

Year of the Disabled

Disabilities Affect All Races, Creeds

By Edythe Westenhaber
Religious News Service

The World Council of Churches refers to them as the "minority group for anyone" — the people whose differences cut across all distinctions of race, creed, sex, age, wealth and social class.

They are the disabled — the 450 million individuals (10 percent of the world's population) whose physical and mental impairments mandate lifestyles markedly different from those of the people around them.

The United Nations has proclaimed 1981 as the International Year of the Disabled Person (IYDP). The aim is to focus attention on the rights and opportunities disabled people should have in order to enjoy their full share of any society's life.



The ranks of the disabled grow constantly because of population increases, accidents and the rapid movement to urban living. Also, better medical services in some

countries mean that people with incurable conditions can live much longer than they once did.

In the United States, it is estimated that 50 percent of the population has some form of chronic health problem. And five percent of all Americans — 11 million persons between the ages of 16 and 64 — are considered severely disabled.

Worldwide, nutrition is a major source of marked disablement, accounting for 20 percent of all cases. In Indonesia, a 10-year survey showed that vitamin deficiency accounted for 60 percent of the cases of blindness in pre-school children.

Non-communicable diseases account for another 20 percent; hereditary and birth defects 19 percent; accidents 15 percent; communicable diseases 11 percent; psychiatric problems, eight percent; and alcohol and drug abuse, seven percent. In developed countries like the U.S., nutrition plays a relatively small role while accidents and disease are correspondingly higher.

Yet despite their numbers, severely disabled people have long been one of the least visible groups in modern society. Able-bodied people preferred not to see them.

The Rev. Harold Wilke, a United Church of Christ minister who was born without hands, reflects that those with severe defects "represent what you non-disabled don't want to be reminded of — your own mortality, problems, hang-ups. We are all symbols for one another."

The stigma placed upon these people also involves the words society uses to describe them.

"Cripple" and "idiot" are hated words. "Handicap" is also a pejorative because it is associated with the "cap-in-hand" begging in the streets to which those with severe defects often had to resort for sheer survival.

Many disabled people and those who work with them prefer the tri-part definition worked out by the World Health Organization: impairment is the defect, disability is the functional loss resulting from it, and handicap is the burden society places upon someone because of that defect.

Ima Jean Kidd of the National Council of Churches says it is also important to say "disabled people. It takes a little longer than 'the disabled' but it's important because then our language shows we recognize the person, not the handicap."

In the United States as elsewhere, the momentum to bring disabled people into the mainstream of society has been part of the wider human rights movement.

The civil rights drive taught these people that they, like other underprivileged minorities, have a right to full participation in American life — to work, have a home, raise a family and generally take part in the joys and responsibilities of community activity. And the consumer movement with its self-help credo taught them that as consumers of health care services they have here again a "right to choose," to participate actively in the decisions concerning their own well-being instead of leaving their fate to medical and social services professionals.

Initially, federal measures to help the disabled were tied to efforts to fit them for regular work. Behind this emphasis on gainful employment lay the rugged individualism of John Calvin's work ethic which has dominated American life.

Vocational rehabilitation grew out of this philosophy of work as salvific. Whatever was done to enable a person to become self-supporting was money well spent — an investment to be returned through the new worker's tax payments. But the growing social responsibility of the 1960s caused this economic argument to be challenged.

In 1973 Congress in legislation that has become known as the Magna Carta of disabled Americans spelled out their statutory rights of access, outlawed discrimination in employment for reasons of handicap, and gave priority to services for the severely disabled.

However, appropriations for independent living services for those judged incapable of working were twice vetoed by President Nixon on the grounds that it "would dilute the resources of the vocational rehabilitation program and impair its continued valuable achievements in restoring deserving Americans to meaningful employment."

Congressional funding for such services, especially independent living centers operated by disabled persons themselves, came in 1978. By then the courts had also begun to support the rights of the handicapped to a place in society. A major breakthrough came with the Willowbrook consent decree, a federal court order that gave occupants of institutions for the mentally retarded the right to live in the "least restrictive environment."

Though directed specifically at the Willowbrook State Hospital in Staten Island, N.Y., the decree has been applied nationally. Thousands of adults and children have been transferred to single houses where they live with attendants in a family setting.

NEXT WEEK — Is religion prepared to do its part?

**Insights
In Liturgy**



By Sister Nancy Burkin

**The Cantor:
A Prayer**

If I were to ask 100 people, "What does it take to be a good cantor?" I think I could accurately predict that 95 percent would answer, "a good voice," or some similar phrase. And, I would have to admit, these 95 people are quite correct. Why then, you may ask, does this column go on for six more paragraphs?

It goes on because to say a cantor must be able to sing well tells only part of the story. A cantor must be able to pray well in song, so well that he or she can stand before the assembly and gather them in sung prayer together. As a cantor develops his or her ability as a singer through hours of practice, endless exercises and demanding lessons so

must a cantor develop his or her ability to pray. The time a cantor spends in prayer is as important as that spent in rehearsal. In fact, if no time has been spent in prayer, the cantor's rehearsal time is a waste and his or her ministry an empty void.

Imagine the following scene: The lector has just finished the first reading, the assembly responds, "Thanks be to God," and all remain together in silent, shared response to the Word proclaimed to them. Following the silence, the cantor moves to the lectern, unhurried and confident in his or her ability to sing prayerfully. The person of the cantor standing before the assembly moves them to a common response even before a note is played or sung. The introduction of the psalm begins, the cantor sings and from the depths of his or her being much more

than a melody evolves. The assembly, gathered by the presence of the cantor and then by the prayer, does not hesitate to respond. The building resounds with the assembly's response to the Word of God!

Regardless of voice quality or vocal expertise, one who has not spent time in prayer with the very reading to which the response is to be given or with the psalm text and who generally takes no time for quite being with God, will never fulfill this role as cantor as described above. The bearing of one's body from chair to lectern, the stance of the person before the assembly, the simple arm gesture gathering response begins and acquires meaning in the experience of God that a cantor has each day. And all this practically before the cantor opens his or her mouth!

The cantor "dies" each time he or she leads the people in prayer, for once he or she begins to sing, the attention of the assembly is not on the beautiful voice quality of the singer but rather on that intangible reality that is hard to describe but very evident when missing: the quality

and depth of prayer. The cantor shares the gift of singing so completely in transparency of faith with the assembly, that they are taken up with the presence of the Giver rather than the gift.

The ability to do this, like the ability to sing well, is not put on like an overcoat and removed just as quickly when it is no longer needed. This ability, like all ministries, is not tied up in what someone does but is part and parcel of who he or she is.

What does it take to be a good cantor? A voice? Yes, but a voice that carries an authentic experience of God that cannot help but gather the people of God to share in that experience. I can be a performer or I can be a cantor. The former has no place in liturgical celebration. The latter makes demands essential to the role: to be a person of prayer, committed to sharing in song my faith experience.

Abortion Film

"Assignment Life," a film on the abortion controversy, will be shown at 7:30 p.m., Tuesday, June 23, at St. Charles Borromeo School Hall, 3003 Dewey Ave.

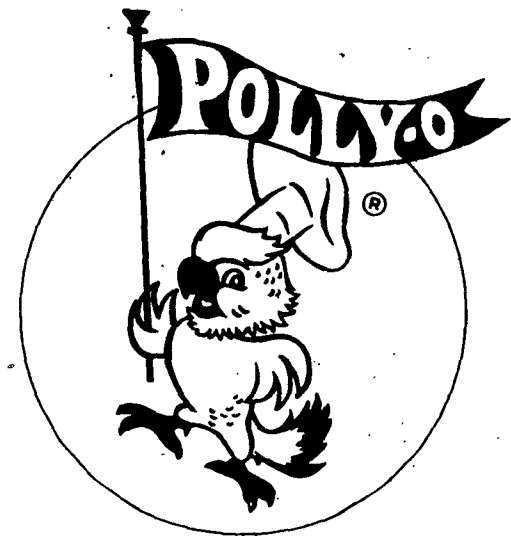
Proposal Gets OK

The plan to develop a new Office of Social Ministry in the Yates, Ontario, Wayne, Seneca and Cayuga county area has been given the nod from a group of Catholics in the region involved.

The group agreed "conceptually" to a proposal to establish such an office. That proposal will be the subject of four open hearings now slated for September and October.

**AMERICA'S
BOUNTY...
DAIRY FOODS**

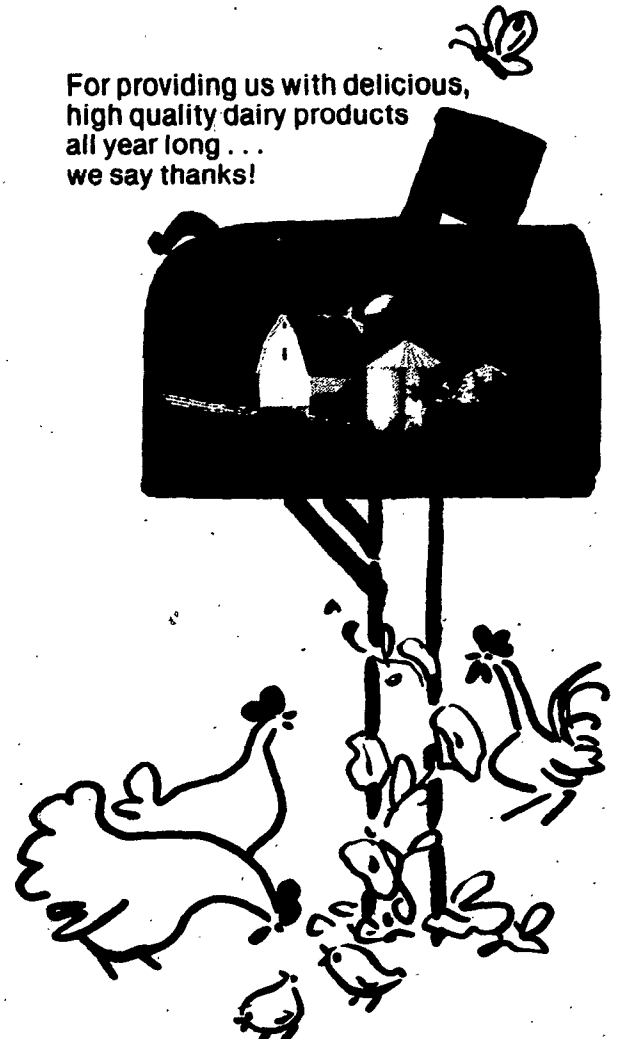
Thanks to you, the dairy farmer,
Americans enjoy some of the
most healthful, delicious foods —
dairy products.
We salute you during your month.



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**WE SALUTE THE
DAIRY FARMER**

For providing us with delicious,
high quality dairy products
all year long...
we say thanks!



Dairy farmers and their
families who live and work
in our community deserve
our thanks. They help our
community remain stable
and healthy.



We congratulate them.



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