

THE

Issue. 166 | March 2020

ENCOURAGER

The magazine of Elevate Christian Disability Trust



Festival One

*A fantastic raised platform for
wheelchair folk to view from*

See page 15





A devotional from **Raymond Mok**

We say that God is love and He loves us. It seems easier to say when things are going well, but it can be harder when times are tough. In some of the darkest times in my life, the devil tempted me to doubt God's love. I felt as if I was not loved but cursed. Have you ever felt that way?

Luke 3:21-4:13 has an answer to that. It shows Jesus' baptism and being tested in the wilderness. Knowing His own identity, Jesus overcame the devil's temptations. He knew who He is to God the Father. Jesus has an intimate relationship with the Father. Jesus knew that He is His Father's Beloved Son.

The devil tried to undermine Jesus' identity by saying to Him, "If you are the Son of God..." But Jesus was secure in His identity as the divine Son of God. He knew He had no need to prove himself. He resisted the temptations, as He completely relied on His Father and obeyed His Father's word.

Jesus was victorious against the devil because He was certain that He is God's Beloved Son. Jesus withstood phenomenal amount of praise and adoration and rejection and abuse throughout his ministry, because He knew that nothing can change the fact that He is God's Beloved Son. As human, Jesus needed to hold firmly to His identity in God. So do we. We need to remember that we are God's beloved children.

How do we see ourselves? But more importantly, how does God see us? Who are we to God?

When God had made human beings in His own image, He declared all He had made to be very good and He blessed them (Genesis 1:27-28). God imparted



goodness, dignity and worth in every human being by creating them in His own image. Every human being is fearfully and wonderfully made by God (Psalm 139:13-14). Every human being is loved by God.

On the other hand, we all have sinned, and the image we bear has been tainted. However, Jesus has redeemed us through His blood. God chose us before the foundation of the world, adopted us as His beloved children through Jesus Christ, and blessed us in Christ. By His grace, God did all these for us. (Ephesians 1:3-14)

How do we bear God's image, and be God's children? How do we hold firmly to our identity in God? What can we do in a world that is losing sight of the fact that every human being bears God's image?

We need a God-centred identity. We need to let God tell us who we are through the Holy Spirit, His word and fellowship. We need to spend time with God to hear Him say "You are my beloved child." Let us also share the love by affirming the inherent dignity and worth of all human beings. ■

"If you know you're God's beloved, you can deal with an enormous amount of success and an enormous amount of failure." – Henri Nouwen

CAMPS 2020

Please take note and put in your diaries

Auckland CFFD	3-5 April	Carey Park, Henderson, Akd
Christchurch CFFD Day Camp	4 April	Reformed Church, Cornwall St, Chch
Emmanuel Family Camp	24-27 April	Totara Springs, Matamata
Joy Ministries National Camp	15-17 May	Totara Springs, Matamata
Elevate National Camp	23-25 Oct	Totara Springs, Matamata

Made in His Image



Disability Awareness Sunday - June 21st

This Disability Awareness Sunday we are focusing on being made in God's image. All of us bear His image. Each of us has value and worth because we are made in His likeness.

Resources and advertising material will be available on our website in May.



Elevate Ditty

Composed by Jean Griffiths and others

ELEVATE

YES! That's the place for us
We're together with God on high

ELEVATE

We have hilarity
Food, fun, fellowship
Drawn here like a magnet

ELEVATE

We are accepted here
Despite our differences
If you come here
We'll embrace you

ELEVATE

Camps are highlights too
They're special to us all
Your faith will grow
And you will glow

ELEVATE

(last verse)
We could go on and on
But we have to end this song
And we want you to remember

ELEVATE

WE HAVE A NEED

The Trust meets four times a year and we need a minutes secretary. The meetings are in Auckland on a Saturday 9:30-3:30. If you are able to take minutes, transcribe and send them out on email, **do contact the Centre 09 636 4763**

CONGRATULATIONS to Pauline Stansfield on being awarded a QSM in the New Year's Honours

PRAY FOR Billy Graham's son Franklyn who will be leading a crusade in Christchurch, Wellington and Auckland in February 2021. We need a revival!



Cartoon by Cathy Wilcox of the Sydney Morning Herald.



MY PURPOSE IN LIFE IS TO ENCOURAGE AND SPEAK LIFE TO PEOPLE

Kim Clark writes:

I headed down to Totara Springs in Matamata for the 2019 Elevate National Camp. It was my first time at this particular camp, and it will be a camp I won't forget. When we arrived we had an evening session of music worship, and we were introduced to the main speakers; the main speakers being long-time-camp-attendee Pastor Geoff and the awesome Pastor Suz. Being honest, when I went down to camp I didn't expect much spiritually. I was thinking "OK, just another camp, that will be what it will be". Of course, it's often when we don't expect it, that God shows up... and He did!

The theme of camp was "Ignite". One of the discussion questions that was asked was "What do we think igniting is or what do we like to see being ignited?" For me, I love seeing people ignited in their God-given calling. I love people living out that calling, and encouraging them in that. I love it when people

know they have a purpose and they have something to offer, no matter their abilities or inabilities. I shared this with the group.

During the worship and church session, Pastor Suz shared her personal story. She shared moments of joy and moments of sadness, anger, rage etc. when dealing with the prolonged illness of her husband, managing her kids, her faith journey and then dealing with the eventual passing of her husband and the grief that followed. I thought she was very brave to share her story, and I appreciated how real and honest it was, not just saying "all was well", but actually talking about the hard stuff that came. In her story, she shared that she knew God could heal her husband at any moment, but she had come to say she wouldn't have grown through the grief and pain as much as she did if she hadn't gone through it. I always think on this Bible verse when hard times come in my life: 'Be truly glad. There is wonderful JOY ahead, even though you must endure many trials for a little while. These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—though your faith is far more precious than mere gold.

When I spoke in one of the workshops, I shared some of my purpose, and how God has been moving in my life. I shared how my purpose is to encourage and to SPEAK LIFE to people. I shared how everyone is a part of the Body of Christ, and no matter our ability or inability, we are all called. I talked about how God called Moses to lead his people, and that Moses was very ill-qualified, but nevertheless God empowered him to fulfil his purpose. When God gave me His calling for my life, I didn't want to do it straight away. He called me to speak and I said, "Nah, I'll do my own thing." This past year He's been saying, "speak", and He's given me small opportunities to speak, and when I finally said "yes" with those small opportunities He's kept giving me more. This is really exciting for me because it's like all those fears and thoughts of not being good enough or not being the right person to speak have gone. If I'm doing what God wants me to do, why should I fear? . For me, all the messages spoken at camp were so relevant. It was like God was reminding me how far I'd come. I've gone from feeling inadequate and worthless and feeling like I had nothing to offer at the beginning of the year, to now feeling that with having God on my side I can do anything. ■

A Sunday of Service

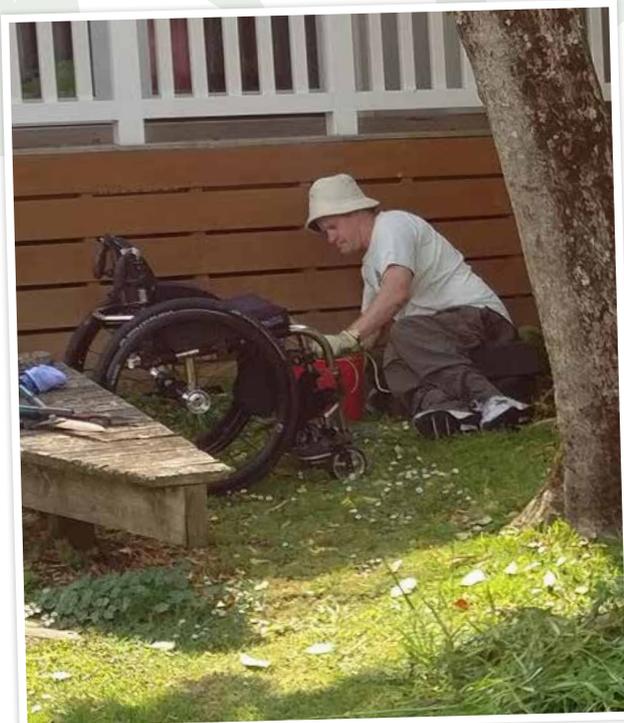
Each year at Mount Wellington Community Church we do a 'Sunday of Service' where we go out into our local community and serve a school or another community organisation by doing practical work like gardening, cleaning, or removing rubbish from the property. We do this as a church community, in place of one of our morning services.

In November 2019 we headed out to Mount Richmond Special School in Otahuhu to help tidy up their grounds. This school is a little further away than we would normally travel, but we wanted to thank them for kindly giving us use of one of their wheelchair hoist vans to allow Annette Hocking to join us for our church camp earlier in the year, last year.

We had a good number of people come along and help with tasks ranging in size and scale from weeding to tree-cutting. Everyone was able to be involved, including children from the church. The school was thrilled with the difference we made in a morning's work.

We see this kind of ministry as a great way to share God's love with our community, and to worship God by using our strengths and abilities for the good of others.

Has your church ever thought of that?



Mike Potter got out of his chair so he could join in with the gardening.



Everyone got involved, even the kids.



NOTHING COULD STOP THIS MAN REALISING HIS PASSION

In 1986 Bob Bardwell suffered a devastating accident when he was struck in the back by a large bucket while working on a large caterpillar machine. His back was broken, and he fell to the ground unconscious, paralysed from the waist down.

It seemed doubtful he would ever now realise the passion he had to start a camp for those in wheelchairs, but within a few years he had started running a camp of his own.

In the subsequent 34 years that initial wheelchair camp has grown amazingly, so much so that today over 1000 physically challenged kids and adults from the USA and Africa attend the annual camp. But not only that- he now has camps for groups such as:

“Honouring our heroes” camps for those who have served in the military

Retreat camps for horse enthusiasts

Family camps to bring together all disabilities

Overnight adventure camps

Wheelchair sports camps

Autism family camps

Grandparents and grandchildren camps

Married couples retreats

Di and Jacqui met Bob at Joni’s International Congress in 1990 and stayed at his ranch. He also came to New Zealand two years later and “The Encourager” then published an article with the heading which so sums up his life attitude, *“Pain is inevitable, but misery is optional”*. ■

The Lord’s goodness in the Philippines

Thanks be to God for His great love and goodness to us and for continually providing for all our needs. One of God’s timeless promises is in Hebrews 13:5: “...God has said, *“Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”* We all as Christians, can relate to this verse.

We really thank God for the answered prayer for our teacher Tess here in Hebron. Tess is deaf and teaches in our deaf school.

On Feb 3rd, she suffered a stroke. We may not always understand all

things, but we can see God’s hand. The Lord saved her life. Today, 3 weeks later, she is able to go home.

Thank God for making a way for Mary Rose (little person). She was struggling to access her classroom on the 2nd floor at school. She has now found a place where she can attend on the ground floor Praise God for that!



GOD’S PERFECT PLAN

Can You...

BELIEVE Jesus Christ died for you on the cross and rose again? (1Cor.15:3&4)

ADMIT you are a sinner? (Rom.3:23)

AGREE to turn from sin to God? (Acts 20:21)

ACKNOWLEDGE God’s free gift of Salvation? (Eph.2:8&9)

If you can, then say this simple prayer aloud: *“Lord Jesus, I receive You as my Lord and personal Saviour. Amen”*



First Annual Chris Norton Foundation camp participants

NOW NOTICE

THE RIPPLE EFFECT

See how the disability ministries continue to develop



In 2014 Chris Norton came to one of these camps. Chris had suffered a spinal cord injury in 2010 while playing football and was given a 3% chance of ever regaining movement below his neck, but he has since continued

to defy the odds. He was blown away by all the “I can do” there. He participated in many fun games and activities, learned from others about how they live active lives despite their disabilities, and he tried things he had thought he would never be able to do, like zip-lining and kayaking. He was so fired up that it enabled him to take on life with a new vigour.

Seeing what it did for him and for everyone else at camp, he knew that more people needed to experience this new freedom. It planted a seed in his heart to sponsor his own week of camp, and for the next several years the idea would not escape him. Finally, he got to thinking and talking about it, and

wanted to just do it. After one call to Bob Bardwell, his enthusiasm for the idea convinced him to make this new camp a reality. He wanted it to mimic what Bob had been doing so successfully for years but with an emphasis on the whole family and to make it free for families through his foundation.

He was able to find 25 wheelchair users and their families who were so excited to come to camp, and 75 participated in the first annual camp. He included all sorts of activities such as the tractor pull, softball, laser tag, archery, horseback riding and zip-lining. It was amazing to see the joy from not only the individuals in a chair, but from parents and siblings too. Friendship and bonds were formed at camp that have continued well after it ended. People found it difficult to say goodbye to each other at the end of camp, but everyone is excited there will be another one **this year!** It was evident that everyone’s perspective shifted, focusing less on their disabilities, but instead seeing their capabilities. ■



A GRANDMOTHER, GOING BLIND, CARING FOR HER GRANDCHILDREN IN ETHIOPIA

Asgedech is being blinded in the most painful way, while trying to raise five grandchildren...who are all suffering from the same condition, Trachoma.

As many grandparents in New Zealand know, raising grandchildren on your own is very hard, but what a testimony of love it is.

Now imagine trying to raise your grandchildren when you have Trachoma. Every time you blink it hurts... really badly... like a knife on your eyeball... as you are slowly and painfully blinded by your own ingrown eyelashes!

That is what is happening to Asgedech, a loving and selfless grandmother in Ethiopia, who cannot afford to protect her own eyesight.

Before Trachoma, Asgedech's life was already very hard. Her husband died long ago. She only has a tiny income from selling vegetables, no adult children to help her... and now a truly dangerous infection has entered her home. Trachoma is the leading cause of infectious blindness and some of the highest Trachoma rates in the world are in Ethiopia.

Asgedech and her five grandchildren, aged six to twelve, all have Trachoma. It is highly infectious. Entire villages have it, especially where families live closely together. With no power, no running water and no hygiene facilities in Asgedech's home, her precious grandchildren are not able to keep their faces clean.

The children just have to look at their beloved Grandi to see what could happen to their own eyes. With every blink, their sharp lashes will scrape across their defenceless eyes.

Please do not let Trachoma destroy these children's eyes. By sending your donation to help reach remote families with the antibiotics and eye ointment that will save their sight, the value of your gift will be multiplied x8, thanks to Pfizer who has agreed to provide its own Zithromax antibiotics and Tetracycline eye ointment, free of charge.

Your gifts are vital in helping to make sure those pills and ointment can reach the people who need them, even the most remote villagers like Asgedech and her grandchildren. Your generosity will help save children from years of agony.

Have you ever scratched your eye? An eyelash can do that. It is hard and sharp. Every time Asgedech blinks, her eyelashes cut tiny tracks across her delicate cornea. It hurts ... how it hurts! Each of these cuts forms a tiny scar. Invisible on their own, they grow to form a misty curtain, blocking the light into Asgedech's eyes.

Asgedech's grandchildren's eyes are not yet affected, but they must keep receiving their annual antibiotics. Without your generosity, field workers have no funding to get to the towns and villages where Trachoma infections are rife.

"My vision has decreased a lot during the past months," she told our field worker Gizachew, sounding quite desperate.

"I can't see as before. Especially at night. I fear blindness. I wouldn't be able to take care of my grandchildren anymore!" she cries, in fear of losing her sight completely and her beloved grandchildren.

Trachoma is so frightening and so painful for Asgedech, she has started having her eyelashes pulled out, using a grotesque pair of tweezers called a werento. It is agony to do this, and it only solves things for a few weeks, because her lashes grow back and start slashing at her eyes again.

No wonder Asgedech is so worried. "The children have already started to get the same disease I have. They could experience the same pain I have. It would be terrible if they lost their sight."

The children too are worried now. Her first granddaughter, Kidist, says "If Grandi goes blind, nobody would take care of us. I don't know what to do. We love her so much and we want to stay with her."

Asgedech can no longer see well enough to work in the garden or take their produce to the market. All they have to eat is what has already been harvested. Trachoma has brought pain, blindness and is now making their deep poverty even worse.

This little family is desperate, but you can do so much to help. Asgedech's sight loss cannot be reversed, but you can stop it getting any worse... and you can protect the eyesight and the future of young ones like her grandchildren. ■



This article was taken from the CBM (Christian Blind Mission) newsletter, and they are the ones to send a donation to rather than to Elevate if you feel to help meet this great need.

Send to:

cbm New Zealand
PO Box 303477,
North Harbour,
Auckland 0751



Connect-ability

It is with great joy and excitement that Pete and Carla Townsend write this report about their awesome and amazing Connect-ability group.

What is Connect-ability?

Connect-ability is a connect group for people with disabilities – people from [Tauranga] Central Baptist and from outside the Church. We meet on the fourth Sunday of each month in the church hall. We begin with a shared lunch, and often we will have an activity, sometimes making something, or otherwise we just sit and connect with one another.

After lunch, we head into the church and have our own church service. We begin with some praise and worship and an eye opening prayer. We then lead into a message, reading from scripture and group discussion. We pray for one another, have more praise and worship, and finish with a discussion of future plans.

My initial goals for Connect-ability were to facilitate **connection within the group**, and to teach everyone more about God, but what I have come to realise is that Connect-ability is less about the group learning about God and more about the group **showing us God's love!** I don't run Connect-ability; I just show up and watch what happens!

At our last get together I asked the group what Connect-ability is all about – what they would like their wider church family to know. Everyone was in agreement – FOOD is very important! Alyssa commented that she "loves to eat her chocolate eclairs." Katie said, "**our purpose is to worship God and Jesus and enjoy being with people**". This was supported by Shirley who said, Connect-ability makes her "**happy and everyone is so friendly**". Evelyn said that "**Connect-ability is like a family**". She loves making friends in the group. This was also supported by Charlie who is happy because he is getting to know people.

Another strong theme came from Meredith and was supported by many others, "Connect-ability gives us people with disabilities, the opportunity to get up on stage and express ourselves in front of the Church, to be involved in Church, e.g., our Disability Awareness Service."

There is a real desire within the group to serve in the wider church family. Many of our group are involved in **taking the offering each week**. RJ is learning how to run the sound system during our Connect-ability service, and RJ and Frances are actively involved in our main service with running the data.

Pastor Brian has been quoted as saying, "Pete thinks he is in charge, but it is actually Katie!" This leads me to my last point, brilliantly quoted by Meredith, "**Connect-ability gives us the confidence to share our testimonies – the ability to be confident.**"

Highlights:

1. Being involved in the main Church service on Disability Awareness Sunday in June. Alyssa and Meredith opening the service in prayer, and John (with Brian's support) reading the Benediction at the end of the service. The whole group were so excited to be involved, and after the service I saw the group engaged in many conversations as people came and spoke to them – it was amazing!
2. Recently we had a number of our group participate in a sports competition between 16 churches from around Tauranga. Our team played Netball, we played four games and we were placed no worse than second in each of these games! RJ was our shooter and boy did he do us proud, getting a lot of goals. The team did so well playing against some very competitive teams, but as always God's love was the winner on the day. Our team won the Sportsmanship Award, and 16 other churches now know that we don't just have old people at Central Baptist.

“ Hopefully churches can be encouraged to follow their example ”

If reading this report has ignited something inside you and you feel like you are missing out, you are welcome to join us – we have just two criteria:

1. Bring good food!
2. Be willing to connect

We have a lot of fun, and we would love to share what we are doing with more people in the community over the next twelve months. We now have a very good foundation for a community ministry, so please pray for Connect-ability, and specifically that we have more opportunities to connect with others outside Central Baptist!



Hush – God is at work!

For reading and meditation – Psalm 139:1-24

“If I go up to the heavens, You are there; if I make my bed in the depths, You are there.” (v8)

...the Spirit of the living God is everywhere. This was brought home to me once while on a flight. Two women in the row immediately behind me were talking, and I couldn't help overhearing what they were talking about. As the conversation continued it became more and more interesting.

One asked the other if she had any children. At this point a photograph was produced, and the mother replied, 'Here are my children; this one here has life-limiting disabilities.' 'That's amazing,' remarked the other woman. 'One of my children has severe disabilities too.' As you can imagine, at this point these women discovered an instant connection. Then I heard one of the women say to the other: 'I was very self-centred and lived only thinking of myself and my enjoyment, until my child arrived. But she brought such love into the life of my husband and me that through it we glimpsed the love of God. We both became Christians because of her.' 'A similar thing happened to my husband and me,' said the other

woman. 'When our baby was born we experienced a deep sadness to begin with, and both struggled, becoming somewhat depressed. After a while though, things changed, and the love that we received from our baby to us was also the means of bringing us to Christ.'

I began to understand God in a new way as I listened in to that conversation. It's always exciting when He surprises us in our reading and study of the Scriptures. Sometimes, however, we can only bow with a thankful, worshipful heart when we see Him reaching out to us in unexpected ways, in times of desperate need.

Father, sensitise me to the fact that Your Spirit is present to bring glory to Your name in and through everything. I do not always know why things happen, but I do know that You work through all things for good, and I am thankful. Amen.

Taken from 'Every Day with Jesus', Nov 2019 (Torch UK)



Thirty six years as a nun and loving Jesus

Sister Diadema Morrison from the Evangelical Sisterhood of Mary writes:

My Life - before God

I had a very good Christian family upbringing – mother, father, and one younger brother. My father was a Presbyterian minister. Church and Sunday School were normal life, as far as I was concerned. Having a physical disability from birth, dislocation of hip and knee, and polio muscle wastage, I was hospitalized a lot in early childhood. Inevitably, I suffered emotional damage; separation anxiety, and a deep-rooted fear of the powerful control others had over my life.

However, those countless orthopaedic operations in childhood resulted in satisfactory mobility – with discomfort - but gave me the determination to live as normal a life as possible. I grew up trying to please people, because I had not experienced the normal growth of healthy boundaries in my life. As a young person I believed in God, but felt no personal relationship to Him, apart from a warm “fuzzy” feeling now and then in Sunday School, church, and youth group.

I trained as a Kindergarten teacher. Quite amazing to be accepted and actually manage to do such a physically strenuous job! Later, in 1974, I went to England on a working holiday with two friends and worked as a Nanny, and then in a Nursery School. That was again hard physical work, but lots of fun! I pushed through pain, for the joy and success of holding down normal jobs. During that time I attended church as it was a routine in my life. One Sunday I heard a missionary speak about the need for Christian Kindergarten teachers on the mission field. I liked the sound of her job description, so I applied to the “Council for World Mission” (CWM) in London and was accepted. Again, very amazing that my physical disability was not seen to be a hindrance! At the invitation of CWM, I went to Selly Oak Colleges in Birmingham, to do a missionary training course. Sadly, I chose to mix with the wrong crowd there, and wasted the months in expressing my pent-up rebellion and

resentment of my disability. Even so, after a year of College, in 1977 I was invited by CWM to take up a job on the staff of a Christian training centre and kindergarten in Kerala, South India. With guilt and shame weighing heavily on my conscience, I went with a heavy feeling of loneliness and insecurity.

When He found me

There I was in India, as a 25 year old. I was challenged to the core by daily life in the village I lived in, surrounded by such a different culture and a different language - Malayalam. I was appointed by the Church of South India to be the Supervisor of the Christian Child Care programme for the state of Kerala, teaching English, craft, and the Principles of Pre-School Programmes, in the Creche Nurses’ Training Centre (with translation to begin with). No other foreigners were involved in this work in that language area. I worked closely with my Indian colleague, a highly educated young lady my own age, who was the Principal of the Creche Nurses Training Centre. What a thrilling experience for a young New Zealander! Everything went well for a while. I thrived in the challenge, loved the Indian people, the hot climate, the spicy food, the overcrowded buses and the sight of coconut palms, paddy fields and elephants. I loved wearing a sari and learning the language, difficult as it was. I loved the little local village church, accessible only by walking up a hill on a stony pathway bordered by mango trees, banana palms, and luxuriant tropical undergrowth. Again, my physical disability was pushed into the background and I was determined to be normal, no matter the cost of pain, discomfort and very unsuitable footwear.

But spiritually I was poverty-stricken. It wasn’t long before I came to the end of my own resources. I felt defeated. So, for the first time in my life I seriously searched for God. I recognized my shallow faith; years of indifference, not much depth of understanding, the impression of God as kindly, sympathetic, loving - but oh, so distant, and very much removed from my thoughts and emotions in everyday life. As my search became increasingly serious, I read my Bible as never before, and a number of helpful Christian books I could find in the nearest Christian book shop. My Indian colleague felt sorry for me. She encouraged me not to give up until I found Jesus personally. One day she handed me one of M. Basilea Schlink’s books about personal love for Jesus. Soon I was reading in earnest and finding really helpful chapters! I loved what I was reading. A personal, loving, and amazingly relational God and Saviour was coming into focus for me. I wanted to respond to His love and forgiveness with all my heart - just as the author of these books so obviously had! Her genuine joy and love for Jesus shone through every page! That was the beginning of my journey towards knowing Jesus personally.

My calling to the Convent

I went home to New Zealand in 1981 after four years in India and soon got a Kindergarten teaching job in Invercargill. Again, there was no question mark over

one. Be the one to find the gold.

Is 11 v 7

my physical disability; I had just had four years working solidly in India, after all! My colleague invited me to attend her church on my first Sunday, so I did. To my surprise, the congregation were talking about two special Guest Speakers that were there recently, from the Evangelical Sisterhood of Mary in Australia, the Christian community of Sisters, founded by M. Basilea Schlink, with branches worldwide. I didn't meet the Sisters, but something "sparked" strongly and deeply in my heart. That spark was fanned into flame in the months that followed. I sensed God speaking to me about a new direction for my life. His will, not my will! His challenge – would I take the risk, and trust and follow?

The following year, I came to Australia to a retreat weekend held by the Sisters and sensed the Lord calling me to spend a longer time as a volunteer at their headquarters in Germany. There, in 1983, I was one of about fifteen young women from many different nations, helping voluntarily in the community's daily life wherever we were needed - the garden, housework, kitchen, laundry – wherever. Physically it was challenging, but again, I so longed to fully take part in this life where I experienced such joy, humour, dedication, trust in God, unity, selflessness and love for Jesus. I knew with all my heart that I wanted this life.

God's calling was confirmed over the next years – and this is now my 36th year! It has been **an amazing journey into relational love for Jesus, such as I could never have imagined!** It has been a deeply challenging pathway of following Jesus uncompromisingly, trusting God even in the times when I don't understand Him, and learning from the Holy Spirit how to "take up my cross" in daily life. Taking up my cross included learning how to embrace my physical disability and not ignore it or resent it, but to find real blessing in it. What a valuable lesson! (Are you wondering if there can really be blessing in a disability? See "The Hidden Treasure in Suffering" - M. Basilea Schlink)

So what is life in the Convent like?

Physically, it was soon clear that my Sisterhood life would be best spent in Australia, where our buildings do not have stairs. It was a heavy "cross" at first, not to be in the large, happy Sisterhood family of more than a hundred Sisters in our "Mother House" in Germany. Here, we are ten Sisters from America, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Netherlands, Australia and New Zealand. Our life together is just as full of joy, humour, dedication, trust in God, unity, selflessness and love for Jesus, as I ever experienced in my beginnings as a volunteer! God's ways are certainly the best! Being an intentional Christian Community, every day begins with personal prayer time and breakfast alone. We meet together most mornings at 8.30. Worship, prayer times, Bible study, sharing together – these times together are varied and set a good foundation for the day. We work



until lunch time in our designated ministry areas. Mine is administration, outreach and music. Sometimes there are speaking engagements in local areas, or groups of visitors coming here for a day visit. I may be appointed to go and speak to a group along with another Sister. I may be asked to help take care of a visiting group, as part of a team. In my office, I attend to correspondence and assist our Sister-in-Charge with general administration of our life together. Other Sisters work in the kitchen and housework, garden and maintenance, accounts, laundry and sewing room. We are used to multi-tasking, especially if Sisters are away. There are many humorous situations when things go wrong, resulting in the most peculiar outcomes! Living transparently, with accountability, forgiveness, repentance, reconciliation and then going forward together in unity is a necessity – along with lots of love, and lots of laughter! We have a short prayer and worship time together at 3p.m. each day – Sisters, guests, volunteers. I prepare the chapel or notify everyone if we will be outside in our Prayer Garden. This part of the day is a special treasure in our life together, and helps us to keep focussed on the Lord, even on the busiest days. Our evening meal is a time for sharing important news, and thank points, and ends with a short time of praying together. Our guests and volunteers eat separately in the evenings, so that our Sister-family-life can remain intact. Some evenings we have a programme either just as Sisters, or with our guests and volunteers, and friends from the wider area. By our lives, we want to honour God and give Him the glory in each new day.

In these Sisterhood years I have had three major orthopaedic operations to fuse joints in both feet (bilateral lambridnudi arthrodesis - I learned that off by heart!), and a TKR (total knee replacement); all three were necessary because of the excessive physical activity in my youth. God is so merciful and forgiving, and the operations were successful. I am pain-free the majority of the time, and I have finally learned the importance of leading a healthy, balanced life spiritually and physically. I am so grateful for every step of this long pathway which began for me back then, more than 40 years ago, in South India! To Him be the glory! ■



THE DEBT THAT I OWE TO MY PARENTS

Thousands have watched clips of **Sarah Kovac** driving, playing the piano, applying makeup and even cracking eggs. Simple, everyday tasks, right? Not without the use of arms or hands. Sarah was born with arthrogryposis multiplex congenita, a genetic disorder in which leg or arm joints are essentially stuck in place and muscles don't develop. For Sarah, those locked joints - and the muscles within those joints - run from the base of her neck to her fingertips.

Beginning at an early age, Sarah learned to rely on her legs and feet to handle the duties of four functioning limbs. Today, those duties include raising a 6-year-old and a 2-year-old. Sarah shares the lessons she's learned in her 2013 book, *In Capable Arms: Living a Life Embraced by Grace*.

Parents of a child with disabilities might wonder how they, too, can raise their child to have confidence and courage. Sarah here speaks of the debt she owes to her parents: When I was in kindergarten, I broke my arm four times. My arms don't bend, they just break. My parents had the strength to watch me go through that over and over and still say, "You can learn to ride a bike. We'll take off your training wheels." **I would come across things that I couldn't do or didn't want to because it was too scary for me, but they let me discover those things** instead of determining them for me.

Many parents have a hard time with this, understandably, because they feel their child won't develop to his or her full potential. So they intervene. They say to the child, "Maybe you should do it this way, or do this with your mouth, or use your other hand," and that sort of thing. I cringe a little bit when



I see that, because in my experience it was really helpful for my parents **to back off and let me find my own way**.

When you're a parent of a child with special needs, you have the internet and doctors and therapists who all have different opinions — and all these things are needed — but it's hard to step back and say, **"God, I trust that You're going to show me what to do. I trust that [my children] will find their fullest potential in You."**

Words often have an impact on a child's self-esteem. Can you remember examples of words or descriptions your parents used that stuck with you over the years?

I came home from school one day after somebody told me I was handicapped. This was during the 1980s, and that was the word used back then. I'd heard the word before, but I don't think I'd ever been labelled that way. So I said something about it to my dad, and he said, **"You're not handicapped. You have a handicap, and there's a difference."**

I learned that I am Sarah first and foremost, and I also happen to have a disability. I don't have to let myself be defined by these things. There's no escaping it, but it doesn't mean it's who I am.

I also remember my mother telling me that a good artist can work their mistakes into the bigger picture. I'm not saying that God makes mistakes God is the artist and can work anything for good. It's a comforting thought. ■

FUN AT FESTIVAL ONE!

By Manu Teofila



I had sooo much fun at Festival One with friends and music. I had friends to dance and sing with, as well as to chill and have some good yarns. Went to bands that I didn't plan to see or hadn't known about, which got me dancing. Thanks to Kylee Black who had been

instrumental in setting up the Soul Lounge, this provided a space with things to make Festival One accessible for people with impairments. For example, they had 3 hospital beds available so folk could rest!

Michael Stoneham was a great buddy at Festival One. He kindly followed me everywhere I decided to go. The weekend sped past, boogying to great music, buying cold drinks at the market and hanging out with friends were the main things we did. It was super-hot every day, but that didn't stop me from rolling from one place to another, I heard music that I liked the sound of. I spotted some friends and spent time with them.

In the ride back home, I told Michael that I felt refreshed and satisfied. Spending quality time with Michael and everyone else filled my love tank. The preachers and speakers filled my mind with encouragement. I love singing praises to Jesus outdoors, and doing it with others really satisfied my soul. Without a doubt, going to Festival One was a great blessing from God! ■



Attention - all those who have changed their email addresses PLEASE tell us your new ones



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With CFFD folk in Ashurst at Ruth and Paul Beale's home

Leslie de la Ganar was thrilled with her learning experience and time meeting up with members of CFFD branches who have supported the Philippines Ministry and helped to pay for the visit. *She writes*



So nice to meet the Joy Ministries committee at Elevate National Camp



A special lunch fellowship with John, Anne, Hugh, Rosemary, Peter and Sandra



Added to my joy that for the first time to have a homemade birthday cake!



So nice meeting up with the Wellington CFFD group

Sponsorship needed for Leslie de la Ganar in the Philippines of \$60 a month. **Contact Ruth Beale, details on page 15**

WHAT IS ELEVATE CHRISTIAN DISABILITY TRUST ALL ABOUT?

We are an interdenominational parachurch organisation.
We run meetings and camps throughout NZ.
We have four groups:

- **CFFD** (Christian Fellowship for Disabled) mainly for folk with physical disabilities.
- **Joy Ministries** mainly for those with intellectual disabilities.
- **Emmanuel** for families with children with disabilities.
- **Torch** for those who are blind or visually impaired.

We have a Centre in Auckland which is our main office, and where we also run a **Drop In Centre** three days a week. We welcome people with disabilities, volunteers and family members.



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