

# DISABILITY NEWS

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 **UnitingCare**  
South Australia

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*from the Editor....*

## The Language of Relationships

### Greetings.

Various articles in this edition relate to the issue of people with disabilities and relationships. In times gone by people with disabilities have been variously described as idiots, mad, insane and sub-human, to name but a few oppressive and isolating terms. Sexually, people with disabilities have been, and, in some quarters still are, treated as asexual beings. Such labelling and thinking has contributed to the exclusion of people with disabilities from normal, healthy social activities and relationships.

Today, whilst such exclusionary thinking and practise lingers - including within the church - it is gradually being challenged by a thinking and practice that describes embracing relationships with people with disability in which genuine friendship replaces charity, and a mutuality of care replaces pity.

There is still such a long way to go, but the journey towards truly embracing relationships is vital if, as Jean Vanier, founder of the L'Arche communities, says, we are to become "fully human" ("Becoming Human").

Feel free to share this newsletter with your friends. Email me (address below) with the names of anyone you wish to have added to the mailing list.

Enjoy the read.

*Rev Trevor Whitney*

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## Relationship as Presence — Molly's Story

I sit next to Molly in her dining area as I've sat beside her on many previous occasions. Molly is a gentle, elderly woman with a significant level of intellectual impairment. Whilst she does sometimes utter a few isolated words, and whilst she sometimes exhibits a truly charming smile, few of her communications appear to be responses to anything I may have said or done. To me they seem to come from private spaces deeply embedded within her mind.

I introduce myself to her once again. Amidst her growing frailty and senility, exacerbated by her intellectual impairment, she barely recognises my presence, and I'm sure has no idea who I am.

She seems content to have me sit alongside her, though her facial expression often suggests that she is somewhere very far away in thought or feeling.

I continue to sit, mostly in silence. I look through the dining room doors and see a staff member with head buried in resident files. Another staff member enters the dining room and gently assists a resident to the toilet. There's a volunteer accompanying a resident back to the dining room after a relaxation session. They are all doing something, achieving a functional goal, fulfilling their professional or voluntary, required or self-imposed, responsibilities.

In a moment of self-doubt I feel I'm wasting my time. *I mean, what am I actually doing?* Molly isn't rejecting me, but she seems mostly in her own world..... And I'm here not really doing anything.

And yet, beyond doing I remind myself I am being present. As I slowly recover from my doubting state of mind I remind myself how, beyond words, beyond tasks, and beyond intellectual awareness, unhurried, attentive presence is so crucial to the human need for companionship and community. I remind myself of how quiet human companionship has enriched me when supposed words of wisdom were futile.

I remind myself how unhurried presence is so foundational to understanding and experiencing the love of God. I think of the Psalmist who said: "Be still and know that I am God."

Just being there, valuing someone for who they are, not what they do, nor what I can do for them. It's so important.

And I sit a little longer with Molly as she continues to gaze far away .

Rev. Trevor Whitney.

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## Embrace Me Stranger

Seen on the street  
by the eye of some camera  
the headline might read

*Restricted*  
**ADULT MALE, MULTIPLE DISABILITIES**  
*handicapped person*  
**INVALID**  
*mental illness*  
**IMMOBILISED**  
*23 YEAR OLD,*  
**LIMITED ABILITIES**

the headline is lying  
it leaves out so much!  
it excludes because it is frightened

You, I, we,  
are more than the sum total of our parts  
look! the swirl & coil of a miracle is in your skin!  
Each of us bears the imprint of the sacred  
(of the spirit, of God)

So welcome, sweet weave, bring your name  
come in, good song, bring your breath  
embrace me stranger,  
tell me your story.

Shelley Miller

Exclusion & Embrace—3rd Australasian Conference re spirituality & disability  
Melbourne, October 18—21, 2001

## a prayer of Embrace

Loving and All-Embracing God,  
you who created  
all people in your image,  
you who regard  
all people as precious,  
direct our communities  
everywhere  
to hear the stories  
of those who experience  
exclusion and oppression  
because of their impairments.

Challenge your church  
to stretch out her arms wide  
to people who live  
with disability,  
who so often experience  
prejudice, misunderstanding  
and indifference.

May your warm  
and enthusing Spirit  
overcome feelings of charity  
with acts of  
mutual respect and care.  
Replace fear of difference  
with joy in diversity.  
And substitute comfort  
in sameness  
with community  
of vast possibilities.

In Jesus name we pray.  
Amen.

### ..... on inclusion

**“ If we start to include the disadvantaged in our lives and enter into heartfelt relationships with them, they will change things in us. They will break down the prejudices and protective walls that gave rise to exclusion in the first place.”**

Jean Vanier, “Becoming Human”, p.84

\* Jean Vanier is the founder of L'Arche, which are small-scale faith communities for people with intellectual disabilities which today can be found around the world.





## Becoming an Inclusive Church for Children with Disabilities

*Daphne Quadrio has an Associate Diploma in Applied Science – Recreation, and has had many years of experience running community programs that included children with special needs. She is based at the SA Mission Resourcing Network's Resource Centre for Children's and Family Ministry Parafield Gardens Uniting Church Ph 8285 7104*

*The following is adapted from a lecture Daphne gave.*

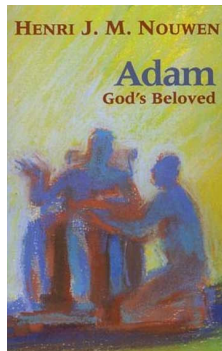
### **Question: Why is it important to involve children with disabilities into the life of the church?**

- ◆ Because God loves children, **all children!** Jesus said 'Let the children come to me. Do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God' (Mark 10:13 –16).
- ◆ Because children with a disability have the same feelings, range of emotions, abilities, gifts, learning capabilities, aspirations, personal needs, dreams and desires as other children, to learn, make friends, be accepted, belong, be valued, be listened to and experience life and God to the fullest!
- ◆ Because children with disabilities are as capable as other children of developing a close and loving relationship with God.
- ◆ Because the church has a responsibility to grow, support and nurture the Christian and spiritual development of each child.
- ◆ Because it transforms the church family as a whole and creates a spirit of diversity, compassion, tolerance, acceptance and an ability to be truly welcoming to all people.
- ◆ Because churches have to. The Disability Discrimination Act (1992) protects all people with a disability and ensures that community groups (including churches) make every effort for equal access and opportunities for involvement.

Adapted from article in KUCA News, March 2003, p.28  
Used with permission

# Reviews Reviews Reviews

## "Adam: God's Beloved" Henri Nouwen



HarperCollins Publishers  
Blackburn, 1997  
\$9.95

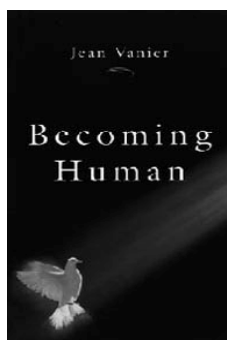
available through Pauline Books & Media

In his final book prior to his death Henri Nouwen, Dutch priest and pastor of the L'Arche Daybreak community in Toronto, Canada, describes his experience of becoming a carer for Adam, a young man at the Daybreak community with severe physical and intellectual impairments. For months Nouwen assists Adam with his most basic and intimate daily needs, caring for someone so seemingly incapable of helping himself.

Over time Nouwen is transformed in his theological thinking, moving from seeing himself as a servant to Adam, to seeing the Incarnate Christ in Adam who reaches out to him. Along the way he is challenged to see that he shares with Adam in the brokenness of humanity and the beloved nature of all God's creatures.

*A simple yet profound biography that invites the reader to consider the sense in which we all share in that broken yet beloved relationship with God.*

## "Becoming Human" Jean Vanier



Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd.  
Toronto, 1998  
\$25.95

available through Pauline Books & Media

Vanier describes this book as being about "the liberation of the human heart from the tentacles of chaos and loneliness, and from those fears that provoke us to exclude and reject others (p.5)." In speaking of those who are marginalized by society, including those who have disabilities, as "the excluded", he makes a case that as a society we become truly human when we overcome our fears and embrace those we would otherwise choose to keep at a distance. As Vanier states, "the excluded ... live certain values that we all need to discover and to live ourselves before we can become truly human (p.84)." Such values include a call away from individualism and prejudice that serve to create exclusionary practices, towards qualities that embody a sense of community, such as mutual trust, forgiveness, and a capacity to listen to each other.

*A very thoughtful and readable book for those prepared to journey from exclusion to embrace.*

### The Wrong Stone

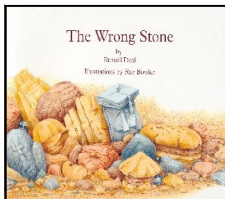
By **Russell Deal**

Illustrated by **Ray Bowler**

Published by Solutions Press 2002

Hardcover \$24.50

'I want you to build me a wall with only perfect stones,' said the big architect. All the stones tried

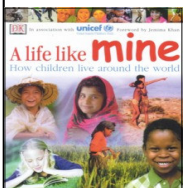


to put their best faces forward. They hid their ugly bits. They tried to climb to the top of the pile. But there was one stone that didn't seem to fit anywhere...and all the others were laughing at him. What is it like to be different, to stand out, to feel unwanted? The Wrong Stone knows...will it be the crusher and the end of the road for him?

A truly important book for those who feel 'wrong' or different or unwanted.

### A life like mine

How children live around the world



Published by **Dorling Kindersley**  
in association with  
**unicef** © 2002

Available from some Oxfam shops, and through Dymocks or any good bookstore.

RRP: \$39.90 Hard cover

Basing each section on particular rights of the child, the book looks at issues for children like housing, food and hunger, disability and disease, education, ideas and opinions, happiness and the future, religion, identity and refugees.

*adapted from article that appeared in  
New Times (Uniting Church SA monthly publication) May 2006*

A UCA agency, assisting people with disabilities to participate in the workforce, says its clients are watching the new Welfare to Work legislation closely.

UnitingCare Wesley Port Adelaide's Employment Access service provides supported and open employment opportunities across South Australia for nearly 425 people at any one time, most of whom have mental health issues.

Manager Mark Waters said the new legislation is causing real anxiety for many clients.

"We are working with people who experience conditions such as paranoia, anxiety, depression, schizophrenia and obsessiveness and the uncertainty surrounding this new legislation is not helpful."

People currently receiving the Disability Support Pension (DSP) will continue to receive it; however there will be changes for people with a disability who have claimed income support from 11<sup>th</sup> May 2005.

These people will be required to undergo a Job Capacity Assessment. If they can work 15 hours or more a week without support, they are likely to receive Enhanced Newstart or Youth Allowance, (both payments are less than the DSP). There will also be increased reporting requirements and mutual obligation placed upon the Enhanced Newstart recipients.

We are concerned about the assessment process and whether it will identify people who suffer from episodic mental health issues," said Mark.

We can work with someone for many months before discovering how they can react when under stress.

There also needs to be processes and services in place to provide training, post placement support and adequate income support to ensure people can make a successful transition into the workplace.

Another major issue is the stigma against mental illness in the workplace and the community," he said.

It is all very well to have legislation to encourage greater participation in the workforce, but will employers support and accept people with disabilities?"

We'll be watching the implementation and roll out of the legislation from July 1<sup>st</sup> with interest," said Mark.

"At this stage it is unclear whether the new system will deliver incentives, training support and a safety net for people with disabilities."

"Without these things I suspect people with disabilities will not be keen to give up their DSP in order to participate more fully in the workforce."