



DisAbility Ministries Committee of The United Methodist Church

Summer 2014

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Bishop Peggy Johnson
autographing the Mission
u study book

The **VOICE** of the United Methodist Disability Connection

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Greetings in Christ!

Welcome to all the new readers who joined us through the United Methodist Women (UMW) Assembly 2014, the Light the Fire conference, and various Mission u events and annual conferences. We are delighted that you are interested in learning more about ways our church can become more welcoming and hospitable to all of us, including those of us with disabilities. We hope you will share about your ministries with us, and will encourage others to subscribe to the newsletter. This newsletter is our primary tool for communicating with all of you.

This issue focuses on the UMW disability study at Mission u events being held throughout the connection. If you didn't get a chance to attend this year, do plan to go next summer. If you participated this year, please spread the word and get others in your church excited about attending. Don't assume that people know about Mission u!

The materials were created to be used on the local and district level, so take what you learned back to your church and hold classes or one-time events. The Mission u study provides an incredible opportunity for all of us to work

together to increase disability awareness, accessibility, and advocacy in our churches. Thanks for playing your part.

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Lynn Swedberg, Editor

Behind the Scenes: A Few Glimpses from the Making of the Mission u Disability Study

Program Proposal: In March, 2010, Rev. Dr. Eric Pridmore and Rev. Dr. Evy McDonald,



Eric Pridmore

co-chairpersons of the UM Association of Ministers with Disabilities, submitted a proposal requesting consideration of disability as a topic for a future United Methodist Women School of Missions study. They cited statistics and the need for the church to address the many barriers to participation still present twenty years after implementation of the Americans with Disabilities Act. They called disability "a common and ever-present experience that needs further biblical, theological, and pastoral study" and suggested resource persons and texts to help develop the study, should it be chosen.



Evy McDonald

Study Book: The first resource person named in the proposal was Bishop Peggy Johnson who has called herself the "disability bishop" since she was elected. She accepted the job of writing the manuscript despite her more than full-time duties as bishop in the Eastern Pennsylvania and the Peninsula Delaware annual conferences. Teaching a course on "Topics in Pastoral Care: Disabilities and the Church" at Drew University Theological School helped her focus on the subject. She drew on experiences from throughout her career to provide stories and illustrations to make the topics come alive.

Addressing the Practicalities: Cheryl Trent, Mission u coordinator, realized that the accommodations being requested so that people with disabilities could participate in Mission u this year need to be in place at all events, for every class, each year. She requested training materials to help planners learn how to create accessible events. Lynn Swedberg developed a PowerPoint presentation that was shared during leaders' training and is available online for future use. See the Resource section below.

Disability Awareness Skit: Leslie Bledsoe served as adviser for the Leader's Guide.

During one phone call she shared about invasive assistance that she often receives from strangers. While superficially funny, the attempts to be helpful represent a lack of awareness of disability etiquette. Lynn interviewed persons with other disabilities who had no shortage of similar experiences. She wove the stories into a conversation set in a restaurant to create the Disability Awareness Skit for Session One.

Cover design: Emily Miller, creative director for United Methodist Women, designed the study book cover using symbols of accessibility. In her research, she encountered a new



Leslie Bledsoe



The New Accessible Icon

logo for accessibility and learned that many people dislike the familiar wheelchair icon because it is so passive. She came up with the idea of overlaying the new logo on top of the old symbol to highlight the dialogue in the disability community. The creators of the new graphic want to spread awareness and use of the updated icon. You can download the symbol from the Accessible Icon Project [website](#), or learn more about it from the linked [handout](#).

What Happens at Mission u?

Formerly called UMW School of Missions, most conference events offer sixteen hours of immersion into several topics in addition to worship and plenary sessions. Some conferences offer abbreviated sessions for people on tight schedules. This year 82 Mission u events are being held across the US. Most are in English, but several conferences also offer courses in Spanish or Korean. Anyone is welcome to attend Mission u - not just members of local UMW units. Women and men connect through classes and meals together in settings such as camps and college campuses.



Altar display featuring medical devices

Every year new materials are developed and course leaders certified through intensive reading and attendance at a regional training event. Disability was designated as an Issue study. Each year there is also a Geographic and a Spiritual Growth topic. Some conferences offer a study for children and/ or youth during the adult event.

Leaders engage the participants in discussion and a variety of activities, realizing that each of us learns best through different methods. For some students the chance to create a

poster or bumper sticker about inclusion was the highlight of the time together. Others offered their talents in developing skits or leading music. Shared personal experiences about one's own disability or that of a loved one brought growth in awareness.

The goal of each Mission u is to move beyond head knowledge to transformation of our hearts and lives as we enter into mission in our communities and beyond. Many participants left the sessions determined to go home and improve accessibility in their churches or conferences, or to reach out to particular community groups. The class is only the beginning.



Leaders share tactilely accessible posters

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Update on the DisAbility Ministries Committee of The United Methodist Church

The DisAbility Committee of The United Methodist Church exists to help you in your efforts to make your church or agency more accessible and inclusive. Our focus this year is to

actively promote the Mission u disability study. Our booth at the United Methodist Women Assembly 2014 in Louisville was popular, and the workshops we held there on "DisAbility-Practicing Inclusion" filled quickly. We held our annual meeting in May in conjunction with the "Light the Fire - The Fullness of Christ: A Church for all People" conference at Ginghamburg church in Ohio. We also had the privilege of contributing a number of articles to the *New World Outlook* [May/ June disability issue](#).



2014 Committee members

We are here to serve as a resource for you. We hope you will get in touch with us for information and to share your ministries.

Regional representatives are:

North Central: Debby Newman (Minnesota) and Terry McDorman CLM (Northern Illinois)

Northeastern: Rev. Jackie Burgess (Greater New Jersey) and Deaconess Barb Skarbowski (Eastern Pennsylvania)

South Central: Rev. Russell Ewell (Missouri) and Rev. Justin Hancock (North Texas)

Southeastern: Rev. Tizzy Von Trapp

Walker (Virginia) and Allyssa Green (North Georgia)

Western: Sharon McCart (California-Pacific) and Howard Guetherman (Desert Southwest)

Other members: Patricia Magyar, Executive Secretary for Health for GBGM, staffs our committee and supports our work in many ways. Lynn Swedberg serves as disability consultant and Tim Vermande as media consultant and webmaster. Rev. Dr. Eric Pridmore is the liaison from the Association of Ministers with Disabilities and Rev. Dr. Tom Hudspeth is consultant for and liaison to the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Ministries.

Contact any of us through the [committee e-mail address](#).

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Upcoming Events

9/14/14 Beyond Accessibility, Living Out the Call to be the Church St. Louis, MO

The Values Team of the Missouri Conference is holding an evening community-wide panel and discussion on inclusion in society and in the church at Salem in Ladue UMC. Agencies and organizations are invited to host free information booths. For more information contact [Rev. Russell Ewell](#).

9/12-13/14 FUSE 2014 Conference Westerville, OH

Sponsored by Joni and Friends Ohio, this conference presents Christian perspectives on Foundations of Bioethics, Unseen Disabilities, Social Action and Church Advocacy, and Equipping for Disability Ministry. Workshops cover a variety of practical topics. The event will be held at Grace Polaris Church. Contact [Joni and Friends](#) to register or for more information.

11/8/14 Accessibility Awareness Conference Barrington, IL

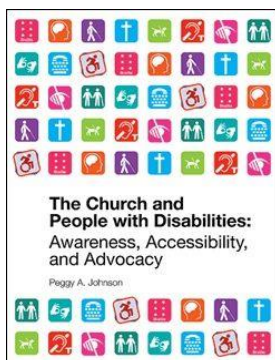
The Accessibility Ministries committee of the Northern Illinois Conference is planning a full day conference with a plenary session, breakout workshops, and vendors and agencies providing informational displays. Contact [Terry McDorman](#) for details.

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Resources

Publications written for the Mission u disability study

***The Church and People with Disabilities: Awareness, Accessibility, and Advocacy* by Peggy A. Johnson**



Available through [Mission Resources](#). Thirteen chapters cover topics including biblical perspectives, Deaf and hard of hearing people, ordination, and veterans with disabilities. The book provides practical information geared to help readers make changes in their faith communities. Available in

English, Spanish, or Korean in hard copy or [Kindle](#) formats.

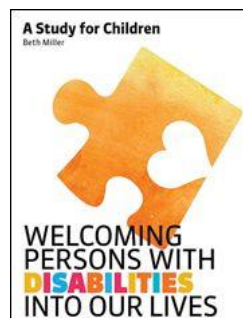
Peggy Johnson is bishop of the Eastern Pennsylvania and Peninsula/Delaware annual conferences. She served Deaf churches and worked with people from the Deaf community for many years as a pastor.

Leaders Guide: The Church and People with Disabilities

Available for download at no charge in [English](#), [Spanish](#), and [Korean](#). The guide provides activities and discussion questions to help engage readers of the study text. Divided into 4 two-hour sessions, there is more than enough material for conducting an eight-week adult or youth Sunday School class or Bible study. Written by Lynn Swedberg, disability consultant for the DisAbility Ministries Committee of the United Methodist Church, with Leslie Bledsoe as adviser.

***Disabilities and Our Response: A Study for Youth* and**

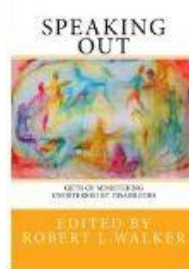
Welcoming Persons with Disabilities into Our Lives: A Study for Children



Using the image the jigsaw puzzle, author Beth Moore introduces children and youth to aspects of the disability experience that help them see the big picture. The lessons are taught through activities including crafts, drama, simulation, and games. Beth is a curriculum writer and volunteer with the [National Ability Center](#) in Ogden Utah.

Other Study Resources

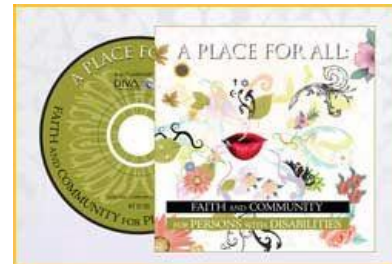
[DisAbility Ministries Committee Mission u Webpage](#) has extensive supplemental resources, including handouts and a PowerPoint presentation outline for study leaders and those who want to teach the course in their churches or districts.



Speaking Out: Ministering Undeterred by Disabilities, edited by Robert Walker. Written for the disability study by twenty-five mostly United Methodist ministers with disabilities, this compilation shares stories of both inclusion and exclusion in our churches. By reading the first-hand narratives you will gain a better understanding of what life is like for individuals living with disabilities including blindness, bipolar illness, hearing loss, cerebral palsy, and traumatic brain injury. Available in [hard copy](#) or [Kindle](#) versions.

DVD: *A Place for All*

Produced by Diva Communications, this hour-long DVD uses interfaith examples to call the church to inclusion. Several segments highlight the work of Bishop Johnson. Clips were selected to complement the study sessions, but the DVD can also be used in its entirety. Obtain a copy through [UMW Mission Resources](#).



New World Outlook: [May/June 2014 issue](#) - A Church for People of All Abilities

response: May 2014 issue - The Church and People with Disabilities

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We hope you are as excited as we are about the Mission u study resources and all the ways to use them! Let us know about your experiences, and offer suggestions for making the program even better next year.

The next issue of the newsletter will be about inclusive, intergenerational ministries. A future issue will cover churches that are supportive to those of us with mental health concerns. We are always looking for authors to share what their church is doing to make a difference.

Peace,

DisAbility Ministries Committee of The United Methodist Church

Contact us through the [Committee email address](#).