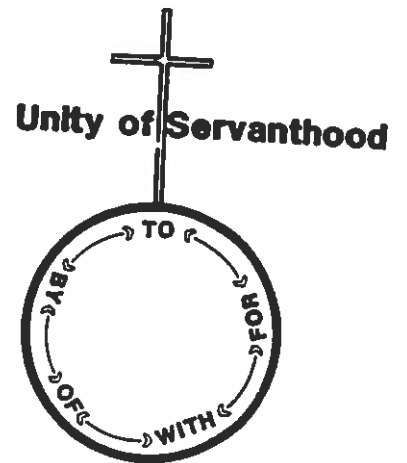
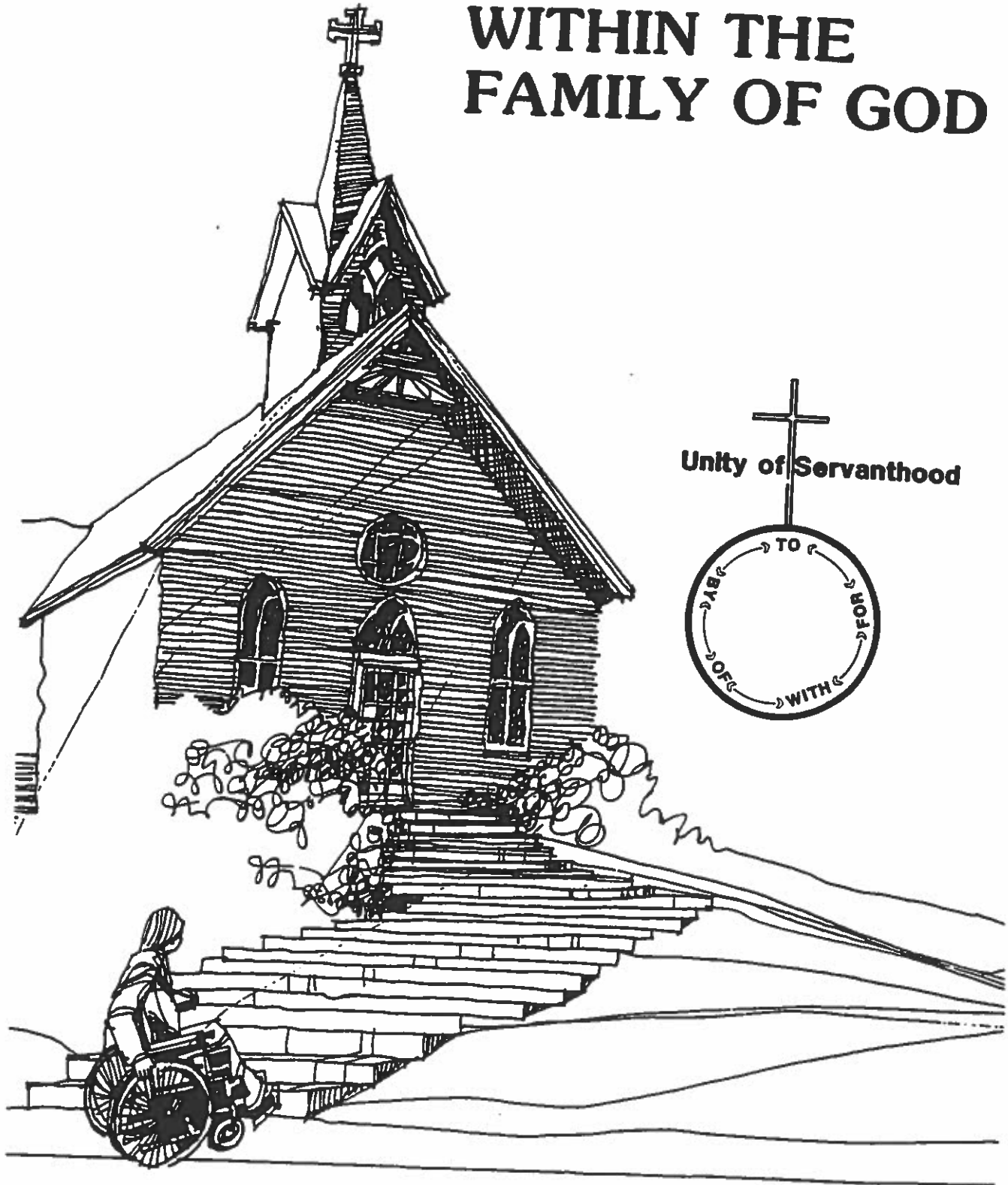


DISABILITY WITHIN THE FAMILY OF GOD



***Theology of Access for
The American Lutheran Church
1980***

RESOLUTION RELATED TO THEOLOGICAL STATEMENT ON MINISTRY WITH THE HANDICAPPED

WHEREAS, The United Nations International Year of the Disabled, 1981, will call attention to all those in our society whose difficulties are sufficiently severe to set them apart from the normal or ordinary ways of living, learning and doing things; and

WHEREAS, Socio-economic developments in industrialized countries have resulted in better health care and been accompanied by an increase in the number of disabled persons, and the proportion of the number of disabled citizens in relation to the population of our nation is increasing; and

WHEREAS, St. Paul teaches that members of the Christian Church are "one in Christ" (Galatians 3:28); and

WHEREAS, Such wholeness of the family of God demands not only compassion for the disabled but also their inclusion as fully committed members of the body of Christ who are able to witness and minister; now therefore be it

Resolved, That the 1980 General Convention of The American Lutheran Church receive the statement entitled "Disability Within the Family of God: A Theology of Access" comprised of three sections:

- 1) the theological statement: *The Church and Persons with Handicaps: Unmasking a Hidden Curriculum of the Christian Community* by Dr. Stewart D. Govig;
- 2) the section entitled "Issues and Implications Evolving from the Theological Statement, *The Church and Persons with Handicaps*";
- 3) the section entitled "An ABC Primer of Faith for the Children of Access" by Edna Hong; and

commend the Issues and Implications section to the member congregations for their consideration and action, and commend the section "An ABC Primer of Faith for the Children of Access" for use as a poetic and inspirational litany by member congregations; and be it further

Resolved, That the divisions and service boards of The ALC examine the implications of this statement for their work; and reflect the concerns embodied in this resolution; and be it further

Resolved, That agencies and institutions related to The ALC examine the implications for their work, and reflect the concerns embodied in this resolution; and be it further

Resolved, That The ALC promote the United Nations International Year of the Disabled, 1981; and be it further

Resolved, That every district of The ALC be encouraged to implement the concerns embodied in this resolution; and be it further

Resolved, That The ALC, through the office of the General President and the Board of Trustees, work to increase the number of qualified persons with handicaps employed in The ALC offices; and be it further

Resolved, That the Office of Communication and Mission Support study the feasibility of developing an interpretive audiovisual program with appropriate aids for persons with communication disabilities, to address the attitudinal, architectural, and communication barriers which prevent full access by disabled persons to the full range of activities of The American Lutheran Church and life in society; and be it further

Resolved, That the actions called for by these resolutions be initiated during 1981, as the United Nations International Year of the Disabled.

Adopted by the 1980 General Convention of The American Lutheran Church by action GC80.6.109.

Exhibit C

DISABILITY WITHIN THE FAMILY OF GOD: A THEOLOGY OF ACCESS FOR THE AMERICAN LUTHERAN CHURCH

(A statement recommended to the 1980 General Convention by the Board for Life and Mission in the Congregation)

We, as Christians, live within a world composed of people who are like ourselves and people who are different from ourselves. Yet we are all part of the family of God.

The American Lutheran Church needs to be a witness in the world about those similarities and differences.

How do we, as a church, address ourselves to the needs of disabled people? What is the theological base from which we choose our attitudes and actions as Christians?

A group of Lutherans whose lives have been closely affected by disability, their own or that of a loved one, gathered to react to a theological statement prepared by Dr. Stewart Govig. From that theological framework evolved a statement of the issues and implications for our actions as individuals and as a corporate body. The passion of our convictions inspired the poetic litany by Edna Hong.

These three papers, standing alone or together, create a theology of access to hearts, minds, and actions of individuals and The American Lutheran Church.

A. THE TASK FORCE TO DEVELOP A THEOLOGY OF MINISTRY WITH THE HANDICAPPED

Rev. John D. Kautz, Oshkosh, Wis., chairman

Ms. Carola Boe, Deronda, Wis.

Rev. Lawrence T. Bunde, Minneapolis, Minn.

Rev. E. O. Gilbertson, Sioux Falls, S.D.

Rev. Stewart D. Govig, Tacoma, Wash.

Ms. Edna Hong, Northfield, Minn.

Rev. Ogden Lovdokken, Springfield, Ore.

Rev. Luther Muehlbrad, Galion, Ohio

Rev. Keith Olstad, Minneapolis, Minn.

Mr. Phillip Pagel, Blair, Neb.

Ms. Karen Quenroe, Canby, Minn.

Ms. Helen Rizzi, Eau Claire, Wis.

Ms. Eleanor Thorpe, Green Bay, Wis.

Mr. David Walle, St. Paul, Minn.

Ms. Joyce Peltzer, Minneapolis, Minn., program specialist,
Ministry with the Handicapped, DLMC/DSMA,
The American Lutheran Church

B. THE CHURCH AND PERSONS WITH HANDICAPS: Unmasking a Hidden Curriculum of the Christian Community

Ever since Jesus commanded his followers to make disciples of all nations by baptizing and teaching (Matthew 28:19-20), Christians have sought to transmit the faith to a new generation. This effort has always included emphasis upon the content of the faith and its Scriptures. In more recent decades, however, the insights offered by the social sciences—developmental psychology in particular—have provided a resource for educators in curriculum planning and strategies.

In the '70s John H. Westerhoff and others have pointed toward anthropology, another social science discipline, as a resource for a different kind of response to Christ's command. In *Generation to Generation* (1974) it is his contention that the church, in emphasizing schooling, printed resources, classes, and programs has tended to be unaware of a "hidden curriculum" which unconsciously underlies its educational efforts. For example, anti-Semitism is seldom if ever explicit, but it may often be an implicit curriculum in teaching about the Pharisees and the crucifixion of Jesus. The prejudice actually develops in this way, according to Bernhard Olson's study, *Faith and Prejudice* (1963).

Broadly speaking, the science of anthropology studies humanity in its physical and sociocultural aspects. Applied anthropology makes a study of a situation where it may be useful for a given community to know something about the population for which it is responsible. It considers the structure, life, composition, and organization of the community. This paper concerns a given community, The American Lutheran Church (North Pacific District in particular) and seeks to promote a curriculum for Christian education which has not been near the forefront of thought and planning, namely, the status of handicapped persons within the church. While parts of it will consider both scriptural interpretation and theological reflection, the intention is to provide first a framework for exposing our marginalizing of the disabled among us (the hidden curriculum) and, second, a plan of advocacy revealed in Appendix II.

1. The Limit Situation

In view of the extraordinary nature of these revelations, to stop me from getting too proud I was given a thorn in the flesh, an angel of Satan to beat me and stop me from getting too proud! About this thing, I have pleaded with the Lord three times for it to leave me, but he has said, "My grace is enough for you: my power is at its best in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9, Jerusalem Bible).

The paradox of the reply to St. Paul's plea for relief from his "thorn in the flesh" suggests an approach for theological reflection upon the church's ministry to its handicapped brothers and sisters. While they experience weakness in one form or another, the handicapped at times share with the apostle greater power in the sufficient grace of God. The term "handicapped" is one which stirs many reactions. This is because one may experience its meaning in so many different situations. Many degrees of infirmity exist in a technological society which continually offers better health care to greater numbers of disabled and chronically ill persons. Some are afflicted with physical difficulties involving auditory and visual impairments; there are also the abnormal, disturbed, and the maladjusted who are often hidden from our view. In addition, thousands who live in close relationship to the handicapped and who care for them share the pain of a "thorn in the flesh."

A professor at the Center for Special Education at the Catholic Institute in

Paris, Henri Bissonnier, has described the general situation of the handicapped in the world and in the church today. Upon the basis of many years of experience in educating the maladjusted, he applies the term handicapped "to all those whose difficulties are sufficiently severe to set them apart from the normal of ordinary ways of living, learning, and doing things."¹ This will provide us with a working definition. Yet in our discussion a number of important psychological, social, and medical dimensions relating to the handicapped in our society must be avoided in order to concentrate upon the theological context.

In recent months citizens of our country have become more aware of the fact that we have been living with an ethic of overabundance since the time of our origin on this continent. Most of us have had no sense of limit and now, suddenly, we are faced with an economy of scarcity. In theological circles the "concept of limit" has been put forth as a key category for describing religious experience and language in David Tracy's *Blessed Rage for Order*.² His category suggests a direction for writing a theology of ministry with the handicapped. Therefore, these reflections, in the context of Christian faith and the community in which it lives, will focus, in the first place, upon the limits and attitudinal barriers encountered by the handicapped. In the second place, we will remind the church to confront such limits in view of the current situation. Then, *together with* the handicapped, we can strive to push beyond them.

A handicapped person with difficulties severe enough to be "set apart" from most other members of society is thereby alienated from others. While some kinds of disabilities—emotional or mental—can also become a source of alienation, those having visible infirmities experience such alienation from the negative response upon the faces of most of those who confront a handicapped person for the first time. And what handicapped person does not recall the child who asks in all innocence, "What happened to your arm, leg, etc.?" As a result, it is impossible to achieve a total indifference to one's disability. And one likely will never "conquer" this self-consciousness or the disability in the manner some climbers are able to "conquer" mountains.³ Rather, one internalizes the limit situation and decides to cope with a personal predicament.

In most cases, even the most severely handicapped adapt to the circumstance and go about doing what needs to be done in the face of hardship. The Israeli violinist, Itzhak Perlman, is a case in point. Since his paralyzed legs will not support him, this concert virtuoso *sits* before the orchestra and plays the solo violin. In a few moments the onlooker's awareness of his handicap vanishes in the glory of the music. Nevertheless, the handicap condition is there and involves some measure of personal denial no matter how magnificently one may compensate for it. Realism insists that we acknowledge an erosion of spirit caused, for example, by a confinement which carries with it the frustration caused by the thwarting of every impulse to be, do, and become. For some, physical wholeness will never be known or achieved again. Thus, Bissonnier insists at the beginning of his book that the dogma of the resurrection of Christ should animate those who work among the infirm. Ultimately, he writes, "Christians have faith in the victory of life."⁴

The reaction of the handicapped person to the conditions brought about by the disability or the reasons for it opens the way to severe depression. Society's admiration for the young, the beautiful, and the healthy (as seen in advertising) adds to the pain. Who could not sympathize with the onslaught of a "victim" ("I cannot believe this has happened to me!") attitude or a "what's the use" feeling? The psalmist cries, "My heart aches in my breast . . . fear and trembling descend

on me. . . . And I say, 'Oh for the wings of a dove to fly away and find rest' " (Psalm 55:4-6, Jerusalem Bible). Such personal anguish has been experienced ever since these words were written. It leads to the posing of great religious questions which neither can be answered nor dismissed: Why do we suffer? Does suffering have any meaning? Can suffering actually enrich our life? Should one learn from pain? The French thinker, Simone Weil, grappled with such questions both by the example of her life and by her written legacy. "Affliction hardens and discourages us," she writes, "because like a red hot iron it stamps the soul . . . with the scorn, the disgust, and even the self-hatred and sense of defilement that crime logically should produce but actually does not."⁵ If Bissonnier is suggesting that Christian faith relates to suffering merely as a "remover" or consoler, she is more inclined to emphasize the fact that a person's wounds are not taken from him or her. Even the risen Christ bore his scars, and St. Paul is conscious of the marks he bore on his body as a result of the ill treatment he suffered for Christ (Galatians 6:17).

Oddly enough, the Bible itself may contribute to the general lack of understanding of such feelings among handicapped persons. Consider Leviticus 21:16-24 as an example. Old Testament scholarship has long recognized a "block" of material in the book of Leviticus (Chapters 17-26, the "law of holiness") as an independent collection which was incorporated into the priestly source of the Pentateuch. Its name derives from the exhortation of God to his people, "You shall be holy because I the Lord your God am holy" (cf. 19:2; 20:7, 8; 21:6, 8, 15, 23). Israel is to be set apart from all other peoples just as God is set apart. Of prime importance is that this holiness be maintained by the strict observance of laws related to worship. Purity and cleanliness are to be observed in such a way as to be "well-pleasing" to God.⁶ That which is unclean, therefore, is "blemished" (cf., for example, Leviticus 22:19-20 and over 20 similar references in the Old Testament) and unfit for the cultic sacrifice. Ritual purity involved the idea of completeness or perfection. Behind such purity also lies the priestly doctrine of creation as found in Genesis 1. There God creates order from chaos and distinguishes different dimensions of the universe, namely, the "vault" of heaven, the "waters of the seas" and "the earth." Unclean animals (cf. Leviticus 11:1-2) are those which display the characteristics of a species other than their own. Of these, the swine is the most notable in our culture; it is unclean, not for hygienic reasons, but because it "parts the hoof, is cloven-footed yet does not chew the cud" (Leviticus 11:7). If the characteristics of another category are taken on, confusion results and the proper order of the world is destroyed.⁷ A leading scholar maintains that Israel derived its worship from the cultic practice of the Near East. But in tension with her neighbors, and in order to maintain an exclusive identity, the people of Israel also excluded themselves from many cultic practices and from customs that were taboo for them.⁸

Despite any effort to understand the holiness code in the context of the religious life of ancient Israel, however, there is a stark description of human "blemish" in the code that may still contribute toward the rise of attitudinal barriers against the handicapped:

And the Lord said to Moses, "Say to Aaron, None of your descendants throughout their generations who has a blemish may approach to offer the bread of his God. For no one who has a blemish shall draw near, a man blind or lame, or one who has a mutilated face or a limb too long, or a man who has an injured foot or an injured hand, or a hunchback, or a dwarf, or a man with a defect in his sight . . . shall come near to offer the Lord's offerings by fire; since he has a

blemish, he shall not come near. . . . that he may not profane my sanctuaries" (Leviticus 21:16-23 RSV).

If perfection of the body is symbolic of the soul's perfection, then obviously a negative attitude toward the disabled is raised. Perhaps the physical perfection of the priest symbolized the perfection—or holiness—of God in heaven. The scholar Noth maintains that the list of bodily imperfections which exclude from the exercise of priestly office contains a sequence of rare or even unique words whose exact meaning, even, is uncertain. Furthermore, "All this," he writes, "concerns internal rules for the priesthood, subjects of professional knowledge."⁹

Surely a careful exegesis compels one to conclude that the passage intends no slight to Israel's handicapped either upon physical or moral grounds; yet present-day popular interpretation may lead to a different response. While the New Testament gives no proscription as to who may lead in worship as does the Old Testament, the fact that Christ is represented by the author of Hebrews as having "offered himself without blemish" (Hebrews 9:14) could link the ideal of physical perfection to Christ's person. At least in Christian iconography this is frequently done.¹⁰ An important passage from the New Testament Johannine literature (John 9:1-41) also relates to the topic of possible biblical origins of an attitudinal barrier toward the handicapped:

As (Jesus) passed by, he saw a man blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be manifest in him" (John 9:1-3 RSV).

Bissonnier points out that this reference, so well-known, still does not deter Christians from linking sin—the sin of the sick, parents, or the world—to every deficiency or handicap the, encounter. If a child is retarded, we may surmise, the cause is that he or she is the child of a chemically dependent mother who took too many pills; if a child is disturbed, the family is to blame; and if a young person becomes paralyzed in an auto accident, it is because youth are so senseless, and so on. "Yes, this is so much second nature," Bissonnier insists, "that it eases our conscience; it dispenses us from searching out courageously and scientifically the causes of the ailment and the ways to remedy it."¹¹ Whether or not he exaggerates this contention is beside the point, for the theological interest of the gospel points us beyond: "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents . . ." (verse 3). A leading scholar of the Fourth Gospel comments, "Despite the book of Job, the old theory of direct causal relationship between sin and sickness was still alive in Jesus' time." He then discusses the story against its background of the apologetics of church and synagogue in the late first century. The man's physical blindness is contrasted with the sin of spiritual blindness.¹²

Once more, a sound interpretation of a biblical text leads to the conclusion that it should not be used to support bias against handicapped persons. Despite this, however, in the Orthodox church today a person who is deformed or misshaped may not be ordained, and the doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church, *admiratio populi*, holds that if one causes "discomfort" within the life of a congregation, one may not be ordained except by intercession of the Holy See. To date, there are 20 priests with disabilities who have been permitted to be priests.¹³ In Protestant as well as Catholic circles, a member of the clergy engages in a very public or "out front" role in preaching and administering the sacraments. And a physical handicap in such circumstances might indeed be distracting or become a matter of congregational discomfort. Perhaps this was the reason for the fact that the

writer was admitted to a leading Lutheran seminary (in 1948) only after having an interview with its president and making a plea for a dispensation of sorts. A director of the United Church of Christ's Council for Ministry headed its placement system for two decades. He recalls many "problem cases" of ministers receiving job refusals because of physical disabilities.¹⁴ Such restrictions need to be reconsidered. It may be helpful to the church to classify degrees of handicapping disabilities for relating to those ordained for public ministries. Section 504 of the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 highlights a range of conditions that should be considered in planning for accessibility in public buildings: nonambulatory, semi-ambulatory, and coordination disabilities; sight, hearing, speech, and learning disabilities, plus mental or psychological disorders. This might serve as a guideline for church planning also.

We have seen that barriers for the handicapped include the personal depression of the afflicted, misunderstood or misapplied passages from the Bible, and prejudice within church tradition. Yet as our Lord clearly established his intention to minister to the disabled with whom he came in contact, so also we as the church of Christ can do no less than follow his example in this respect. Our efforts, however, will confront suffering not merely to console the sufferer, or to remove the pain; while we may offer no supernatural remedy for suffering, we can strive together for a "supernatural use for it."¹⁵

2. Beyond Limits

After three years in which he endured life in Auschwitz and other Nazi prisons, Viktor Frankl emerged from torture and degradation with a different sense of life's meaning. "Suffering," he writes, "is an ineradicable part of life, even as fate and death. Without suffering and death human life cannot be complete."¹⁶ Depression is not an inevitable condition of those who are "set apart" by disabling conditions. Frankl's incredible physical and emotional testing led him to conclude that nearly everything may be taken away from a person except one thing which he calls "the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way."¹⁷ For the handicapped who so choose, this freedom will involve a quest for new ways of "living, learning, and doing things" with the goal, in terms of New Testament images, of affirming his or her uniqueness in becoming a "living stone" (1 Peter 2:4) in God's "spiritual house" who is equipped as a saint "for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:12).

These images of the church remind us of the implied singularity of the New Testament community. Wholeness of the "house" and "body" establish identity, yet:

Wholeness does not mean sameness. We need not look alike, think alike, talk alike, see alike, hear alike, or share alike in the same abilities to be whole persons. All of us are unique creations who share a common humanity which finds its ultimate purpose and promise in building up the body of Christ which is the church.¹⁸

During his Galilean ministry great crowds came to Jesus bringing with them candidates for healing. They put them at his feet and when the maimed were made whole by his healing power, they glorified God (Matthew 15:30-31). On another occasion, Matthew describes a woman who came to Jesus for healing. "Your faith," he tells her, "has made you well" (9:22). A more detailed account concerning able persons who, in faith, brought their handicapped friends to Jesus is provided by Luke:

And behold, men were bringing on a bed a man who was paralyzed, and they sought to bring him in and lay him before Jesus; but finding no way to bring him in, because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down with his bed through the tiles into the midst before Jesus (Luke 5:18-19).

Here the faith and desire for wholeness on the part of the paralyzed man is accompanied by the faith of others who enabled him to meet Jesus. They literally broke down the barrier which kept him separated from the Master.

Spinal cord injuries have left many in a paralyzed condition today. For these, broken in such a way and often in pain, the decision to find "new ways of living" is an act of great courage. And frequently the world they encounter is unready for them, callous, and even hostile.¹⁹ The act of those who brought the paralyzed man to Jesus suggests how basic a ministry to the handicapped in today's church ought to be. The ministry of the church may be viewed as its work in continuing Christ's activity in the world. As he came not to "be served but to serve" (Mark 10:45), so also the ministry of the church is its service. "I am among you as one who serves," (Luke 22:27) Jesus declared to his disciples, and the foot washing episode of the Gospels (John 13:1-11) exhibits his command that they should do likewise. By way of contrast, in a culture which Christopher Lasch has described as "narcissistic," the Christian call to discipleship and service is challenged by a growing quest in our culture for new avenues of personal well-being.²⁰

At times in its history the church has led movements to aid the underprivileged and the handicapped. Vincent de Paul and, in our time, Mother Teresa of Calcutta are examples of such service. But in Western society, with its advanced technology, the circumstance of the disabled has changed. It is reflected in one of the reports (Section II) accepted at the 1975 Fifth Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Nairobi, entitled "The Handicapped and the Wholeness of the Family of God." In part, this report states:

*The church's unity includes both the "disabled" and the "able" . . . yet able-bodied church members, both by their attitudes and by their emphasis upon activism, marginalize and often exclude those with mental and physical disabilities. The disabled are treated as the weak to be served, rather than as fully committed, integral members of the body of Christ. . . .*²¹

The Nairobi action has already brought about a deepened concern for disabled people in many churches, especially in the United States.²² It has also provided the background for a consultation attended by 38 representatives from 15 countries sponsored by the Innere Mission und Hilfswerk of the evangelical churches in the German Democratic Republic and by the World Council of Churches' Commission on Faith and Order. Held from April 3-7, 1978, at Bad Saarow (in East Germany) this gathering included participants who were themselves disabled and also those directly engaged in work with the disabled. A memorandum of the consultation, entitled "The Life and Witness of the Handicapped in the Christian Community," contains a call for Christians to accept the disabled within the mainstream of congregational life. Section III of the report contains a number of specific suggestions for implementing ministry with the handicapped and may eventually serve as a guide for introducing the topic to concerned members of the church (see Appendix I).

These actions illustrate how today's church attempts to make more meaningful the life of Christ in its particular time of history. In previous times, and also to a degree today, the church has advocated institutionalizing the disabled. Such good and well-intentioned efforts, however, will not meet current needs. A simple rea-

son is the fact of such vast numbers of handicapped now living among us. The World Health Organization estimates that 10 percent of the world's population is disabled (i.e., 400 million human beings). In the United States alone there are 7 million children and at least 28 million adults with mental or physical disabilities!²³ Recent federal legislation reflects a dramatic advance in understanding the plight of these people. A necessary practical step in establishing accessibility to institutions which receive federal funds was taken in the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. It states (Section 504) that "no otherwise qualified handicapped individual . . . shall, solely by reason of his handicap, be excluded from participation in . . . any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance." In commenting upon Section 504, former HEW Secretary Joseph Califano declared:

*In Section 504 the Congress enacted a charter of equality to help end the shameful national neglect of handicapped individuals and to translate many of their legitimate needs into legal rights.*²⁴

The church, in this case, in addition to being a prophetic voice for ministry, might now take advantage of the federal government's practical steps (such as the removal of architectural barriers) in opposition to this circumstance of injustice and prejudice. The Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (Public Law 94-142) and the 504 regulations published in 1977 constitute a clear breakthrough for handicapped Americans. Even though in an earlier day the church was frequently the lone voice in support of suffering human beings, a recent White House Conference for the Handicapped adopted a resolution which deplored:

*the many ways religion and religious institutions have marginalized the handicapped, seeing them as objects of pity and mission only, failing to see them as participating members of the whole family of God.*²⁵

As a community of faith which responds to God's healing work in Christ, the church is now challenged at least to assist in implementing the leadership of secular authorities in this case; it is also challenged to renew and rethink its dedication to the ministry of its Lord who proclaimed "good news to the poor. . . release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind . . ." (Luke 4:18).

The presence of the handicapped among us reminds us of the fragility of human life, and that each of us is vulnerable. But Christ's call to discipleship addresses us in both our strength and weakness, just as the Gospels depict his life in these terms. Our success-oriented society concentrates too much upon health as the norm. While suffering and a "limit situation" are enemies for us to overcome, this does not mean that persons with handicaps should be pushed to the edges of our awareness lest they "intrude." These also belong to the human family and their lives can be "OK" after devastating impairment, and, in some cases, even better. Each of us would profit from reflecting seriously that since, in a sinful world, life is never intrinsically harmonious, it is not necessarily "sick" to live in relative disharmony.

A theology of ministry with the handicapped must deal in tension with, on the one hand, an institutionalized form of service which may become depersonalized; on the other hand, it must caution those who might falsely spiritualize our human condition so as to give insufficient attention to sin and suffering in the world. It is time for Christians to question frivolity and tone down use of the words *exciting* and *celebrate*; more emphasis needs to be given to such terms as *ponder* and *lament*. It must be willing to grapple with difficult questions on the local level

such as inclusion of handicapped persons within the worship and sacramental life of the congregation. The new *Lutheran Book of Worship* contains a prayer for "the Poor and the Neglected" (p. 44) which includes this sentence: "Help us to heal those who are broken in body or spirit, and to turn their sorrow into joy." I have argued that in some cases of affliction, sorrow will never "turn to joy." Would another sentence such as "Help us to support the efforts of the handicapped to minister, and help us to become more aware of them on our life's journey" be helpful? Clergy-lay distinctions of leadership in this area should be considered again. Will "lay" ministry among the disabled become the better option for the future?

In order to apply its theology of ministry, a congregation must learn better to understand that its mission is no longer "to" persons with disabilities, but rather "with" them in a common mission to the church and to the world.²⁶ But condescension and patronage must be dismissed; the handicapped wish to be taken seriously as equals. In the future we, hopefully, will become more accustomed to the "visibility" of handicapped in our congregations, for example, by listening to sermons from someone in a wheelchair. Henri Nouwen describes the opportunity each Christian has to become a "wounded healer" for others. This means that he or she will strive for the abandonment of aloofness toward the pain of others.

*No one can help anyone without becoming involved, without entering with his whole person into the painful situation, without taking the risk of becoming hurt, wounded, or even destroyed in the process.*²⁷

Applying a theology of ministry with the handicapped also means that we continue to grapple with ways for educating ourselves better to interpret Scripture in the light of the new cultural circumstances described above. For example, since current practice sometimes encourages blind persons physically to lead other visually impaired in learning to cope with their limitation, how shall we better interpret the parable of Jesus, "Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit?" (Luke 6:39)? It must never be taken as a cruel joke! In the Old Testament, when Moses complains to the Lord that he does not have the eloquence necessary for his role in leading Israel out from Egypt, Yahweh replies:

Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him dumb, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak (Exodus 4:11-12).

In the midst of suffering and disability, both Moses and Paul experienced God's grace which gave them power in their weakness. Such "supernatural use" for suffering will also attend a responding and faithful church today.

3. Unmasking the Curriculum

Two ambiguous images of the New Testament church spell out the difficulty of educating people about Christian ministry and the handicapped. There is the image of the church comprised of free, strong, and healthy men and women who, as the "salt of the earth," reject false idols and fight for an abundant life for all. "Liberation theology" and its promoters are a model of this image. Yet there is also the image of people suffering for the sake of others and helping them find the presence of Christ in the acceptance of suffering. Mother Teresa of Calcutta provides an example of this image. Leslie Newbigin finds the basis for both images in the ministry of our Lord himself; at the end of his ministry he accepts death and "commits all—himself, his disciples, his mission—into the Father's

hands. And this is because he is the agent . . . of an eschatological liberation. . . . Here is the clue to the paradox of our Christian experience of strength in weakness." ²⁸ The church, however, has often ignored the handicapped by choosing to exclude them from its fellowship (i.e., by constructing architectural obstacles) and sacramental life. Removing barriers of neglect and ignorance will mean the breaking down of traditional stereotypes of who is really handicapped in the church: each member of the body of Christ is a vulnerable human being and, in most instances, will experience a degree of disability or handicap. Thus, the question of the handicapped in the church involves not so much a mission to the crippled and hopelessly deprived as an effort better to understand what the church really is. It is the community of those who follow the One whose *cross* is at the center of its life in word and sacrament. This cross signifies weakness; yet it is also the basis for a power of a faith which both accepts limits and still rebels against them.

In American culture today a privatized "religion of success" has the effect of promoting an indifference to the institutional church. For those of us who participate in and support the institutionalized church such individualism poses a challenge both to unity and mission. From the standpoint of Christian education in the church, the writer maintains that within the church a "hidden curriculum" concerning the disabled has been in force for many years. This curriculum teaches that disability involves what is unpleasant and what makes most of us anxious; therefore, silence is its motif: "We will not talk about handicaps." It must be emphasized that the curriculum is not planned nor does it operate from malice. But now is the time to begin unmasking it! To the zealot who asks, "Are you saved?" we can respond, "For *what*?" Some members of the church who suffer handicapping conditions will strive to press beyond such limits they experience and not allow suffering to crush them. They bear a particular witness without which the strong and healthy may be lost in their own illusions of physical invincibility. Their integrated presence provides a corrective to the common tendency to identify the power of God with our successes or, in Lutheran theology, a "theology of glory" at the expense of a "theology of the cross."

A Christian education devoted to the "deliberate and intentional attending in the present to the future possibility of the total person and the Christian community" ²⁹ is a place to begin. An intentionality which not only recognizes past failures but also seeks to lessen the loneliness and isolation of the disabled is the first priority for attention. Subsequent plans for interaction with able-bodied and disabled Christians will, by the power of God's spirit, result in a more authentic experience of the "communion of saints." We will learn together, perhaps, that only God himself is *able* (Luke 3:8; Romans 4:21, 16:25; 2 Corinthians 9:8; Hebrews 2:18, etc.) and that each of us is *disabled* by the fall. But in Christ God sets us free and *enables* us to do his will. Every Christian, therefore, is a "dis-enabled" person. When this is taught, militant activity will not be necessary. Militancy is a threat to unity because it overemphasizes the "we" and "they" dichotomy. Every baptized saint is "in Christ" and justified. In this scheme of things there is no place for fragmented groups such as "the youth," "old folks," or "the" handicapped. As Christians we are free to help one another without the prodding of "supercrip" or "supernigger" as in the parallel situation of racism. The church should call upon its members to be *wish* the handicapped just as its Lord was present with "the lame, halt, and blind" of New Testament days.

The beginning of this paper called for a context of action in education. Christian educators now employ the term *praxis*, that is, the combination of *theoria*

'reflection' and *poiesis* 'action.' It is reflection in action.³⁰ I suggest three contexts for our educational effort, namely, (1) exposing the cultural situation, (2) affirming neglected resources of the Lutheran tradition, and (3) the development of a shared praxis.

In his *Church in the Power of the Spirit* Jurgen Moltmann describes Christianity and the processes of cultural life.³¹ The Christian faith and community is being challenged today, he maintains, by three culture conflicts, namely, racism, sexism, and the relationship between the healthy and the handicapped. He accuses our culture of welcoming some persons but only "putting up with" others. This distinguished theologian insists that we do not see the handicapped *person*; we see only the handicap, because we do not wish to see ourselves simply as a person but only as a *healthy* person. "Every particularist and narrow identification," he writes, "(the human being as a white man, the human being as a man, and the human being as a healthy, nonhandicapped person) leads in . . . racism, sexism, and the idol of health to the pushing aside of other people. . . ." ³² The preparation of new curricula and education for exposing this situation through preaching and learning is an urgent need. We might begin confirmation instruction with Baptism, then proceed to the Third Article of the Creed. We could insure that disabled children and teenagers discuss these matters with their peers.

Secondly, the task of Christian educators should promote a new affirmation of neglected aspects of the Lutheran tradition itself. It is true that the scope of such an affirmation is much broader than our topic! We as Lutherans, however, ought to reflect upon the possibility that we have overemphasized the doctrine of justification at the expense of the doctrine of sanctification. Perhaps we have intellectualized the gospel to the extent that, in some instances, we are not so concerned about action. It is time to stop bad-mouthing Scandinavian pietism for its legalism without ever mentioning its remarkable record of "Salvation Army" works of love. Consider also what Luther has to say in the famous *Treatise on Christian Liberty*:

*Hence, as our heavenly Father has in Christ freely come to our aid, we also ought freely to help our neighbor through our body and its works, and each one should become as it were a Christ to the other that we may be Christs to one another. . . . We conclude, therefore, that a Christian lives not in himself, but in Christ and in his neighbor. Otherwise he is not a Christian.*³³

Our education might profit from viewing Luther in context and paying less attention to the life of the reformer while grappling with such radicality in his thought.

In the third place, a "shared praxis" approach will involve concrete activities and challenges for each congregation as it becomes more aware of the presence of disabled persons. Among Roman Catholics the educator Thomas Groome connects Christian education as "shared praxis" with the thought of Karl Marx. The dynamics of his message in our culture stems in part, according to this observer, from the insistence that theory is not something to be formulated and then applied to practice. Rather, he emphasized that knowledge is primarily something that is done and is not knowledge until it is done. Theory emerges from what is being reflectively done and this activity in turn leads to further action in an ongoing dialectic.³⁴ A challenge to a new style of Christian living is called for, which instead of taking for granted a confrontation between two groups ("us" the normal and "they" the disabled, etc.), accepts the solidarity of each person in the body of Christ so that physical differences will not be divisive.

"Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17). The "old" includes ignorance, segregation, and the culture-conflict result of putting people aside. But in order to learn about this we must share and dialog as Christians *as we experience* the world of suffering. Bonhoeffer's "cost of discipleship" and "cheap grace," in our tradition, point the way to such sharing in practice.

Care must be taken that action to integrate or bring relief and comfort to sufferers not become a new legalism of sorts. Hans Küng reminds us that theory and practice for Jesus coincide in his deeds as a "partisan for the handicapped" and by his insistence that "doing God's will" places the priority of service to persons over observance of the law.³⁵ A law has the advantage of laying down clear limits, and in observing it (the prohibition of murder, for example) one has achieved something. But then evil thought, what one desires in the heart, is one's own affair. This is why, Küng holds, that so many people in their relations with other human beings prefer to keep a law rather than make a personal decision.³⁶ A theology of ministry with persons who are handicapped stems from the freedom of the gospel which enables us to abandon ourselves to change—not because we are forced or shamed into a new series of regulations, but rather because we want to do God's will.

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Notes

1. Henri Bissonnier, *The Pedagogy of Resurrection: The Religious Formation and Christian Education of the Handicapped and the Maladjusted* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), p. 2. A "Statement of Faith and Call to Action" (adopted by the Division of Health and Welfare Ministries, Board of Global Ministries, The United Methodist Church, on April 26, 1979) makes a definition more directly related to the church: "Persons whose disability or difference in appearance or behavior creates a problem of mobility, communication, intellectual comprehension, or personal relationships which interferes with their participation or that of their families in the life of the church." Harold Wilke (see note 3 below) has a simple definition: "That which makes people unacceptable." *The Christian Ministry* (Vol. X, No. 2), March 1979, p. 5. The U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare uses "mentally retarded, hard of hearing, deaf, speech impaired, visually handicapped, seriously emotionally disturbed, crippled, or other health impaired persons," National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., *Resolution on the Church and Persons with Handicaps* (Nov. 9, 1977).
2. David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), pp. 92-93. Tracy lists, on the one hand, limits to ordinary experience: finitude, contingency, and radical transience. On the other hand, the fundamental structures of our existence he cites are the worthwhileness of existence, and basic belief in order and value. Another contemporary theologian, David Hall, has described his vision of a theology of the cross in which a "theology of limits" would assist men and women to pursue new possibilities for individual humanity. See *Lighten Our Darkness* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), pp. 213-220.
3. See the story of the remarkable Harold Wilke. "His Ministry Conquers Handicaps," *New York Times* (May 7, 1978, Section 11). Wilke, born without arms, speaks of the principle of coping and then "figuring out ways a job can be done without using normal means."
4. Bissonnier, *The Pedagogy of Resurrection*, pp. 9-10.
5. Simone Weil, *Waiting for God* (New York: Harper and Row, 1951), p. 121.
6. Martin Noth, *Leviticus*, rev. ed., (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), p. 16.
7. J. R. Porter, *Leviticus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), pp. 83-84.
8. Noth, *Leviticus*, p. 16.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 153, 156.

10. In the work of artists such as Holman Hunt and, to a degree, El Greco. See Roland H. Bainton, *Behold the Christ* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), pp. 28, 33, and 83. For a Christian aesthetic which emphasizes the lowliness and suffering of Christ, the art of Georges Rouault may be cited. See William A. Dyrness, *Rouault: A Vision of Suffering and Salvation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971). Perhaps the classic example of this aesthetic is Gruewald's Isenheim altarpiece. In films, George Steven's *The Greatest Story Ever Told* illustrates the former emphasis and Paolo Pasolini's *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* the latter. Pasolini uses effective and dramatic techniques to portray the "lame, the maimed, the blind, and the dumb" (Matthew 15:30) who were brought to Jesus for healing.
11. Bissonnier, *The Pedagogy of Resurrection*, p. 78.
12. Raymond E. Brown, *The Anchor Bible: The Gospel According to John* (i-xii) (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966), pp. 371, 379, 381.
13. Minutes, Meeting of the Task Force on the Church and Handicapped Persons (Harold Wilke), May 10, 1978. Board of Global Ministries, The United Methodist Church.
14. Harold H. Wilke, "No Steps to Heaven," *Christian Century* (vol. XCVI, no. 28), September 28, 1979, pp. 844-847.
15. Dorothee Soelle, *Suffering* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), p. 155.
16. Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1963), p. 106.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 104.
18. "The Church and Persons with Mental, Physical and/or Psychologically Handicapping Conditions." Statement of Faith and Call to Action, Board of Global Ministries, The United Methodist Church (April 26, 1979), p. 4.
19. See Kady Cone, "Paralytics: Strangers in a Strange Land," *Christian Century* (vol. XCLV, no. 22), June 22-29, 1977, pp. 589-592.
20. Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1978), pp. 7-27.
21. "The Life and Witness of the Handicapped in Christian Community," Memorandum of an Ecumenical European Consultation in Bad Saarow, East Germany (April 3-7, 1978), p. 1. An abbreviated version may be seen in the pamphlet published by the Christian Medical Commission of the World Council of Churches, "The Churches Take a New Look at the Contributions of the Handicapped in the Search for Their Liberation from Isolation" (see Appendix I).
22. Such as The Reformed Church of America "Rights of the Handicapped" (1975 and 1978 General Synod Minutes); the Southern Baptist Convention, Resolution "On the Handicapped" adopted 1978, and The United Methodist Church (see note 18 above). For a collection of documents see "The Church Responds," Harold Wilke, ed., a publication (n.d.) of The Healing Community, 139 Walworth Avenue, White Plains, N.Y. 10606.
23. "The Life and Witness of the Handicapped in Christian Community," Bad Saarow Memorandum, p. 5; "Health, Life, and Death . . . A Christian Perspective," Office of Research and Analysis, The American Lutheran Church (July 1977), p. 13.
24. Harold H. Wilke, "No Steps to Heaven," p. 847.
25. Anthony P. Kowalski, "The Church and the Handicapped," *America*, May 27, 1978, pp. 426-27.
26. Harold H. Wilke, "The Worst Barrier of All," *Christian Ministry* (vol. X, no. 2), March 1979, pp. 4-9.
27. Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1972), pp. 71-72.
28. Geiko Muller-Fahrenholz, *Partners in Life: The Handicapped and the Church* (Geneva: World Council of Churches Faith and Order Paper No. 89, 1979), pp. 21-22.
29. Thomas H. Groome in Padraic O'Hare, ed., *Foundations of Religious Education* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), p. 10.
30. As an "in" term among Roman Catholic educators, *praxeology* dominates the pastoral reflection at the University of Montreal, O'Hare, *Foundations of Religious Education*, pp. 20, 124.
31. *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), pp. 182 ff.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 186.
33. John Dillenberger, ed., *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1961), p. 76. Hugh T. Kerr, *Readings in Christian Thought* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1966), p. 154.
34. Groome, *Foundations of Religious Education*, p. 21.
35. Hans Küng, *On Being a Christian* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1976), pp. 266, 240, 252.
36. *Ibid.*, pp. 242-243.

Appendix I

Selected Statements of the Bad Saarow Memorandum (G.D.R.) April 3-7, 1978

"The Life and Witness of the Handicapped in the Christian Community"

There is no Christian community without the disabled. When the handicapped are missing, the community itself becomes handicapped.

The Christian community is constantly summoned to gather around its Lord. It is the permanent task of the Christian family to gather and to integrate all members of his body.

The consequences for the life of the church are evident, in both worship and service, and affect the ordained as well as the lay leadership. Church services must be organized on the assumption that it is the rule and not the exception for the disabled to be present and to participate. We recommend, therefore, forms of worship in which disabled fellow Christians, with their range of experience and sensibility, their physical and sensory capacity for self-expression, are able to participate. We seriously question, therefore, whether any grounds exist for excluding baptized Christians, however seriously disabled, from celebrations of the Lord's Supper. We likewise think it necessary that admission to the priesthood must no longer be conditional on medieval or modern doctrines, de facto or de jure, stemming from the Levitical stipulations for admission to the priesthood.

The presence of the disabled reminds us that every human being is a frail, threatened, defective being and a being created and blessed by God.

Fellowship between the disabled and the able-bodied makes it easier for all to be more realistic and honest in admitting that no life is exempt from disability. It is unrealistic to make a hard and fast distinction between the disabled and the "healthy." It prevents the recognition that in some measure every human being is exposed to danger and in need of help and that at some time in the course of his or her life, if only in old age, must contend with handicaps of various kinds.

In thus affirming our conviction that the unity and integration of the disabled in the church are based on the gospel of Christ, we are implying that we speak in favor of the homes, schools, and institutions where the disabled receive special help, protection, and care. We acknowledge with gratitude the help and the home which such places provide for thousands of disabled human beings. Almost without exception, those engaged in the diaconal ministry of such institutions have been and are imbued with a profound devotion to disabled persons and provide their churches with a shining example of selfless fidelity and love. We also acknowledge with gratitude that in these institutions new and improved therapeutic methods, technical aids, and nursing systems have been developed which have become an indispensable aspect of the work with the disabled today.

Appendix II

ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS EVOLVING FROM THE THEOLOGICAL STATEMENT

The Church and Persons with Handicaps: A Hidden Curriculum of the Christian Community

The Issue: Church Advocacy on Behalf of Persons with Disabilities

The ministry of Christ moves the church to advocacy with and on behalf of all persons with disabilities. In so doing, the church affirms that each person is unique with unique needs and unique gifts.

The Implications:

Advocacy involves persuasion—moving others to action and motivation. We should use the district and conference gatherings of the church to bring memorials to the floor of the national convention on behalf of the ministry with the handicapped.

We must resist the growing cultural priority which excludes those who are less than "media perfect," making the elderly and the disabled peripheral, institutionalized, closeted, or out of the mainstream. We must persuade those about us to accept as normal the concerns of the elderly and persons with disabilities in order to avoid the atrocity of neglect.

When handicapped persons are unable to be a part of primary family life, we must reemphasize our membership in the family of God and explore creative options for foster homes and extended families for children, the elderly, and the handicapped.

In whatever is done in an advocacy role, we must recognize that change requires strategy in order to accomplish it. If changes are sensitively and firmly negotiated, resistance to change can be short-lived.

The Issue: Attitudinal Barriers

Common attitudes toward persons with disabilities and attitudes of persons with disabilities toward themselves can be real barriers in building a ministry with the handicapped. These attitudes are crucial as they will ultimately become the enabling or the defeating factor in this ministry.

The Implications:

Common attitudes of persons with disabilities toward themselves are often born out of deep feelings of guilt and fear. They fear being a burden to their families, their church, or their society. Guilt often comes as a result of frustration at not being able to give in a conventional manner. Frequently, for example, persons with disabilities require more time and attention which can be a restriction causing impatience in nondisabled persons and guilt on the part of persons with disabilities. But a ministry of love and service can exist in this tension if we interpret receiving as a form of giving. The impatience of the nondisabled person may also be related to his/her own fear of becoming disabled. This fear stands in the way of responding with appropriate love, affirmation, and acceptance of persons with disabilities.

The attitudes of nondisabled persons toward persons with disabilities often exclude the disabled from ministry and witness. We must recognize that a disability does not necessarily embody only limitations but it can also provide new opportunities, new skills, and new gifts. Persons with disabilities need not be feared; the person is not the disability but rather a person who has a disability.

Persons with disabilities should participate fully in every dimension of the congregation and community life. To accomplish this, we must seek out and utilize handicapped persons in leadership positions.

The Issue: Architectural and Communication Barriers

Congregations need to become aware of the extent of disability in the United States today. According to the 1970 census, 36 million Americans now experience some form of physical or mental handicap. In other words, one in six Americans has a disability of some type. Hearing impaired persons, most frequently the

elderly, represent the largest disability group within The American Lutheran Church.

The Implications:

The absence of persons with disabilities from church activities leads congregations to question why monies should be expended to make buildings accessible when they have so few or no disabled persons as members. In many cases, the disabled are not present because they cannot get there, not because they do not exist! Barriers of steps and inaccessible bathrooms and education and fellowship areas make participation by persons with disabilities impossible. Congregations need to develop an evangelical outreach to seek out excluded members and those in the community who are disabled and to include them as part of the family of God.

Architectural barriers are too often thought of as being just the steps leading to the entrance of the church building. Within the worship area people with mobility problems have difficulty taking communion if there are steps to the altar. Pews are situated in such a way that there is no room for a person in a wheelchair except in the aisle. An inaccessible chancel limits the ability of a disabled pastor or lay person to serve in that congregation. Remodeling could reduce or eliminate these problems.

Persons with hearing impairments need adequate lighting to facilitate lipreading, and they may need special sound systems or a sign language interpreter for full participation in congregational life. Persons with vision impairments need the church's printed matter made available in large print or braille, or recorded on tape or read to them by a sighted reader.

The economics of eliminating architectural barriers is a real and serious problem. A variety of "try another way" methods to meet the needs of disabled persons should be considered. It may be that community facilities outside the church could be used for worship. Several congregations could join together to finance the remodeling of one facility to make it accessible. Communion could be served at more than one location within the worship area. When facilities are accessible, local congregations should place announcements in local newspapers advertising this fact.

The national church body could provide loans or grants to congregations wishing to make their church buildings accessible. New church buildings constructed with ALC funds must be accessible; however, churches built with private financing are not required to build with accessibility.

Worship traditions of the church may separate some people; for example, standing for prayer separates those who cannot stand. The option should be given to members of a congregation to remain seated if they wish, or standing during worship might be eliminated. Kneeling at the communion rail is difficult for some and impossible for many elderly people. Again, a variety of ways of distributing communion could be tried. A simple railing at the chancel steps would also help.

Persons with emotional problems who find it difficult to be a part of the congregation need the special caring and reaching out of congregational members in order to feel wanted. Perhaps occasional small home worship sessions with members of the congregation could provide the same sense of community caring that is an expression of the fellowship of all believers. This concept could also be applied to those who are "shut-in" by necessity. Smaller and special services within the church is another example of "trying another way" to meet special needs.

Creativity in applying the concept of "trying another way" can lead to many previously unthought of ways to meet special needs. It is important to involve

disabled persons in thinking of and planning for ways to meet their needs as they are in the best position to speak about those needs.

Transportation assistance on a volunteer basis could be provided in the community. Several congregations could also go together and purchase a special van to provide transportation for disabled persons. This could serve the needs of persons with disabilities as well as older people with mobility problems.

Special attention should also be given to parking areas—making certain that curbs are cut or ramped—and that wide parking spaces are reserved for disabled drivers.

The Issue: Sexuality and Family Life for Persons with Disabilities

The fullness of one's personhood includes sexuality. Individuals with disabilities are often seen as asexual. Parents of disabled children and adolescents as well as disabled adults need support and assistance from the church in education about sexuality. More important, the corporate church needs to affirm the sexuality of disabled persons as a part of their total personhood.

The Implications:

Opportunities for learning and growth in the area of sexuality are restricted by the physical limitations of the individual. For example, a child in a wheelchair does not have the opportunity for bodily awareness and tension outlets provided by playful wrestling and body contact sports. Teenagers may be limited in their social outlets and activities during their dating years because of physical disabilities. Deaf people may have language limitations which complicate their understanding of the body systems and their ability to discuss sexuality.

Marriage of disabled persons may be opposed by parents, professionals, and friends. Questions are often raised about the physical ability or competence of a disabled couple to raise children. Disabled people should not be denied the joys and difficulties of parenthood simply because of their disability.

When one partner in a marriage experiences a disability because of disease or accident, great stress may be placed on the marital relationship because of the lack of knowledge as to how sexual expression may be maintained.

Persons with mental handicaps are often denied sex education and opportunities for expressing sexuality. Realistic considerations about the ability of mentally handicapped persons to be parents require sensitive guidelines—for example, regarding conception control. Careful consideration must also be given to the disabled residing in institutions as to their right to make choices about sexual expression and/or marriage.

Seminarians, clergy, and lay persons need structured educational opportunities (as in the Sexual Attitude Reassessment Program) in the area of sexuality and disabled persons. Special resources should be developed on this subject especially for theological and pastor education.

Social service agencies related to the church should provide support groups for disabled persons, spouses and parents of disabled children concerning these issues.

Church-supported institutions for the mentally handicapped, disabled persons, and the elderly need to provide their staffs and residents with policy guidelines and educational opportunities which affirm healthy and constructive expression of the sexuality of residents.

Pastors and members of congregations need to know about community resources dealing with the subject of sexuality.

The Issue: Residential Centers for the Disabled

While the church approves and encourages the integration of persons with disabilities into community life, it must also recognize that there are severely handicapped persons who cannot and should not live independently.

The Implications:

Recognizing that all persons with disabilities cannot be "mainstreamed," the church should acknowledge the need for church-sponsored residences that meet not only the physical, social, and security needs of severely disabled and multiply handicapped persons, but also their spiritual needs.

Where there are already state, county, or private residences, group homes, etc., local congregations should not duplicate such efforts to provide physical, social, and security care. They should, however, make the spiritual care of the residents a primary concern by inviting and welcoming them into the life of the local congregation.

Where such facilities do not now exist, the church should consider the possibility of creating cooperative or communal households where the more severely disabled could live with the less disabled in a caring and sharing atmosphere.

The Issue: Theological and Continuing Education

Among the clergy as well as the laity, there exists much prejudice, ignorance, indifference, rejection, and misunderstanding of disability. This may well stem from an unawareness of their own or potential disability. Therefore, the clergy and professional church workers need to be educated to a conscious awareness of their own inadequacies as well as the inadequacies of the people to whom they minister.

The Implications:

Formalized seminary training and continuing education ought not be an either/or matter — classroom/parish life, knowledge/experience, mind/heart — but a matter of *both-and*. In the seminary classroom, the would-be pastor or church worker ought to explore the full implications of every doctrine of the Christian faith for an inclusive ministry. Field training and experience in seminary education and continuing education should bring potential pastors and church workers into hospitals, prisons, institutions, group homes, retirement homes, and all other centers of outreach. It should further bring them into an intimate and caring relationship with all disabled persons—whatever the disability.

Pastors, church workers, and congregation members should also recognize their responsibility toward the disabled—both those in the pew and those not in the pew who have excluded themselves or have been excluded by attitudes or architectural barriers. The goal should be to develop an awareness of the uniqueness of each individual in the eyes of God and of his/her special contributions to the body of Christ, the congregation.

The Issue: Interaction of Persons with Disabilities within the Ministry of The ALC

Once the removal of the attitudinal and architectural barriers has permitted persons with disabilities to enter into the life of the congregation, every effort

should be made to promote the interaction of these individuals and their families within the ministry of the church.

The Implications:

Youth groups, Sunday schools, daily vacation Bible schools, and fellowship organizations within the church should be encouraged to include persons with disabilities in all of their activities. Where necessary, special materials should be provided for worship and/or study to persons with language and/or learning disabilities. All materials of the church should be made available in large print, braille, on tape, etc.

Current publications and media presentations distributed by the church should be revised to heighten awareness of all disabilities. This can be accomplished by using illustrations of people of varying ages, races, sexes, and differing disabilities. All future materials, including films, filmstrips, television productions, etc., should be communicationally accessible.

When specific needs cannot be met by currently available educational and worship materials, congregations should draw on their own creativity to meet these needs. For example—providing readers on tape, note takers for hearing impaired persons, or large print bulletins and hymn sheets.

Congregations should also recognize that persons with disabilities and their families have experience and knowledge which could be of value to other disabled and nondisabled persons. These individuals should be identified and called upon to offer assistance to others facing similar situations.

The Issue: Involvement of Social Service Agencies and Institutions of The ALC

Social service agencies and institutions of the church receiving federal funds for parts of their programs and services are required to become physically and programmatically accessible under regulation 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Those agencies and institutions of The American Lutheran Church which are not legally required to be accessible need to look at their moral responsibility to become accessible.

The Implications:

All offices and agencies of The American Lutheran Church, and all district offices of the church should be made accessible or moved to accessible facilities. All educational institutions of the church should also be reminded of their responsibility to make their programs and facilities accessible. Because few agencies, offices, or institutions of the church have funds to make the necessary changes in facilities or programs, financial assistance for modification in building structures should be made available by the national church.

All conferences and meetings of The American Lutheran Church should be held in accessible facilities and should be communicationally accessible for visually and hearing impaired persons.

Social service agencies should provide consciousness raising and leadership training for professional staffs, pastors, and lay persons. Equal opportunity for the employment of disabled persons on their staffs must also be affirmed.

The professional staffs of the social service agencies should provide support groups for disabled persons and their families. They could also provide training for congregational members to facilitate support groups within the congregational setting.

It is suggested that all districts of the church appoint an individual to be responsible as a resource person within each district. This person should be knowledgeable about architectural and communication barriers and his/her services should be made available to all congregations or institutions of the district.

**C. AN A B C PRIMER OF FAITH
FOR
THE CHILDREN OF ACCESS**

"This was according to the eternal purpose which he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and confidence of access through our faith in him" (Ephesians 3:11-12).

A Deed knocks first at Thought
And then—it knocks at Will—
That is the manufacturing spot
And Will at Home and well

It then goes out an Act
Or is entombed so still
That only to the ear of God
Its Doom is audible—

Emily Dickinson

ACCESS, BOLDNESS, CONFIDENCE
through our faith in **CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD!**

ACCESS!

Q. So the Church of Jesus Christ has an Open Door Policy, then?

A. *If a church does not have an Open Door Policy, it is not a Church of Jesus Christ.*

"Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut!" (Revelation 3:8)

Q. And heaven is ACCESSIBLE?

A. *The geography and architecture of heaven we do not know. But this we know—it is totally ACCESSIBLE! It has no barriers whatsoever, no narrow-hearted discriminations, no hidebound prejudices. Heaven makes no cruel distinctions—for heaven is the kingdom of love.*

Q. Are you SURE of this? Is the Church of Jesus Christ that wholesale and indiscriminate? ACCESSIBLE to everyone? And heaven, too?

A. *Yes, truly! In truth, in very truth! The Church of Jesus Christ and God's heaven are ACCESSIBLE to ALL.*

ALL!

Q. Is there evidence in Scripture for this?

A. *The gospel of Christ "is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith" (Romans 1:16).*

"For ALL shall know me, from the least of them to the greatest" (Hebrews 8:11).

Q. If ALL are indeed children of ACCESS by faith in Christ Jesus, then why—oh, why—why have churches and church people raised physical, mental, and spiritual barriers to ACCESS? Why have they made fellow human beings whose disablements are so severe and visible as to set them apart (avoidance persons), persons to be shunned or shut away? Why, oh why, the prevailing attitudes?

The ones we flaunt.

The ones we disguise.

The ones we hide.

The ones we try to hide and can't.

"If she had more faith, she would not be blind."

"It's too bad he's paralyzed for life, but it's the Lord's punishment. After all, he was drunk when he crashed."

"Let the handicapped find a church that is already without steps. After all, they can't expect us to go to all the expense of remodeling just for them!"

"People like that should stay home! Do they know how uncomfortable they make the rest of us feel?"

"We absolutely will not have people like that living in our community or going to our church!"

If we are ALL children of ACCESS, why, then, these attitudes?

A. *Those are indeed foolish, sickly, sinful attitudes. All of them are invalid or invalid. They are all-too-common. But they are also all-too-human, marks of our humanness. We are not just bodies, you know. We are minds and spirits as well.*

What perilous property it has proven to be! What strange disabilities we do get! What queer and chronic diseases! What crippling attitudes! All because we are that wonderful-fearful union of three unlikes: body, mind, and spirit. All because we are human!

CREATOR

Q. How absurd! How could the Creator ever think that it would work! Did he not foresee when he handed our beings over to us—did he not foresee—

deafness and dullness of hearing

indifferent and dull-to-reason minds

deaf-to-Spirit spirits

cataracts and blindness
mental myopia and obtuseness
mole-eyed spirits

stunted, dwarfed bodies
small and narrow minds
shrivelled and puny spirits

maimed, lamed, shattered, paralyzed bodies and brains
callous, unfeeling, palsied minds
sluggish and comatose spirits

atrophy and dystrophy of the muscles
of the body, the mind, the spirit

and all the pain and pains!
Body pain, mental suffering, spiritual anguish—!

Did not the Creator foresee what a mess we humans would make
of things?

CHOICE

A. *It was the risk he chose to take, the amazing gift he chose to give, the amazing compliment he chose to make to human beings—to give them the gift of free will. The gift of CHOICE.*

God did not give his animal creatures the wonderful and terrible gift of freedom, the frightful freedom to be a self. (The only way to be! The only way to be human!) God did not give animals CHOICE.

This is why God's animal family does not have ologies and doxies. This is why:

*Dogs do not avow-wow dogma.
Cats do not have a catechism.
Spiders do not spin theology.
Whales do not need a creed.
The fox is neither orthodox nor heterodox.*

Only God's human family has the freedom and fun and fear and trembling of CHOICE.

Q. Did God the Creator hand our unruly beings over to us and abscond? Is God the Great Absence?

A. *According to his eternal purpose, we have ACCESS to him through faith. "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Hebrews 11:1. Jesus said to the doubting Thomas: "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."*

Only God's human family has BELIEF and UNBELIEF.

BELIEF

*Only human beings can pray and do pray:
Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief!*

Q. What is our faith? What do we human beings believe?

A. *We BELIEVE in God the Father almighty and all-loving—
We BELIEVE that he has a Plan and patterns galore.
Many of his patterns have perished, but his Plan proceeds
as it has proceeded for trillions of years.*

ABLE

*We BELIEVE that God created all human beings ABLE
ABLE-bodied, ABLE-minded, ABLE-spirited—
ABLE to have loving physical union
ABLE to have loving mental union
ABLE to have loving spiritual union.*

This brief life of unblemished ABLEness was called Eden.

*We BELIEVE that God gave us the tremendous compliment of
CHOICE—and we lost Eden. The scene of the crime is not impor-
tant, but somewhere and sometime in God's eons of time we BE-
LIEVE that a conscious creature we call Adam became more in-
terested in self than in his Creator. (Ah, Adam, why were you not
more adamant!)*

*By this Fall, this Free-Fall, this Freely-Chosen-Fall from God's Plan
for us, we BELIEVE that we became dis-abled—dis-abled in body,
dis-abled in mind, dis-abled in spirit—became totally disabled to
live in love and harmony with God now or ever and forever.*

*We BELIEVE that NEVERTHELESS
God so loved the world that He gave his only Son
that whoever BELIEVES in him should not perish
but have eternal life.*

*We BELIEVE that God's crucified and resurrected Son
did not leave us desolate when he left the world
but has sent us his Spirit, the Spirit of his Father,
to empower our weak, handicapped, disabled selves.*

*"Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to do far
more abundantly than all that we ask or think, to him be glory in
the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever.
AMEN" (Ephesians 3:20).*

AMEN!

Q. Not so fast with the AMEN! What about limitations? What about the inevitables and the unavoidableables? What about the impossibles and the incurables?

BEGINNINGS

BECOMING

- A. *We who are limited by impossibilities BELIEVE in the possibility given us by his Spirit of new BEGINNINGS. We BELIEVE that in and through his Son, Jesus Christ, God has made ACCESSIBLE to all his dis-abled children the possibility of continual BECOMING. And because we BELIEVE all this—*

*We are not afraid to own a body.
We are not afraid to own a mind.
We are not afraid to own a spirit.
We are not afraid of whatever dis-abilities of
body, mind, and spirit to which we may fall prey.
He has not left us desolate!
We are Children of Access!*

- Q. Can you give me your word for it?

CHRIST

BIBLE

- A. *No need for my word! CHRIST was, CHRIST is that word. The whole exciting, sensational, and unabridged story is in the BIBLE! In the beginning was the Word . . . and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us . . . To ALL who receive him he gives power to become the children of God, the children of ACCESS. And from his fullness we all receive grace upon grace— and the BOLDNESS and CONFIDENCE of ACCESS through our faith in him.*

BOLDNESS

CONFIDENCE

*Christ is that Word.
Christ is the whole alphabet of the Word.
From A to Z (we stop at C!)
Christ is the alpha and omega.
He himself said it.
In CHRIST and by CHRIST we are saved—*

- Q. Saved for WHAT?
To get to heaven at last?

- A. *Heaven can wait!
It does so without our asking!
Christ saves our self-centered, power-mad, ambition-ridden, lust-driven selves—from ourselves.*

Christ saves our dated and dis-abled selves—from ourselves.

Christ forgives us and cures us of self-loathing.

Q. Being saved sounds pretty self-centered! Is that what it means to be saved? To be saved for more self-centeredness, more selfishness?

A. *Christ frees us from all that self-centeredness and selfishness which has made our love-ABLENESS a crippled capacity, an imper-ABILITY. Christ frees us from all the anxieties and guilt feelings we have because we know, consciously or unconsciously, that we are crippled creatures, unABLE or weakly able to relate to others in love. Freed from sinful, anxious, and guilty concentration upon ourselves, we are free to turn to others in love and concern for them, not for ourselves.*

CHANGE

Q. What about CHANGE? Millions upon millions all over the world are being disabled in body or mind or spirit by injustice, oppression, dis-abling conditions. Is there no hope for CHANGE?

CROSS

A. *The CROSS is the cue, the clue, the key to CHANGE. "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not NULLIFY the grace of God. . ." (Galatians 2:20-21).*

Christ did not and does not save us to go around and about nullifying his grace in the world. Christ saves us to CHANGE THE WORLD, beginning with the members of his CHURCH, the CONGREGATION and the CLERGY.

CHURCH CONGREGATION CLERGY

Q. Sometimes some of us think the CHURCH, the CONGREGATION, and the CLERGY are not trustworthy pillars of hope. Indeed, some think them a rather hopeless bunch.

A. *That, my friend, is the crucial question, boiled down to the essence of many questions.*

Can the Saved-in-Christ, the children-of-Access, become Christs to their neighbors?

Can the Saved-in-Christ, the children-of-Access, help lighten the weight, the freight of cares their neighbors carry? (Some of us carry a ton of woe as if it were an ounce. Some of us carry an ounce of woe as if it were a ton.)

Can the Saved-in-Christ, the children-of-Access, bring light and love to the sorely-afflicted?

Can the Saved-in-Christ, the children-of-Access, allow the sorely-afflicted to bring their special gifts of light and love to them, who perhaps are deaf, dumb, and blind to their own disablements? Can those who feel themselves so very capable be enabled by the Spirit to become teachable, reachable, and accessible by and to the very ones whose visible incapacities make them seem incapable of having much to give to the "capable"?

"The more limited and the weaker the powers which it can command, the more intensely the soul seems to use them" (Friedrich von Bodelschwing).

Can the Children of Access have the BOLDNESS AND THE CONFIDENCE of ACCESS through faith in CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD to make themselves and their churches and their congregations ACCESSIBLE TO ALL, for ALL have the same ACCESS through FAITH IN HIM?

CAUSE

If so, then there is CAUSE FOR CELEBRATION!

CELEBRATION

"Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations; forever and ever. AMEN!

AMEN!

Edna Hong

