

Lord of the Dance

I love to dance. Music to me spells movement, and just about anything on the radio with a decent beat has the power to send me 'bopping' instead of walking around my house. Since hearing Phil Vincent's story, however, I have become more aware of the gift of dance, its power to transform and to reveal God's delight in us. Let me explain.

Phil is the Australian coordinator of *Faith & Light*, a Christian movement for people with physical and intellectual disabilities, their families and friends. Phil himself was born with cerebral palsy.

Last year Phil travelled to Canada for the international conference of *Faith & Light* representatives. It was a time of faith and friendship; a time for people to tell their stories and to be listened to in ways healing and lifegiving.

Phil found himself particularly affected by the testimony of Ruth, a speaker who spoke of her shyness as a teenager. When she went to local dances she was wary of embarrassing herself because she wasn't sure of the steps. As he listened to Ruth, Phil found himself remembering occasions in his own youth when he would decline an invitation to go to a school dance. 'I felt shy and self-conscious about my disability. I thought no one would be interested in dancing with me. As Ruth was talking, in my heart of hearts I heard Jesus ask me,

"If I came with you, would you go to the dance?" I heard myself say, "Yes I would."

As the conference came to a close a celebration was held which included singing and dancing. Viviane from Belgium asked Phil if he would like to dance. Phil hesitated. 'Okay... but what about the wheel chair?' (Phil had been using a wheel chair at the conference.) 'No problem,' said Viviane. 'My son Laurent is in a wheelchair and I often dance with him in our home.'

What followed was, in Phil's words, one of the most wonderful and liberating experiences of his life. 'I had a ball! It was great to get really involved and be part of the action, not just with Viviane but all the other people who asked me to dance as well during the course of the evening. As I said to Viviane later, I have been waiting thirty years for someone to ask me to dance and it was worth the wait! I will always remember that night, especially Viviane's kindness, with great joy and gratitude.'

For every person who has felt the awkwardness of stepping out beyond their comfort zone, whether it be onto a dance floor or another platform that tests their confidence, Phil's story is a reminder that God's love is a joyful invitation drawing us beyond all fear and self-doubt. In God's eyes we are each beautiful and cherished. Beauty is the glow of the gift within, agility is the freedom of true friendship; and dancing, ultimately, is about following the steps of the one and

only Lord of the Dance.

As Phil says, 'Long may the dance continue!'

Faith & Light, co-founded by Marie-Helene Mathieu and Jean Vanier (founder of L'Arche), grew out of a pilgrimage to Lourdes by 12,000 people in 1971. •

