

FROM SERVICE TO RIGHTS:
THE MOVEMENT FOR DISABILITY RIGHTS
IN THE AMERICAN METHODIST TRADITION

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Among the most recent developments in the field of historical inquiry is the recording of the lives and events of various minority groups. This is as true for people with disabilities as for persons from racial, ethnic, and gender groups. Recent authors have devoted considerable attention to the writing of the history of various disability groups including deafness, deformity, and mental illness.¹ This has been dramatized recently by the PBS series, "Beyond Affliction—The Disability History Project."²

The development of historical materials on the disabled within Christian churches has been a particular concern for the author as he has sought to develop materials within the mainline churches including the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the United Church of Christ, and The United Methodist Church.³ This article documents the major events in The United Methodist Church and its predecessors as a way of informing both those involved in disability work within the churches as well as those who may be interested in comparing the history of disability affairs to other minority groups.⁴

The significance of this topic is especially heightened by the legislative changes made by the 1996 General Conference of The United Methodist Church with respect to disability issues. Meeting in Denver, Colorado, the legislative assembly is noted for several achievements, among them the overhaul of the Representative Ministry and the continuing debate on the nature of baptism and the church.⁵ However, there is one achievement which,

¹For example a recent anthology of articles see Lennard J. Davis, ed., *The Disability Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1997) 9–152.

²Produced by Laurie Block and Jay Allison and available on video tape through Public Broadcast Audience Services, Lyons, Colorado 80540.

³These have been sponsored by their respective denomination agencies which deal with disability issues. The present work is an outgrowth of grant provided by the General Commission on Archives and History, The United Methodist Church through special funds made available from the General Council on Finance and Administration.

⁴See also Kirk Alan VanGilder, "Deaf America's Encounter with Methodism: A Brief Look at a Culture and a Church," *Methodist History*, 36:4 (July, 1998).

⁵See "Ministry Committee to Handle One Third of All Petitions," *Daily Christian Advocate*, 1996: Vol. 3, No. 1, 1.

while perhaps unnoticed, is of no less significance than those items attracting the attention of wider audiences.

During its meeting lasting from Tuesday, April 17 through Saturday, April 27, 1996, the General Conference adopted several legislative proposals pertaining to disability issues including: the changing of all references to persons with handicapping conditions to either people or persons with disabilities; the adding of people/persons with disabilities to various lists of groups to be included for special attention by the church at various levels; the strengthening of provisions to make all church facilities and meeting places accessible; and continuing provisions for funding of outreach programs, especially among the deaf.⁶

Also of great significance was the intensive lobbying effort by numerous groups concerned about disability issues in the church including: the United Methodist Congress for the Deaf; the Association of Physically Challenged Ministers of the United Methodist Church (APCM); the North Central Jurisdiction Accessibility Advocates Association (NCJAAA); the General Boards of Global Ministries, Discipleship, Church and Society, and Higher Education and Ministry; and various individuals devoted to particular disability issues. It should be noted that many petitions to the General Conference came from Annual Conference endorsements of their respective disability groups (i.e., Divisions, Committees, Task Forces, etc.) whose power within their areas was sufficient to win the support to forward them on to the highest legislative body of The United Methodist Church.⁷

Yet, the real importance of this effort is that it was the culmination (though certainly not the end) of a process by which The United Methodist Church and its predecessors moved from merely serving persons with various disabilities to advocating their rights both outside and within the church. This article focuses on these efforts, especially with respect of the rights of persons with disabilities within the denomination.

I

While the 1960 General Conference of The Methodist Church was to be the first occasion in which petitions (memorials) were acknowledged calling attention to a need for the church to focus attention on the needs of "physically and mentally handicapped children,"⁸ in fact, the church had a long history of serving persons with all types of disabilities.

As early as 1901, the *Methodist Review* carried an article by Raymond Dodge (1871–1942) dealing with the relationship between Christianity and

⁶See Kirk Alan VanGilder, "Deaf America's Encounter with Methodism: A Brief Look at a Culture and a Church," *Methodist History*, 36:4 (July, 1998), 239.

⁷This summary was derived from an analysis of the *Daily Christian Advocate*, 1996: Volumes 1–3.

⁸See the *Journal of the General Conference* (1960), 1529–1530.

mental illness titled, "Christianity and Sanity."⁹ Later on, even into the 1960s, various periodicals of the church carried articles on various topics related to mental illness, Christianity, and the church. While these were often written by non-Methodist authors, these publications were, nevertheless, published and circulated within denominational circles.¹⁰

In terms of organizational activity, Goodwill Industries comes closest to representing the mission thrust of The Methodist Episcopal Church and later The Methodist Church among the disabled up to 1970. It was started in Boston in 1902 by the Reverend Edgar Helms (1863–1942) as an outgrowth of an institutional church serving inner-city residents who had immigrated to America only to find discrimination and poverty in crowded slums. As Helms led this mission, it became apparent that in addition to a massive program of education and relief there needed to be an effort to provide job experience and skills. The concept and organization of Goodwill Industries grew into a full scale workshop program to provide the benefactors of the relief effort a feeling that they had earned the right to purchase clothes and household items. Gradually, the workshop program expanded to include persons with disabilities. And when World War I produced its share of amputees and the paralyzed, Goodwill's role expanded to become a leader in the field of rehabilitation.¹¹

For many years, Goodwill Industries was viewed as a movement within the Methodist tradition. Its leaders and directors were largely ministers in the Methodist Episcopal Church and occasionally in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.¹² As word got around that Helms had great success in his efforts, other cities asked him to help with the expansion of the Goodwill model. Helms also persuaded the Methodist Episcopal Church at the national level to adopt his work as a major mission effort. By 1932, the Board of Home Missions and Church Extension, Department of City Work, listed Goodwill Industries as a Bureau under the directorship of Edgar Helms.¹³ Goodwill was winning recognition for its work in the relief of those caught in the throes of the Depression.¹⁴ However, with the expansion of the movement into many urban areas with the need for support from other religious and community resources, the increasing of the Board to control its work, and its participation in the secular rehabilitation field, Goodwill grad-

⁹*Methodist Review*, Vol. 83, 1901, 882–890.

¹⁰See: Samuel Southard, "Sectarianism and Psychosis," *Religion and Life*, 580–590, Vol. 23, Autumn, 1954 and Harold S. Sanger, "Demonic Possession and Mental Illness," *Religion and Life*, Vol. 36 (Spring, 1967).

¹¹A detailed history of this movement is found in John Fulton Lewis, *Goodwill: For the Love of People* (Washington, D.C.: Goodwill Industries of America, Inc.), 1977.

¹²John Fulton Lewis, *Goodwill: For the Love of People*.

¹³The Methodist Publishing House, *Journal of the General Conference 1932*, 1355.

¹⁴See J. Tremayne Coplestone, *History of Methodist Missions IV: Twentieth Century Perspectives* (New York: The Board of Global Ministries, The United Methodist Church, 1973), 890.

ually separated itself from the church. By the early 1970s, Goodwill Industries was essentially an independent secular organization.¹⁵

II

Around 1960, LaDonna Bogardus of the Department of Christian Education of Children General Board of Education of The Methodist Church and Rosemary Roorbach of the Methodist Publishing House began to collaborate on a series of efforts concerning the Christian education of persons with mental retardation.¹⁶ While the precise reason for Bogardus' interest in the field is unclear, information indicates that she came to her position originally to do children's ministry as early as 1949.¹⁷ With the heightened interest in mental retardation generated, in part, by the presence of John F. Kennedy in the White House whose sister was a person with retardation, and special education in general, Bogardus gradually came to devote nearly all her time to this work. In addition, a number of books and articles began to appear from a variety of religious sources on the subject of the church and the needs of persons with handicapping conditions.¹⁸ In 1959 the National Council of Churches published Marion O. Lerrigo's book entitled *The Mentally Retarded and the Church*.¹⁹ In 1961, two more monographs appeared each published by church publishing enterprises.²⁰

These Christian educators saw the need to provide nurture in the faith in a way in which persons with mental retardation could become full participants in the life of the church. At the grass-roots level, scattered individuals were asking for assistance in their educational efforts. The combination of these factors produced curriculum pieces, training manuals, audio-visuals and numerous articles geared to educating persons at various levels of mental development.

¹⁵John Fulton Lewis, *Goodwill: For the Love of People*, 427-428,

¹⁶Much of the material in this section derives from a group interview with several persons who had, at various times, been connected with this ministry (although in more recent years). The interview was conducted on July 23, 1997 at The United Methodist Publishing House in Nashville, Tennessee.

¹⁷This information was obtained from the jacket cover of *Christian Education for Retarded Children and Youth* authored by Ms. Bogardus in 1963. (See below for a more complete discussion and reference.)

¹⁸The term "handicapped" was used in church literature until relatively recently. The United Methodist Church changed all references in *The Book of Discipline* to the term "persons with disabilities" in the Book of Discipline as the result of the legislative actions of the 1996 General Conference.

¹⁹Marion O. Lerrigo, *The Mentally Retarded in the Church* (New York: National Council of Churches, 1959).

²⁰Janette T. Harrington and Muriel S. Webb, *Who Cares?* (New York: Friendship, 1961). Charles E. Palmer, *The Church and the Exceptional Person* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1961).

An example of this was the work of Ruth McDowell. From 1958 to 1964, McDowell served as Director of Christian Education for the Council of Churches in Youngstown, Ohio.²¹ In 1962, she and Laura Weaver, another Methodist Christian educator, organized and led a Sunday morning class for persons who were mentally retarded, ages 12 and older. After two months, McDowell established a similar class in another part of the city. Before she began these efforts, however, she wrote several leading denominations inquiring about curriculum resources. It was through these contacts that the link with Bogardus was made resulting in the organization of a number of laboratory schools devoted to training teachers in the Christian education for persons with mental retardation around the country.

An aid to this movement was the participation of Bogardus and Roorbach in cooperative publishing efforts facilitated by the National Council of Churches through its Committee on the Christian Education of Exceptional Persons in cooperation with the Cooperative Publication Association. In 1963 Abingdon Press published LaDonna Borgardus', *Christian Education for Retarded Children and Youth*, as the first of what was intended to be a series of publications in which various mainline publishers would take turns in releasing assigned materials.²² Noteworthy, was the input from various ecumenical and secular sources which fit the relative strength of local councils of churches at the time.²³

The *Planbook for the Leader of Children, 1965-1966* published by the General Board of Education and The Methodist Publishing House listed six publications for "persons of special need." In addition to the Bogardus book, it listed Palmer's book, *The Church and the Exceptional Person*, as well as books on the Christian education of the socially handicapped child, the gifted, and camping and music activities for retarded children.²⁴ The following year's *Planbook* listed these same materials along with a new item titled, *Caring for Your Disabled Child*, by Benjamin Spock and Marion O. Lerrigo.²⁵ Later, the Cooperative Publication Association released various curriculum pieces for the Christian education of mentally retarded children and youth. These became the foundations for additional laboratory training schools such as the one held in Lorain, Ohio in the summer of 1972 with Bogardus and McDowell as separate laboratory class instructors. The following year, McDowell joined the staff of The United Methodist General

²¹The information about Ms. McDowell's participation and knowledge of the role of The Methodist Church in efforts to educate persons with mental retardation was taken from a series prepared by Ms. McDowell for the July 25, 1997 meeting at The United Methodist Publishing House.

²²Again, this material was taken from the book jacket.

²³Bogardus, *Christian Education for Retarded Children and Youth* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1963), see Foreword.

²⁴Pamphlet No. 190-BE (Nashville: Graded Press, 1965).

²⁵Published in 1965 by Macmillan.

Board of Discipleship as Associate Director of Interpretation and Field Service where she would continue her work with LaDonna Bogardus. Later, she worked as editor of *The Church School* with some responsibility for disability literature. In 1976 she was appointed Editor of Church School Publications and in that capacity served as a member of the National Council of Churches Committee on Ministries with Persons with Handicapping Conditions.²⁶

In the summer of 1973 a consultation on the Church and Mental Retardation was held at Scarritt College for Christian Workers in Nashville, Tennessee. United Methodists from around the country gathered to hear a number of speakers including the Reverend Robert Perske who was a Chaplain on the staff of the Kansas Neurological Institute and later to become a regular Abingdon Press author on mental retardation and other disabilities along with his wife and illustrator, Martha. Also present was the Reverend Dr. Robert Pizer of the recently organized SEMAR of the Southeastern Methodist Agency for Retardation. This organization was beginning to develop group homes for persons with various disabilities using funds available through the Federal Government.²⁷

III

These strides in the development of educational materials for persons with mental retardation and the continuing presence of various programs and institutions under the auspices of The United Methodist Church were soon overshadowed by General Conference legislation and the emergence of various disabled groups seeking self-recognition and empowerment.

In 1960, the General Conference of The Methodist Church, Committee on Hospitals and Homes, acknowledged several petitions (memorials) expressing Christian concern for the "lack of any Methodist facility to care for physically and handicapped children" and called for the Board of Hospitals and Homes to "give further consideration to this problem." It also urged the General Conference to go on record to "encourage Jurisdictions, Areas or other regions of the Church larger than single Annual Conferences, to establish institutions and services to care for mentally retarded and physically handicapped children."²⁸

In 1964, the Committee on Hospitals and Homes reported that a study had been conducted by the General Board and recommended the reading of its report "Methodism Faces the Need of Retarded Children." The Committee also recommended that the General Conference "direct the

²⁶Communication by Ms. McDowell, July 25, 1997.

²⁷This was assembled through the author's recall. The search for actual documents has not been fruitful.

²⁸*Journal of the General Conference* (1960), 1529-1530.

General Board of Hospitals and Homes to appoint a Committee to seek a cooperative arrangement with one or more Conferences and for Jurisdictions to establish services for mentally retarded children and to promote services to mentally retarded children with a goal of one pilot project by 1968.”²⁹ The resolution was buttressed by Bishop Fred Holloway who, serving as President of the Board, noted that: “there is no more beautiful think in life than to have a beautiful baby born in a family, but to have a baby born who is mentally retarded, the Catholic Church does something about it, the Lutheran Church does something about it, to be sure, the state does something about it. I think The Methodist Church should do something about it.”³⁰ The 1964 General Conference also entertained a proposed change in the Discipline, “which will be put in at the appropriate place in order to suggest that new church buildings will be made more easily available and usable by people who have physical disabilities.”³¹

In the mid-1960s much attention was focused on the merger between The Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren Church. The Plan of Union made reference to the continued work (at least for the time being) of Goodwill Industries.³² The Evangelical United Brethren Church had participated in the work of the National Committee as well as the Cooperative Public Association efforts, although apparently had not produced many materials. Their interest in the area was mainly through the ecumenical route where the resources of a denomination of less than a million members could be shared more effectively.³³

At the General Conference of 1972, John R. Allison of the Tennessee Annual Conference moved to insert a paragraph on “Retarded Persons” into the United Methodist Social Principles:

We recognize the responsibility of the Church to serve and receive the services of retarded persons. Realizing that many of these persons are unable to articulate their own needs and aspirations, we commit ourselves to work with them to articulate and realize these needs and aspirations. We further urge support of programs, services and legislation that will enable them to enjoy their human rights, especially in matters of education, employment, and place of residence.³⁴

The title was immediately amended by acceptance to refer to “Retarded and Handicapped.”³⁵ Four years later, the paragraph was altered in a few small, but significant, ways. First, the word “handicapped” was added to the body of the text rather than as a designation in the title. Second, references to rehabilitation, services, and legislation were added so that the closing sen-

²⁹*Journal of the General Conference* (1964), 847.

³⁰*Journal of the General Conference* (1964), 847.

³¹*Journal of the General Conference* (1964), 899.

³²The Plan of Union: Report to the General Conferences, November, 1966, 186.

³³Conversation with Leo Kisrow, August 13, 1998.

³⁴*Journal of the General Conference* (1972), 466–467.

³⁵*Journal of the General Conference* (1972), 467.

tence read: "We further urge support of programs, of rehabilitation, services, and legislation that will enable them to enjoy their human rights, especially in matters of education, employment and place of residence."³⁶

An action of even greater significance came when the 1976 General Conference recognized two petitions expressing concern for the "problems of the handicapped," and made a referral to the Health and Welfare Ministries Division of the General Board of Global Ministries.³⁷ This proved to be the impetus for a series of events that would move The United Methodist Church from providing services to the "retarded and handicapped" to advocating for their rights, within the Church, as well as in the larger society. In 1977, and more than a year after the close of the 1976 General Conference, the Division of Health and Welfare Ministries of the General Board of Global Ministries authorized (at its meeting October 14–22 in Atlanta) the organization of a task force on ministry to the handicapped and mentally retarded. Four members of the Division's Board were to serve "along with four persons who are physically limited, speech or hearing impaired, or emotionally and physically dysfunctional."³⁸ The following year, the Reverend Ivan (Toby) Gould, a member of the New York Conference, was hired as Executive Secretary of the Office of Ministries to Persons with Handicapping Conditions.³⁹

These activities resulted in a significant push to enact new, and to revise previous, legislation with regard to persons with disabilities and otherwise to set the tone for The United Methodist Church in the following decade. The Task Force, with the support of the Division of Health and Welfare Ministries, proposed to the 1980 General Conference a resolution entitled "Persons with Handicapping Conditions: To be part of the whole." In its adopted form, it called "United Methodists to a new birth of the need to accept, include, receive the gifts of, and respond to the concerns of those persons with mental, physical and/or psychologically handicapping conditions, including their families."⁴⁰ The resolution listed and briefly described several areas of concern including accessibility, awareness, adequate resources, affirmative action, advocacy with the church, and advocacy within the society. Into several items was woven the notion that the church must alter its internal practices as well as advocate for fair treatment and programs from government and other secular agencies.⁴¹ Following the 1980 General Conference, the General Board of Global Ministries through its Ser-

³⁶*Journal of the General Conference* (1976), 1179.

³⁷*Journal of the General Conference* (1976), 349, 1552.

³⁸United Methodist Reporter, 11-04-77, no page. (Note: The author feels that reference to "physically dysfunctional" is a reference to psychologically disabled).

³⁹Toby Gould, "The Church Needs All its Members," *New World Outlook*, 36–38, October, 1980. (And author's recollection.)

⁴⁰*Journal of the General Conference* (1980), 1332.

⁴¹*Journal of the General Conference* (1980), 1332–1334.

vice Center released a pamphlet reprinting the resolution. In addition, it released, "A Statement of Faith and Call to Action: Study Guide on The Church and Persons with Handicapping Conditions."⁴²

In actuality, this later document was adopted the previous Fall (October 16, 1979) by the General Board of Global Ministries at its Annual Meeting in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The guide listed the Task Force members who were: David L. Severe (Chairperson), Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; Earl H. Miller (Vice Chairperson), Fort Lupton, Colorado; Margaret Newton, Muskogee, Oklahoma; J. Leonard Cohn, Jr., Senatobia, Mississippi; Elmer F. Beckett, Portland, Oregon; Max Cleland of Washington, D.C.; J. Paul Ephraim, Jr., Denton, Texas; Steven Ferguson, Lincoln, Pennsylvania; Jacquelyn Page, Nashville, Tennessee; Robert M. Pitzer, Atlanta, Georgia; Robert T. Standhardt, Nashville, Tennessee; and Calvin T. Word, New Castle, Indiana.⁴³ Several of these individuals were to emerge as key actors in the movement developed in the 1980s.

In addition to the resolution, the 1980 General Conference was to entertain and approve other legislation which moved The United Methodist Church even further away from "service" to "rights." First, the General Conference revised the paragraph in the Social Principles to refer specifically to the "rights" of persons with handicapping conditions. In addition, it incorporated language which referred to the persons with handicapping conditions as having the same "humanity and personhood of all individuals as members of the family of God."⁴⁴ Second, it passed a resolution to involve persons with handicapping conditions as members of the 1984 General Conference with special reference to the Baltimore Conference ministry to the deaf.⁴⁵ Third, it referred to Curriculum Resources Committee of the General Board of Discipleship a request to provide curriculum materials for the deaf.⁴⁶ Fourth, references to persons with handicapping conditions were added to lists of groups not to be excluded in various programs and processes.⁴⁷ Finally, it concurred with a petition relating to Paragraph 306.2 of the 1976 *Book of Discipline* regarding Diaconal Ministry by adding: "handicapping conditions are not to be construed as unfavorable health factors when such a person is capable of meeting the professional standards and is physically able to render effective service in the Office of Diaconal Ministry."⁴⁸

These developments took place at a time when several mainline churches and ecumenical agencies were beginning to show interest in per-

⁴²Education and Cultivation Division, General Board of Global Ministries, The United Methodist Church, Pamphlets RS-3/81-75M and RS 8/80 respectively.

⁴³Service Center Pamphlet, RS 8/80.

⁴⁴*Journal of the General Conference* (1980), 779.

⁴⁵*Journal of the General Conference* (1980), 984.

⁴⁶*Journal of the General Conference* (1980), 1071.

⁴⁷*Journal of the General Conference* (1980), 1180, 1351-1352.

⁴⁸*Journal of the General Conference* (1980), 1214.

sons with disabilities and their issues. In 1977, Harold H. Wilke's article, "'Mainstreaming' the Alienated: The Church Responds to a 'New' Minority," appeared in *The Christian Century*.⁴⁹ As director of the Healing Community, Wilke appeared before nearly every mainline group and often worked across faith lines as well as with rehabilitation organizations. His article was followed by numerous others which documented the plight of persons with disabilities in the church.⁵⁰

Much of this was also in preparation for the International Year of the Disabled which was slated to be held in 1981. Sponsored by the United Nations, with each nation given the freedom to develop its own coordinated events, the National Council of Churches issued a call for congregations in each community to effect goals in the areas of transportation, education, and employment. In response, the Division of Health and Welfare Ministries issued its own pamphlet which described how the International Year fulfilled its emphases for the 1981–84 Quadrennium, made reference to the actions of the 1980 General Conference, suggested steps congregations could take in response to persons with disabilities, and provided a list of resources.⁵¹ Interestingly, the list of resources included a reference to an issue of *Engage/Social Action Forum* put out by the General Board of Church and Society titled, "The Church and Persons with Handicapping Conditions."⁵²

Another approach which the Task Force pursued was to sponsor events centered around key issues involving disability in the church. In October 1981, 34 persons with and without disabilities gathered in Boston, Massachusetts to explore theological issues. Papers were presented by Gerald F. Moede and Robert T. Standhardt, each with two respondents. These were later compiled into a booklet titled, "Is Our Theology Disabled? A Symposium on Theology and Persons with Handicapping Conditions."⁵³ Two years later, a group of United Methodist clergy and "some ecumenical friends" met at Lake Junaluska, North Carolina to discuss the issue of clergy with handicapping conditions. A summary statement was later released as an "Occasional Paper" by the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry.⁵⁴

⁴⁹March 23, 1977.

⁵⁰See for example Gloria Maxson, "'Sickened-Class' Citizens," *Christian Century*, September 21, 1977 and Nina Herrmann, "Save Your Roof! Build a Ramp!" *Christian Century*, December 12, 1979.

⁵¹"1981 Emphasis Ministries with Persons with Handicapping Conditions: The Emphasis for the Health and Welfare Ministries Division of the General Board of Global Ministries of The United Methodist Church for the International Year of Disabled Persons," Education and Cultivation Department, no date.

⁵²*E/SA Forum* 59, General Board of Church and Society, no date.

⁵³Health and Welfare Ministries Division, General Board of Global Ministries, The United Methodist Church (1982).

⁵⁴The United Methodist Center (11/7/83).

IV

By these actions, The United Methodist Church had effectively moved in the rights era. Subsequent legislation and activities by boards, agencies, and caucus groups would gradually work to carry the rights movement to its logical conclusion. For instance, the 1984 General Conference entertained among its items of business, a letter advocating accessibility of future General Conference sites and facilities,⁵⁵ revised and added more detail to the resolution "The Church and Persons with Handicapping Conditions,"⁵⁶ and approved a referral relating to the establishment of congregations for the deaf.⁵⁷

The call for the establishment of congregations for the deaf and other related actions,⁵⁸ was stimulated by the activities of The United Methodist Congress of the Deaf. Organized in 1978 as a "network of pastors who served in deaf ministry and as a way for other deaf Methodists to gather for fellowship and worship," the Congress evolved into an assembly with representatives from all five jurisdictions with national meetings every two years.⁵⁹ The efforts of the United Methodist Congress of the Deaf (UMCD) reached its peak when it (with support from the General Council on Ministries) successfully proposed the establishment and funding of a National Committee on Deaf Ministries.⁶⁰ The Committee was to have four main responsibilities which can be summarized as: (1) identifying the needs and concerns of the deaf, deafened, and hard of hearing; (2) collecting information on ministry models, programs, and resources; (3) exploring biblical, theological and secular understandings for ministry; and (4) advocating the development and implementation of programs, policies and services by The United Methodist Church.⁶¹ The Committee began its work in 1993 and made extensive recommendations to the 1996 General Conference and successfully assured its continuance for another four years.⁶²

A second group which emerged was the Association of Physically Challenged Ministers (APCM). In 1985, Toby Gould left his position as Executive Secretary of the Office of Ministries to Persons with Handicapping Conditions to return to parish ministry. The Division of Health and Welfare Ministries assigned staff member Susanne Paul to continue the

⁵⁵*Journal of the General Conference* (1984), 330–331.

⁵⁶*Journal of the General Conference* (1984), 808–812.

⁵⁷*Journal of the General Conference* (1984), 1553–1554.

⁵⁸*Journal of the General Conference* (1984), 1175.

⁵⁹Kathy Black, *Signs of Solidarity: Ministry with Persons Who are Deaf, Deafened, and Hard of Hearing*, New York: Health and Welfare Ministries Program Department, General Board of Global Ministries (1994), 11.

⁶⁰See *Daily Christian Advocate* (1992) Vol. 4, No. 8, 481.

⁶¹*Daily Christian Advocate, Advanced Edition* (1992), 556–560.

⁶²See *Daily Christian Advocate, Advanced Edition* (1996), 742 and *Daily Christian Advocate, Daily Edition* (1996), 171, 635, 660, 754.

work. A few years later, the Reverend Earl H. Miller was hired as a consultant for ministry among persons with handicapping conditions. Miller, a ministerial member of the Rocky Mountain Conference, and a person with a disability, had been involved in advocacy for several years and, while serving various pastorates, had established a camping program for persons with mental retardation as well as a Conference Committee on Ministry with Persons with Handicapping Conditions.⁶³

Miller's dream was to form a national organization of ordained ministers with physical challenges. On November 2–5, 1990 a consultation was held at Scarritt–Bennett Center in Nashville, Tennessee. Fifty ministers with various disabilities shared personal stories and concerns for their acceptance in the church. Leaving nothing to chance, Miller brought along a plan for an organization which was revised and adopted. The Association of Physically Challenged Ministers elected Miller as its co-chair along with the Reverend Kathy Reeves who, at the time, was serving as pastor of the Frances Willard United Methodist Church in Oak Park, Illinois.⁶⁴

Immediately, APCM began work on legislation for the 1992 General Conference and plans were made for a second meeting. These plans were carried out despite Miller's sudden death via a pedestrian accident on February 13, 1991 while on a Board assignment in Oklahoma City.⁶⁵ The election of the Reverend Thomas Binford of the Tennessee Conference as the new co-chair of APCM assured the continuity of the work begun by Miller but by the time APCM met again in 1991, it was too late to mount a legislative effort for a meeting less than six months away.

It was the 1996 General Conference which proved to be the place where legislation would not only be proposed, but enacted. APCM made a decision at its 1994 Meeting not to hold a meeting in 1995 so that it could devote its financial and personnel resources to preparing for the 1996 General Conference. Thus, when a handful of members and friends arrived at the Denver site (as well as Kathy Reeves who had joined the Division of Health and Welfare staff after Earl Miller's death) they were preceded by petitions submitted and recorded in the *Daily Christian Advocate*.⁶⁶ Together with the United Methodist Congress for the Deaf and several other groups (whose names were not clearly identified), APCM monitored legislation, spoke at legislative committee meetings, and prepared and distributed printed information on the proposed legislation.⁶⁷

⁶³Susanne Paul, "Living Examples: United Methodist Clergy with Handicapping Conditions," General Board of Global Ministries, Health and Welfare Ministries Program Department, no date (c. 1990).

⁶⁴*Newscope*, November 16, 1990.

⁶⁵United Methodist News Service, February 15, 1991.

⁶⁶See *Advanced Edition* (1996), index.

⁶⁷Much of this material was confirmed in a conversation with the Reverend Mickey Stringfield, August 14, 1998.

The results can be seen by reading *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*,⁶⁸ and while questions can be asked as to what degree the provisions enacted (as described earlier) have been implemented (especially given the denomination's financial and organizational restructuring), these achievements and the work accomplished over the last several years, serve as a testimony to the cause of people with disabilities in the life of the church and the people who have worked so hard to make their voices heard.

⁶⁸The United Methodist Publishing House (Nashville, 1996).