

Breaking Barriers

everybody belongs everybody serves

ISSUE #77 SPRING 2008

▲ A Ministry of Christian Reformed Disability Concerns

Good News and Bad News

by Hank Kuntz, Regional Disability Advocate for Classis Toronto

To quote Dr. James Vanderlaan, our former Director of Disability Concerns, “First the bad news: you are getting old. Now the good news: you are getting old!”

That is the daily reality in the roughly 350-member congregation where Betty Van Deemter is the Church Advocate. The Heritage Fellowship at Holland Christian Homes (HCH) in Brampton, Ontario, is officially part of what was known as Brampton Second CRC, yet functions with its own council of a dozen elders and deacons as well as two full-time and two part-time chaplains. Of the 1,100 tenants and residents of this retirement complex, some 240 live in two separate 120-bed long-term care facilities. All others live independently in apartment



buildings in units ranging from studio to two-bedroom size.

Many of the tenants continue to worship outside the facility, but many others have made the Heritage Fellowship their church home. Betty reports that the Sunday morning service at HCH draws attendees from some 13 different denominations! “I guess at our age we have stopped looking at differences of points of view,” comments Betty.

When it comes to disabling conditions, HCH certainly underscores the fact that everyone will deal with a disabling condition if they live long enough. So here is a place designed to meet as many needs as possible. A social worker and nursing staff are available. There are clinics for various concerns, as well as support groups to provide community for those dealing with issues such as Parkinson’s or grief.

HCH also has close to 400 folks listed as volunteers, nearly all of whom are residents. They provide much-needed help with mealtimes, activities, gardening, maintenance, visiting others, doing devotions, providing transportation, and more. Betty Van Deemter keeps abreast of disability issues that need attention. Recently she and others worked successfully to get a special computer for people with visual impairments.

Younger people living with disabilities would love to be able to access the kind of care provided by a “home” like HCH! This community meets the human need to be part of a body in which we all can play a role and use the gifts God gave us to serve others.

As Betty Van Deemter says, “The joie de vivre and harmony of



this community is at times astonishing.”

That’s the joy that comes to so many of us who are affected by disabilities or diminishing abilities: the joy of knowing that Christ carried the load for us, and does so even today.

Theme

This issue of *Breaking Barriers* focuses especially on senior citizens.

Our next issue will focus on the particular joys and challenges of living with autism. **If you or a loved one has autism, please send us your stories by May 15.** We would love to hear from you.

on the web

Visit us at www.crcdisabilityconcerns.org. You’ll find

- *Breaking Barriers* in Spanish.
- back issues of *Breaking Barriers*.
- resources for disability awareness, disability ministry, support groups, and much more.

Wheelchair Races Offered in Toronto Airport

by Curt Gesch, a Regional Disability Advocate for Classis BC Northwest

I took the 11:00 p.m. red-eye flight from Vancouver. We arrived late in Toronto at about the time that I should have been boarding my next flight. I had only carry-on baggage, but had to get go through U.S. Customs and security before making my connection.

I asked for a “golf cart” to transport me because I had to carry my briefcase, drag a small suitcase, and carry my cane (no extra arms to use it).

The agent at the departure ramp told me, “Please stand over there.” She pointed. People streamed around me as I stood in front of an “assistance needed” sign. I felt as if I had



Curt Gesch has been awaiting a free hip joint resurfacing operation. He spends a lot of his time making canes and walking sticks and pretending that he doesn't need them. (Photo by Brooke McLeod)

a different sign behind me: “Here he is, a 59-year-old cripple who doesn't look like he needs a ride!”

The cart arrived and drove right past me. The agent chased it and told the driver, “Take him to the escalator.” Then she asked me, “Can you go up the escala-

tor by yourself?” That imaginary sign flashed on again. “Ah, sure, but I need to get through customs and my flight is supposed to be boarding.”

“Oh, dear. OK, I'll meet you at the escalator.” She ran like Elijah before Ahab's chariot and beat the cart to the escalator, wheelchair in hand.

“I really don't need a wheelchair,” I objected. (There was that imaginary sign again.)

“Just get in.”

After going through customs, a lady came up to me and said, “And where am I taking you?” She very deliberately patted me on the shoulder and said in a voice that was, I thought, one-fourth pity, one-fourth flirtation (my wife, Betsy, says I flatter myself), and one-half concern, “Now don't you worry, sir, we'll get you there.” Off we went.

We went through the shortest line to clear security. “Sir, do you think you can walk through the arch without your cane? Someone will meet you on the other side to take you to your gate.” Oh, good, I thought, tag-team wheelchair races. So off came the shoes and then another request, “Please remove your suspenders.” I did with no dire consequences. Another wheelchair waited.

This time my attendant was the Donovan Bailey of wheelchair pushers. We zoomed down the long concourse, often on the British side of the path. He told me, “There are two people behind you; so don't worry.”

I asked him if he got lots of exercise with his job. “On a busy day I walk more than ten miles,” he told me. “You won't see many men in their late 50s weighing the same as when they graduated from high school.” I agreed but didn't volunteer my weight.

As a regional advocate for Christian Reformed Disabilities Concerns, I asked myself, “What could I learn from my airport experience?”

- I learned what it is like to feel “on display” as a person needing extra help because of a disability. (Remember those signs, visible and imaginary.)
- I learned that—contrary to popular buzz—airport personnel can be very helpful.
- I learned that my best response to being in a mild state of helplessness was gratitude. The Heidelberg Catechism says, “Prayer is the most important part of the thankfulness God requires of us.” I wonder if, humanly speaking, thankfulness might be the most important part of communication with one another.
- As I get less physically able, my soul seems to be more able to achieve two goals: contentment and patience.

When we got to the gate, he took my boarding pass, validated it, and wheeled me to the ramp, asking, “Can you walk the rest of the way?” After my cart-chair-chair-chair adventure, I practically skipped onto the jet, which had waited for me and “the other two” whom I suspected didn't really exist.



resources

Conference: Compassionate Journeys

Saturday, May 3, Community Christian Reformed Church, Kitchener, Ontario

In keeping with the theme of Disability Concerns' new book, *A Compassionate Journey* by John G. Cook, this conference will help attendees learn new ways of thinking about and caring for people with disabling conditions. Nella Uitvlugt, director of Friendship Ministries; Mark Vander Vennen, director of Salem Christian Mental Health Association; Mark Stephenson, director of Disability Concerns; and Ralph Bus, a Disability Concerns volunteer, will be giving presentations and workshops. For more information, call Disability Concerns Canada at 800-730-3490, or email disabilityconcerns@crcna.ca.

Website: www.strengthforcaring.com

The Strength for Caring website, a not-for-profit offering from Johnson & Johnson, is dedicated to helping caregivers. It includes a “caregiver manual” and addresses issues such as daily care, money and insurance, and health conditions.



Website: www.enablelink.org/agc/index.php

The mission of Access Guide Canada (AGC) is to provide the most accurate listings on accessible resources possible—a pool of information from which we may all benefit.



Healthy Churches See Almond Blossoms, Not Gray Hair

By Mark Stephenson, Director of Disability Concerns

With my 50th birthday coming this year, I've lived almost 32 years since society began calling me an adult, but I'm just 17 years from retirement. Especially considering the joy with which our teenage children call their parents "old," issues of aging are growing more real for me.

But I still have good health and a full head of hair. I can engage in a little creative self-deception and think of myself in late youth.

We do the same thing as a North American society. We're getting older, but we hate to admit it. According to the U.S. census and Statistics Canada, the proportion of senior citizens may reach 25% by 2031. Statistics Canada reports that seniors will "become more numerous than children somewhere around 2015."

As we age, we become more likely to experience disability, whether hearing or sight problems, mobility issues, dementia, or other challenges.

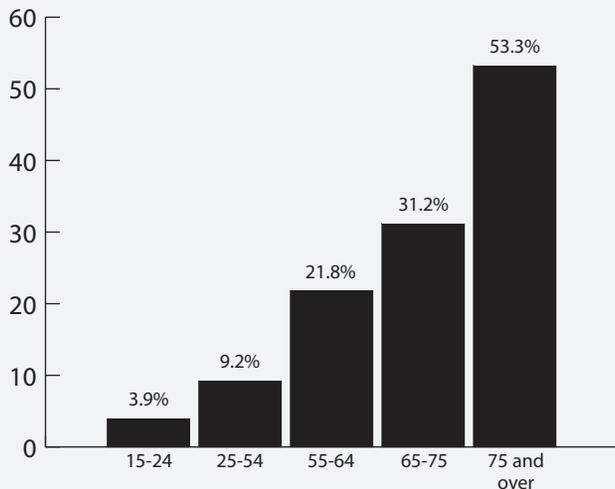
The graphs with this article illustrate this increase. Most people over 75 years of age live with a disability of some kind. Since the number of elderly people will continue to increase, the sheer numbers of people in North America living with disabilities will grow dramatically.

Healthy churches seek to include all people living with disabilities, whatever their age. Healthy churches not only seek to meet needs but also to encourage people to use their gifts, whatever their age. Older people, including those with disabling conditions, bring

many gifts to the church including discipline, wisdom, commitment, and time.

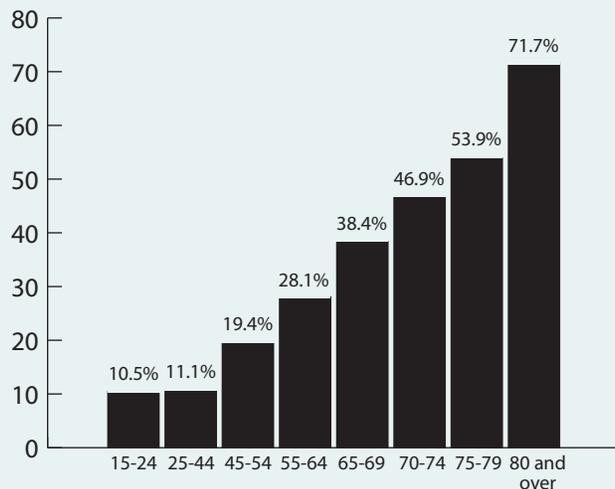
Ecclesiastes 12:5 pictures gray hair as a blossoming almond tree (no "nut" jokes, please!). The gray "blossoms" on the heads of older people do not suggest the end but the beginning of a season: old age as springtime! With all of the challenges that come with increasing age, one of them should not be a neglectful church. Rather, healthy churches encourage blossoming almond trees to use their gifts for the glory of God and the building up of his church.

Adults with disabilities by age group: Canada



(Statistics Canada 2001)

Adults with disabilities by age group: U.S.



(U.S. Census Bureau 2002)



health corner

Medication Safety

by Ann Kutudis-Kenien, ARNP VR, and Elly VanAlten, RN, the Regional Disability Advocates from Classis Southeast US and Alberta North

The misuse of medications is one of the leading factors that contribute to injury, new disability, admission to nursing homes, and even death. Medication errors are among the most common medical errors, harming at least 1.5 million people every year, says a new report from the Institute of Medicine of the National Academies.

If you take medications, here are some guidelines to insure safety and effectiveness:

- Only take medication that your doctor orders.
- Make a list of each medication, herb, supplement, and allergy you have. Update that list each time you visit your care provider.
- Make sure all your doctors are aware of all medications you are taking, including over-the-counter or herbal meds. Get all prescriptions at one pharmacy so that the pharmacist can see your whole medication profile and look for possible negative interactions.
- Take all medications until they are gone, especially antibiotics, unless you are reacting to them.
- Report to your doctor and pharmacist any problems that arise after you start taking a new medication.
- Don't save medications "in case I might need them again sometime." All meds have an expiration date, and will start decomposing or changing after this time, with possibly deadly consequences.
- Don't share prescription meds with anyone.
- Check all medications, including over-the-counter and herbal meds, every six months. Take any that are questionable or which are past their expiration date to your pharmacist for disposal in an ecologically safe manner.
- Note that "natural" or herbal medications and vitamins are not harmless; they can be toxic if taken in doses higher than what is recommended or what is needed by the body.



meditation

Alzheimer's: A View from a Daughter

by Erica VanDorp

Dedicated to her dad, Martin Brink.

God remembers us even when we cannot remember God.
You will be remembered by the Lord your God. (Numbers 10:9)

It all started out so very slow,
forgetting the things he used to know.
Always so good at math and figuring,
pencil in pocket and ready for measuring.
Then overwhelmingly a deep frustration
when he couldn't bring things to completion.
I started to see a part of my dad die,
and knew I had to start saying goodbye.

I wasn't ready to say my farewell;
every part of me wanted to rebel.
He seemed all normal on the outside,
but on the inside his ambitions had died.
With a blank look and stare in his eyes,
there the cruelty of the disease lies.
The body continues to live and carry on
while his mind was fading and would soon be gone.

Faces of loved ones he would briefly recognize,
then the light would soon disappear from his eyes.
Before him she stood when he asked for his wife.
How can that be? He's known her most of his life.
But my heart turned to my God in heaven,
grateful for all the days they were given,
for a love that survived through rain and sun,
that lasted from morning till the day was done.
So thankful for His faithfulness for their many years,
that in His mercy, He dried all my tears.

Even though all this seemed so unfair,
the thing that helped most was prayer.
We turned to the One who knew us best
who gave us comfort and much-needed rest.
Even though we all questioned why
we had many chances to say our goodbye.
We didn't know which hour God would call him home,
but grateful for our hope and that he didn't die alone.
We know dad is in a far better place
enveloped in His amazing grace.

Disability Concerns Publishes Book on Caring Ministry

A *Compassionate Journey*, a new book co-published by Disability Concerns and Faith Alive, invites readers to practice compassion by walking alongside people with disabilities or chronic illnesses.

People who develop long-term illnesses or disabilities must adjust to major changes in life. A close connection to God and to other people can help such people accept their new reality and move on to experience growth and wellbeing.

A Compassionate Journey offers readers insights into the journey of people living with long-term challenges. It outlines a helpful perspective

on caring and guides readers in the practice of compassion. "When we reach out to those who are suffering," writes author John G. Cook, "we'll find Christ already there, waiting for us to come and visit, waiting to bless us."

Each chapter includes questions for discussion. There's also an outline for using this booklet in a workshop setting, making it ideal for councils,

care teams, adult education, and other group settings, as well as for individuals who want to learn how to show care to people with long-term needs.

The book can be ordered from Faith Alive Christian Resources by calling 1-800-333-8300 or by visiting www.faithaliveresources.org.

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.

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