



ICDF Networks

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Ability Not Disability



The mural with the title “Luke 14” shown in the photograph above was painted by Hyatt Moore in 2015. His website states: “It’s real people depicted in the mural, including one from Jamaica blinded and disfigured after being assaulted with battery acid, a scarred soldier without an ear, a little Guatemalan boy with severe cerebral palsy, a lovely young (pregnant) woman who suffered a stroke . . . and more.” A fascinating video on the painting and how it came together can be seen at ...

<https://www.hyattmoore.com/egallery/2015/02/24/luke-14-mural-revealed/>

Luke 14:12-13

Then Jesus said to his host, “When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.

In this newsletter however we want to celebrate the lives of those who live with challenges and, through the grace of God, overcome these in a spectacular manner just as we want to pay tribute to those who reach out in order to enrich the lives of those who at times can be marginalised. May we as a fellowship always be filled with compassion and love, always ready embrace and encourage.

<http://www.icdf.com>

Using Sign Language in Dance

I am delighted to read of Carol's love for sign language. To every word I shout a hearty "Amen!" I remember interpreting in my church for a deaf friend. Halfway through worship he started weeping. I was devastated, thinking I'd messed up big time, but no.... apparently swaying like a dancer does to music, and using his language of sign.... he heard music for the first time ever! He heard with his eyes! Alternatively, a hearing friend told me he went to a deeper place in worship when he watched me sign and dance. His heart and head connected uniquely! BOTH these examples beautifully affirm Carol's encouragement to dancers (natural movers and over expressive gifting) to help build the gap between the deaf and hearing communities. PLEASE pray about being a bridge. - Linda Wells

In primary (elementary) school, we had a deaf unit and one girl taught me to sign the alphabet. Years later in the '90s, a school presented a concert in church and I remember being fascinated by a dance duet presented entirely in sign language. Fast forward to about 2008 when a sign language class was started in church to grow the pool of interpreters. I decided to join this class to learn sign language for dance, and a whole new world of language and expression opened for me.

Sign language is the language that the deaf use to communicate. There is a silent world and they use sight to read words, pictures and symbols formed by one's hands, facial expression and body to communicate. Every country has its own sign language, so there's Kenyan Sign Language (KSL), American Sign Language (ASL), British Sign Language (BSL) and so on. There is also international sign language, but people tend to learn their own country's sign language first.

To learn sign language, join a sign language class and learn from the basics up. It doesn't take long - within 6 months to a year you can attain fluency based on your interest and diligence in practicing. You'll grow even faster if you regularly interact with the deaf in your community. They really appreciate hearing people (that's what they call us!) making the effort to enter their world and communicate with them in their language - it definitely beats communicating by writing notes!

To incorporate sign language in dance, listen and understand the song, and let the Lord guide you in the movements. You will know if you'll do the entire song in sign language or parts of it. To dance using sign language in dance, the signs remain accurate, but are larger than life and extend far beyond the usual signing space (the square formed by your head, shoulders and torso) to bring out the dance element. The fun part is combining the signs with dance movements in the rest of your body and teaching others. If you have deaf people in your church, consider involving them - they don't hear the music, but follow the rhythms and are usually quick students in learning choreography. I encourage you to explore sign language and consider using it to enrich your movement vocabulary in 2021. God bless!



Caroline Mwazi

If you should be interested in connecting with others who make use of deaf signing in their dances, please contact us at icdfworld@gmail.com

Expressing Beauty in our weakness

I love this testimony from Tracy Williamson. It reveals the beauty of God's heart. I remember when God released me back into dance after eighteen years of no dance, as I tried to offer my gift on the altar. He made it clear He ALWAYS looks at the heart first, and anoints a beautiful humble heart mightily. I love even more how humble her heart is as she exposes the vulnerability of hearing loss, and STILL steps out in faith, thus challenging us all to "go for it" and glorify God in the process!!! Go Tracy! Thank you for your courage and the resulting Blessing!!!!!!

LOVE Marilyn Baker too. Powerful duo. - Linda Wells

Lockdown and the time since has been testing for us all, but for me one of the biggest challenges came early on when I was invited to be part of an amazing vision: for dancers all over the country to create a danced version of the UK Blessing Song. Like the song, the danced version would be shared online with dancers of all types and ability incorporated into a beautiful whole.

A friend of mine, Nicky Enticknapp who is one of the CDFB regional coordinators, sent me the initial invitation. I work with blind singer/songwriter Marilyn Baker in a music and teaching ministry and Nicky knew that I sometimes did simple mime type dances to Marilyn's songs, hence her including me.

Nevertheless, it took me by surprise as I have had no dance training and am actually profoundly deaf, partially sighted and coordination impaired! To put things into context, about 20 years ago Marilyn and I were at a conference led by Jennifer Rees Larcombe. A dancer was going to lead a workshop but had to cancel and people were so disappointed. When Marilyn suddenly suggested I do it I was shocked as I had never danced and couldn't hear music! However, that night God spoke to me, saying that many people feel they can't do it for different reasons and that it would help them to have a leader who felt the same. God's secret wisdom!

I woke with that thought in my head and knew He wanted me to do it. I said yes though I had no idea how. In the end I used the only music I had any concept of, one of Marilyn's older songs called Overflow of Worship. I could hear a bit better when I first joined her so had more of an idea of the speed and style of the song. I thought of some simple mime movements that we could do to express the words and then we tried it in our little group. The group was made up of me, a totally blind lady, another lady who had a Zimmer frame, a man with depression who had hardly made eye contact before let alone tried dancing, a frail but enthusiastic lady in her 80's and one or two who were able bodied but had never danced before. Amazingly, the dance came together in a lovely way and we all did what we could to make the movements full of meaning. Some people were wobbly, some were out of time, but everyone did it from their hearts. It was an eye opener to me that you don't have to be trained or even physically able to powerfully express love and beauty with our bodies. I'd spent so many years feeling ashamed of who I was because of bullying and abuse, and I found this experience amazingly healing. I've been doing such workshops ever since and also dance in Marilyn's concerts although my hearing and balance are now a lot worse.

However, on this occasion with the UK Blessing dance, my instinctive reaction was to say no. It seemed impossible as I had no way of knowing how this song went. I played it over and over from the link which amazingly had subtitles, so I could pick up the words: "The Lord bless you, and keep you; make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. May He turn His face towards you, and give you His peace. Amen, amen amen ...". I loved the words as they conveyed so much of God's heart, but I had no idea of the tune or timing. Added to that, I had to video it myself, as with Marilyn's blindness and lockdown, there was no one I could ask to help. I could record videos on my iPad, but every time I'd used it before, they either came out far too fast or too slow.



Tracy dancing as Marilyn is singing on a visit to India

Because of this, I was going to refuse, but once again I heard God whispering into my heart: 'So many, especially those with weaknesses, feel they cannot dance, but their slightest movement from a worshipful heart is so beautiful to me. Please do the dance to represent them, all of those who feel they can't.'

I knew I needed to try, and it turned into an amazing experience. Marilyn sang it over and over to try to get me familiar with the melody and timing. I knew the second part of the song would be too complicated so decided to just focus on the first verse, the chorus and the repeats. Surprisingly, it was the 'amens' that were the trickiest part. I just couldn't tell, even with the subtitles, how long each amen was and if there were gaps between them, but as Marilyn sang 'The Lord bless you and keep you,' I felt such joy as simple movements came together in my mind. I set the iPad on a tripod and amazingly it was Marilyn's blind friend Hazel who gave me the heads up of



Tracy leading a dance at Brunel Manor, Britain

how to use the video so that it ran at normal speed. I think God has such a sense of humour, for who would imagine a blind person giving me that insight? The resulting view wasn't very pro – I was a bit wonky, but I got it near enough ok.

We decided Marilyn would sit about 1.5 metres away and would listen to the song on headphones singing it loudly for me herself so that I wouldn't be distracted by the track's backing music. I would watch her face after setting the video to go and as soon as the words began Marilyn would nod and I would start dancing. She nodded with each new phrase and gradually as we did it again and again, I got a feel of the timing and cadence, so started focussing more on being expressive than on my worry that I was out of time.

There were plenty of humorous moments. Once we got nearly all the way through when the phone suddenly rang, and we had to stop. Another time my Hearing dog, Goldie, heard a noise outside and started barking! I nearly gave up when we got all the way through and I felt that it had been the best shot yet, but then found that the remote had not worked and nothing had recorded!

Eventually we completed it and I was able to submit my video. It wasn't at all perfect and I know there were definitely times, especially during the amens, when I was out of time. But that ultimately didn't matter. What counted was that the Lord helped me to do something I never thought I could, to dance to a totally unheard and unknown song on behalf of all those with weaknesses or fear. I couldn't have done it without Marilyn's help which speaks to me of how much we are a body, all of us with weaknesses and strengths yet able to support and enable one another. That depicted to me what was happening in our communities during the lockdown and needs to continue happening as we move deeper into being what the body of Christ really means.

I am so grateful for the privilege of being invited to take part in this amazing experience and yes, I will keep on dancing. I would like to encourage all, whatever weaknesses or disabilities you may have, to go for it as your every act of worship brings such joy to God's heart and is such a beautiful picture of God's love working in our midst. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vnEhIz2eHow>

Tracy Williamson

Tracy Williamson is an author and speaker working together with blind singer/songwriter Marilyn Baker for the MBM Trust, see ... www.mbm-ministries.org. Together they have published a book called "A Beautiful Tapestry". This is a joyous celebration of how God has used two ladies to share his love to a broken world. <https://www.mbm-ministries.org/products/pre-order-beautiful-tapestry>

It's your story ... Make it real!

I have been a worship dance facilitator since 1993 and I'm currently the National Coordinator for the Christian Dance Fellowship of Ireland. I'm presently involved with integrated dance where people with a wide range of abilities can express themselves emotively through physical movement.

I started dance, drama and singing in 1976 within church. My passion for the performing arts led me to gain a National BTEC Diploma in Performing Arts. Although I did extremely well and passed with triple distinctions, I couldn't continue to a dance degree - my tutors thought that I would never make it through the strenuous physical activity required. They suggested the route of becoming a drama teacher because I had a physical disability.

I was so determined to continue in my dance endeavour that I Googled 'Dance and Disability' and found Open Arts in Belfast where I explained my situation. This led to me taking part in a dance audition to join Luminous Soul, which is part of Open Arts ... a unique, contemporary dance programme that provides high-quality dance training and development for disabled people. This gave me the great opportunity to work with many expert choreographers and tutors from around the UK and Northern Ireland. These include the award winning Candoco Dance Company, the Blue Eyed Soul Dance Company, and the world class performers and choreographers, Claire Cunningham, Caroline Bowditch and Marc Brew. Luminous Soul has performed at many high profile festivals and events locally and nationally. This project gave me the opportunity to do the training I wanted and to continue with my performing arts qualification alongside doing my Bachelors of Science in Psychology and working. (For more info see www.openartsni.org)



Photo: Open Arts (used with permission)

The dance training with Luminous Soul completely changed the way that I facilitated my own worship dance classes. I became more aware of how I could move my own body learning to break free from the physical and emotional barriers that I had put on myself through listening to other people's negative limitations of my ability. My personal confidence grew. I began to trust in my own physical body again which I hadn't been able to do for some time. I always had the fear that my body would somehow let me down.

I trained to work with other dancers with many different abilities to my own which enabled my own dance movement to excel. The belief and encouragement from fellow dancers has enabled me to push myself to do more. The atmosphere within Luminous Soul is so completely different from my experience from my performing arts training. We are a family of dancers who respect each other and encourage each other. It is not an atmosphere of competition and criticism which was my past experience in college.

The training I gained within Luminous Soul has enabled me to be more aware of my environment. We are all individuals of all shapes and sizes. Everyone has their own level of dance, physical and emotional ability, and passed experiences. What these years have taught me the most is love and respect; and acceptance of self and acceptance of others. We are 'all different' and we all have a right to be different and to be respected for who we are as dancers no matter what ability.

Within the Christian Dance Fellowship of Ireland we are a group of united worship dancers with a range of abilities. This means we can learn from each other. Again in love and respect. Dancers know they have the option to interpret the movements in the way they feel comfortable - using a chair, standing, kneeling, or lying down, stepping out to rest. This is all important.

No matter who or what you are, you can dance in your own way breaking free from preconceived ideas. Be yourself happy and free in your own unique dance movement.



Photo: CDFI workshop

My personal motto is, dance comes from the heart and that is more important to me as a dance facilitator than perfect alignment. Continue your dance the way you feel led to dance and enjoy the freedom that it brings. Whether you dance from the heart using your eyes, your head, your hands, your legs, your feet, or your torso, it's your story. Make it real.

Julie-Anna Richmond



Photos: Open Arts (used with permission)

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“Signed worship should be relaxed and fun, with little exertion as it can be done while seated, you only require your brains to be switched on!” ~ Naomi Haywood

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Apologies: In the previous ICDF newsletter for Children and Youth we erroneously printed that Thea Webster was from Sydney, Australia while she actually is studying in Brisbane. We apologise for any inconvenience caused.