

Salt & Light

Winter 2007

The Newsletter of the Social Concerns Ministry Team

Educating and informing the church body in light of biblical principles

You are the salt of the earth...
You are the light of the world...

Mt. 5:13-14

Editorial Note:

This issue of *Salt & Light* reminds us of something very much at odds with our intuition and our culture: weakness and disability can be a blessing. But for that to be the case, we need to see how God works through weakness, and to understand how God calls us to join Him in caring for those who lack the abilities that most others have.

The Word of God and the history of the church speak loudly on this subject, as the first two articles here remind us. The third article offers practical insight into the needs of children with disabilities. Public government can help address those needs outside the walls of the church, as the fourth article explains.

The newsletter concludes with a personal reflection from one of WBC's own on the challenges and blessings of having persons with disabilities in our midst. They can be much more than irritations—they can be inspirations as well.

Please come to WBC on January 21 (see box on page 2 here) to learn more!

The Bible and People with Disabilities

From: Jay Hollman and John Kilner, *Ethics & Medicine*

God's concern for the downtrodden and those unable to care for themselves is a recurrent theme of the biblical writings. Psalm 82 advises us to "Defend the cause of the weak and the fatherless, maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed. Rescue the weak and needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked." God puts himself on the side of the afflicted and the oppressed, responding to their needs (Psalm 10:17,18) and providing them a refuge (Psalm 9:9).

In fact, loving and caring for those who are disabled makes us an imitator of God. Even if we were armed with the greatest human strength and the greatest human brilliance, we would be weak and stupid compared to the Creator—God. We, of all generations, should know this best because we truly better understand the extent of the universe and the intricacies of molecular structure and function. The difference between God and us is far greater than the difference between the most capable of us and the most severely disabled person. Yet God chooses to be concerned about us, desires to be with us and comes to our aid. When we do the same to weak and disabled individuals, we are behaving in a way like God.

In this sense, we should not object when people have the ambition to be like God. Indeed,

responding to the calling to be children of God, and brothers and sisters of Christ, people are to manifest many of the attributes of God. The problem with so many who "play God" is that they aspire

Approximately 20% of the U.S. population, or about 60 million people, live with some level of disability. Nearly half of those have a severe disability.

more to having the authority of God than they do to reflecting the moral character of God. The biblical picture is that God, living among us, is Christ who welcomes the children and the outcast. He does not desire to be served but serves. If we would mimic God, then we should reach across the difference gap to mentally disabled persons with the same compassionate love and caring that characterizes God.

Nowhere is this teaching more clear in the biblical writings than in the parable of the sheep and goats (Matthew 25:31-46). In this passage Jesus tells his followers what will happen on the final judgment day. At this time, people will be divided into two groups: the "sheep" whose rewards will include an eternal life with Jesus, and the "goats" who will take their places with the devil and his

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Winnetka Bible Church 555 Birch Street Winnetka, IL 60093

Prior issues of *Salt & Light* available at www.wbc.org

The Church Has Led the Way

Adapted From: Alvin Schmidt, *Under the Influence*

Historically, the church has long been in the forefront of meeting the needs of people with disabilities. The church:

- ◆ Introduced *morotrophia* (mental asylums, begun in A.D. 321)
- ◆ Established *nosocomia*, first institutions that served only the sick (late 4th century); housed and nursed the sick
- ◆ Constructed *xenodochia* (buildings that housed strangers, travelers, and the sick (late 4th century))
- ◆ Introduced *gerantocomia* (institutions for the aged, 5th century)
- ◆ Established *typholocomia* (institutions for the blind);

Definition of an individual with a disability: "a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities."
—Americans with Disability Act

- ◆ first one established in Jerusalem (630)
- ◆ Provided health care for lepers by Hospitalers of St. Lazarus during the Crusades (12th century)
- ◆ Built the monastery at Monte Cassino, founded in 529; cared for the sick; many monasteries followed suit; cared for mentally disturbed
- ◆ *Damus Sancti Spinus*, mostly in Germany, 14th century; small hospitals: treated, housed, and nursed civilians; housed mentally disturbed.
- ◆ Established mental asylums, London, 15th century; housed and nursed the mentally disturbed.
- ◆ Constructed many general and

mental hospitals, combined from 17th—19th century; nursed the physically ill and mentally disturbed.

Despite the church's inspiring leadership in caring for people with disabilities over the centuries, not all congregations today have the vision and practical understanding that such caring requires. Those that do provide inspirational models, and we will have the opportunity to learn from one of them at WBC on January 21. †

YOU ARE INVITED!

What: Seeking God's Perspective on Disability

When: Sunday January 21, 9:15 am

Why: Sanctity of Life Sunday

Where: Winnetka Bible Church (downstairs)

Encouraging a Special Needs Child

Adapted From: Suzanne Keffer, *Insight for Living*

- *Challenge him or her to excel.* Whether the child faces minor challenges or major obstacles, always stimulate his or her development. While distinguishing between red and blue or drinking through a straw may seem like a small victory to you, the confidence the child will gain is immeasurable. Even if he or she never masters a task, the time spent with you and others will benefit him or her.
- *Affirm his or her value.* Like all children, kids with special needs yearn to know their worth. When the child interacts with people who don't understand her condition, she may question her value. Be prepared to talk frankly about her developmental differences. Teach him to tell others about it when they ask. Comfort him when he hurts.

Remind her that God made her. Offer him the opportunity to learn forgiveness as he faces others' jeers.

- *Realize his or her limitations without limiting his or her potential.* While you may need to assist the child in many areas, don't allow your help to become a hindrance to his or her independence. Guide him with as much freedom as possible. By empowering the child to do some things on her own, you give her self-assurance. If you think he might fail, let him try. If it takes her a little longer to dress herself, get up earlier. If her clothes don't match, don't worry about it. *Encourage him or her to interact with peers and people in the*

Well over 600 million people throughout the world live with a disability."

community. Don't isolate the child from others in an effort to protect him or her. She needs to socialize. Let her get to know other children—both kids with typical development and kids with special needs. Ask older kids or adult friends you trust to spend time with him. He should relate to people outside his family. Cultivate an environment that will allow the child to bloom socially. When he stutters, someone may snicker. When she asks for help up the stairs, the first person may say "No." But the next "Yes" could be the new friend she never would have met if it weren't for the first "No." †

Why Involve Government?

From: www.statelib.lib.in.us

Action by the government is necessary to guarantee the rights of disabled people.

1. Equality is a constitutional right and a social responsibility. All citizens should have equal access. The Fourteenth Amendment of the

U.S. Constitution clearly states that every citizen has a right to "equal protection of the laws." Research on the special difficulties faced by the disabled, however, demonstrates a pervasive, yet often subtle, discrimination in society.

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) includes

some important facts in section 2 (a) Findings:

- ...discrimination against individuals with disabilities persists in such critical areas as employment, housing, public accommodations, education, transportation, communication, recreation, institutionalization, health services, voting, and access to public services;
- ...individuals who have experienced discrimination on the basis of disability have often had no legal recourse to redress such discrimination;

individuals with disabilities continually encounter various forms of discrimination, including outright intentional exclusion, the discriminatory effects of architectural, transportation, and communication barriers,

14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution:
 "No state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any state deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws."

overprotective rules and policies, failure to make modifications to existing facilities and practices, exclusionary qualification standards and criteria, segregation, and relegation to lesser services, programs, activities, benefits, jobs, or other opportunities....

2. If citizens' rights are being denied, and the states do not provide remedies, it is the responsibility of the federal government to guarantee those rights.

The federal government is the

only entity with enough power to address broad and pervasive discrimination issues. The federal government is empowered to act on behalf of citizens by the U.S. Constitution: the "supremacy" clause (Article VI), the "due process" clause (the Fourteenth Amendment), and the "commerce" clause (Article I, Section 8). In most cases, disagreement between state and federal law is resolved in favor of federal law.

3. In maximizing the potential of every citizen, the state and nation will benefit economically. The gross national product will increase as all citizens become contributing members of society. The ADA Findings in Section 2 (a) noted that:

- census data, national polls and other studies have documented that people with disabilities, as a group, occupy an inferior status in our society, and are severely disadvantaged socially, vocationally, economically and educationally;
- the nation's proper goals regarding individuals with disabilities are to assure equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency for such individuals. †

The Bible and People with Disabilities

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demons. The criterion for the division between the two groups will be their true faith and character, demonstrated by the manner in which they have treated the needy. Christ so identifies with the needy, that He considers actions done to them as actions done to Him.

Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?"

When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?"

The King will reply, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me" (vv. 37-40).

For Christians, there can be no higher ambition than treating Christ as special. This is true

because of His divinity, but also because of his great love for humanity, the death he died to pay the price for human selfishness, and his modeling of what God is truly like. People treat Christ as special not only through times of worship but very practically when they show kindness through meeting the needs of the "least of these." Never is such kindness more clearly evident than when people serve mentally or physically disabled individuals. †

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Irritation and Inspiration

By Suzanne Kilner

It may not always be easy to fellowship and worship with people who have disabilities. But it can be a blessing as much as it is a challenge.

One challenge involves communication. Special needs people often learn social skills through repetitive role playing and memorized scripts. Try establishing a routine conversation using the same words each week, even if that simply involves "Hi Amy" and then (after a pause) "Good to see you!" Prayerfully consider investing more time and become a one-to-one aide during Sunday School or the worship service.

Taking time to understand someone's disability and walking with them to a setting where they can be successful can be an important ministry. Some may need a quiet place outside of the noisy foyer or hallway where they can hear or not be distracted by an overwhelming crowd. Others may need an activity to do together.

Over the years people have mentioned to John and me specific ways that the sometimes-irritating behaviors of our son with Down Syndrome can also be inspiring during the Sunday morning service. Often they hear his loud but off-key singing and feel less self-conscious about their own singing. They see his enthusiastic swaying or clapping to music and choose to enter into worship more enthusiastically themselves. When he responds aloud to rhetorical questions from the pulpit, they smile, but realize they agree with his response and God burns that truth on their heart. Several come feeling very lonely

and unwanted and a spontaneous hug from Paul brings God's love to their hearts. Some come in feeling sorry for themselves and realize that in contrast to a person with disabilities, they have lesser challenges; and they leave in a spirit of thankfulness. Occasionally the pastor comments that Paul clearly got the main point of the sermon and underlined it for everyone by his energetic response!

As we invite more persons with disabilities into our congregation, we will have the opportunity to let God transform any irritation into inspiration as God speaks to our hearts and needs through them. †

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