Some Thoughts on Disability Concerns

By Rev. Mark Stephenson, Director of Disability Concerns

**T**he Christian Reformed Church has been served by full-time Directors of Disability Concerns for 20 years. Now God has blessed me by giving me a turn to serve in this role. I'm blessed to serve in this role for several reasons:

1. Our denomination has shown a passionate concern for ministry with people with disabilities for over 25 years. A recent book from Haworth Press contains a chapter called, "The Christian Reformed Church as a Model for the Inclusion of People with Disabilities." An educational ministry to people with special needs, Friendship Ministries, traces its roots to the CRC and is now used in North America and beyond by many denominations and independent churches. The CRC publisher of curriculum, Faith Alive, provides a variety of materials in Braille, and the *Banner* and *Breaking Barriers* are available on tape. Most importantly, many Christian Reformed churches have worked hard at building bridges of inclusion and removing barriers of attitude, communication, and architecture.
2. The network of people in Christian Reformed churches and classes who work with Disability Concerns are generously kind and faithfully hardworking. And I get to work with them!
3. I get to follow a distinguished and hard-working advocate for people with disabilities, Dr. James Vanderlaan.
4. The ministry of Disability Concerns is central to the mission of the church. Jesus' first sermon declared that his mission (and therefore ours) is to people with special needs (Luke 4:18,19).

One final note, *Breaking Barriers* costs over \$10,000 to print and mail each issue. If each of our readers sent in just \$1 a year, the cost would be covered and we would have money to spare for other ministry needs. Will you please consider sending a donation to help us offset our costs? Donations can be mailed to Disability Concerns, 2850 Kalamazoo Ave. SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49560. Or donate online by following the "Giving" link near the bottom of the left hand column at [www.crcdisabilityconcerns.org](http://www.crcdisabilityconcerns.org).



### health corner

#### Eat Your Vegetables!

By Ann Kutudis-Kenien, ARNP, Disability Concerns Regional Consultant for Classis Southeast U.S.

Today is a good day to ask some important questions about the food you eat: Do my family and I need to change something about our diet to reflect the significance we place on health? Are foods rich in vitamins, fiber, and antioxidants found at our house? Do we have a meal plan?

Fresh crispy salads make a terrific lunch, but first wash those leafy greens well. Start your healthy lifestyle with meal planning. If you need help, ask. The Internet is a fabulous place to find answers. As a healthcare provider for 35 years, I still consult specialists regularly. Multiple sclerosis in my life keeps me searching. In Classis Southeast U.S., I love to consult with families who are living with a disability and are not certain where to find answers.



Durk De Vries drives the Percheron team as Cassie and another girl ride.

## A Dream Come True

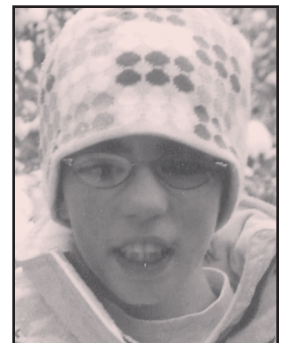
By Hank Kuntz, Regional Consultant for Classis Toronto

**C**assandra LaPointe, better known as Cassie, who lives in Owen Sound, Ontario, has been wanting to ride a horse for a couple of years now. According to an article in the local paper, *The Sun Times*, "thanks to the DeVries family and GRACE, she'll get the chance".

Alma De Vries, the Disability Concerns Contact Person for the Owen Sound Christian Reformed Church, and her husband Durk, have been offering Christmas season sleigh rides for some 11 years at Dual Acres Percherons. Durk and Alma have used their beautiful Percheron draft horses for rides for various charities such as children's hospitals, and individual children with special needs.

Cassie came to their attention through a private referral after they had polled community groups for stories of special needs.

Cassie is being raised by her mom, Tyra, who explained that her 10-year-old daughter has Myotonic Dystrophy Type 1, which is a progressive, multi-system neuromuscular disorder. As well, Cassie has issues with



Cassie LaPointe

speech, sight, and developmental delay. She enjoyed the snowy sleigh ride December, 2005, together with Santa and some 200 others. Though there is no charge, riders were asked to make a donation to the cause.

This year that cause was Cassie, to raise money for her to get lessons at GRACE, the Georgian Riding Association for Challenged Equestrians, which specializes in therapeutic riding. Through the funds raised, Cassie got more than a horse ride. She took riding lessons at GRACE and attended horse camp this past summer.

As *The Sun Times* put it, all this was caused by "the dynamic duo, Durk and Alma DeVries".



Stephenson's daughter, Nicole, enjoys a ride in the swing from her dad.

## Pleased to serve you!

By Rev. Mark Stephenson, Director of Disability Concerns

**B**y the way my wife, Bev, cried my name, I knew something was dramatically wrong with our pregnancy. Hours later our tiny daughter, Nicole, was born 14 weeks early. In the weeks following her birth, Nicole suffered lung, brain and eye damage, and developed a seizure disorder and other medical issues. Thus Bev and I have had personal experience with someone with disabilities for the 19 years of Nicole's life. Nicole moved into a Christian adult foster care home called Harbor House Ministries a year ago.

Reports from the U.S. Census Bureau and Statistics Canada find that 12% of people live with a severe disability. That

translates to nearly 33,000 Christian Reformed people living with severe disabilities.

Bev and I know firsthand the ways that churches can show love and give practical help. Yet, ironically, the church is not always the first place where people with disabilities are included and involved. We can do better, even though as a denomination we have shown significant commitment to people with disabilities and their families.

For this reason, Disability Concerns has introduced a brief phrase which summarizes the church's call to include people, not just people with disabilities, but all people: **Everybody belongs. Everybody serves.**

The Christian Reformed Church is active in missions, education, publishing, media, pastoral care, advocacy, diaconal outreach, and youth ministry. To learn about our work in North America and around the world, visit [www.crcna.org](http://www.crcna.org).

*Everybody belongs:* As we learn together to include fully all of God's children in the life of his body, then we will reflect the hospitality of heaven. (See 1 Peter 4:7-9.)

*Everybody serves:* As we invite all the members of Christ's body to use their gifts for him, we will faithfully administer God's grace in its various forms. (See 1 Peter 4:10-11.)

I am thankful for the hard work of many people in Disability Concerns over the past 25 years, and am honored to serve as the next Director of Disability Concerns. If you need help in your ministry with people with disabilities, please contact me at [stephenm@crcna.org](mailto:stephenm@crcna.org) or by phone at 224-0801 or toll-free U.S. and Canada at 888-463-0272.



## meditation

### John 5:1-15

By Ruth E. Stevenson, Pella, Iowa

While I read the account of Jesus healing the paralytic at the Pool of Bethesda, a question came to my mind: why did this man wait 38 years and still no one helped him into the pool when the waters were troubled? When he met Jesus, the man did not recognize him or understand his healing power. But after 38 years, finally he was healed.

Later Jesus and the healed man met at the temple. Jesus found himself on trial, having to deal with the legalism of the Jews since Jesus performed this healing on the Sabbath. The emphasis shifted from the healed man to the Healer. After all, according to the Jews, Jesus broke the law.

This moment teaches us the most important lesson about the healer. When the healed man does recognize Jesus, Jesus tells him to "stop sinning," pointing the way to repentance.

Perhaps we can't answer why no one showed the man compassion for 38 long years; but we can see that Jesus showed the greatest compassion. Jesus approached the man. That in itself is significant, and something all of us can do. Jesus responded to someone in great need. When Jesus revealed mercy to this old man, he restored him; no troubled waters needed. He healed the man, and called him to live a new life: not just a life free from paralysis, but a life free from sin.

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of the Christian Reformed Church  
Disability Concerns



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