

# EDITORIAL

ANN HOLT

**Ann Holt** was Director of Care for Education before joining Bible Society as Partnership and Development Executive and national trainer and consultant to Local Education Authorities, the DfES, and independent schools on issues to do with governance and management, including the appointment of senior staff, and has written on issues covering school governance. Adamson Books have recently published her latest book *Joined-Up Governance*, co-authored with Jane Martin.



**OUR NEPHEW WAS TWO WHEN HE WAS MOST PROFOUNDLY AND MULTIPLY DISABLED BY PROBLEMS WHICH OCCURRED FOLLOWING A "ROUTINE" OPERATION ON HIS HEART.** For nine years I shared the sorrows, tears and joys of my sister-in-law, her husband and her parents as they worked tirelessly to give Patrick a full and enjoyable life, until he died prematurely, aged eleven. I learned first-hand about different criteria for success and achievement; discovered the huge capacity for support and generosity demonstrated by caring therapists, teachers and doctors, as well as friends, and found out just how difficult it can be to navigate our streets, shops and other buildings if your body requires a wheelchair or other assistance.

Since then, as a result of immense effort and highly successful campaigning on the part of those with various disabilities, there has been a huge change in attitude and awareness of the needs variously disabled people may have and, more importantly, how their perspectives and experiences of life can enrich all our understandings.

Paul Dicken's article on the Disability Discrimination Act challenges churches not to hide behind the difficulties of historic and physically challenging buildings, but to rise to the challenge of the investment it may take to reach out to 15 per cent of the UK's population. Changes to the church buildings and to styles of worship should aim at respecting the dignity of the disabled, who should be consulted before any plans get underway. As with good Special Needs Education, which often leads to better education for all (Individual Learning Plans which began with children with special needs are now coming in for everyone), the church that values people with disabilities values people full stop, and becomes a better church for all.

This brings me to the rich variety of articles, several written by Christians who are themselves disabled, in this issue that will enhance our understanding of God himself as we "see" him through the eyes of the blind, "hear" him with the deaf ...

John Hull helps us to get behind the "metaphorical defence" of the negative image given to blindness in the Gospels to the Jesus who enters into darkness, as well as bringing light.

Reflecting on the theology of Jürgen Moltmann, Roger Hitching reminds us of the incompleteness of humanity and of how we all need healing, so it ill becomes us to differentiate to the point of discrimination against those whose disability may just be more obvious. If we all

understood sign language, we could discover another eloquent, beautiful and powerful iconography with which to represent our relationship with God, as well as enabling us to reach out to the "other". The liberation that comes from "breaking the power of the perspective of the dominant" will not only have consequences in our church life, it will also affect us politically, socially and economically.

Two other articles enable us to begin to tread a pathway to some greater theological insight into the reality of disability. Faith Bowers opens up the issues of fault, guilt and the reasons for suffering – the big questions that confront all of us at times in our lives and movingly finds the Christ of the cross, present and highly visible in human suffering. Nancy Eiesland, on the other hand, takes us to "a further place along the path towards human flourishing" by encountering the resurrected Jesus who nevertheless bears the marks of his woundedness in his resurrected body.

Writing my first editorial for an issue of *The Bible in TransMission* replete with articles born out of the writers' own experiences of disability, as well as their theological reflection, has been a moving and challenging experience. It has once more made me face the deep mysteries hidden in our God, and the perplexities of certain biblical imagery when seen from the perspective of the blind, the deaf and the chronically sick. As I read the articles, I was reminded of how surprised and puzzled I was at my sister-in-law's response when she carried home her child who went into hospital with a relatively minor problem and came out unable to walk, speak or feed. She simply said, "Now, I know that there must be a God, no one else can make sense of this." ■