

25 Years of... Sharing God's *Love* with People Who Have Cognitive Impairments

## FRIENDSHIP MINISTRIES CELEBRATES 25 YEARS

of Nurturing  
Spiritual Growth  
and Relationships  
in Churches around  
the World

It started with one family and a simple question they posed to their denominational publishing house: "What materials do you have to nurture the spiritual growth of our son who has Down syndrome?" The publisher was empty-handed.

The problem was more complex than a lack of materials. The church was failing to embrace its sisters and brothers with cognitive impairments and their families. And so Friendship Ministries was formed with a mission we've been working to share with churches around the world for the last 25 years.

### Today, Friendship groups exist in:

- More than 800 churches
- More than 50 denominations
- More than 20 countries

But we're getting ahead of ourselves! What is Friendship Ministries' mission all about?

### Sharing God's Love in the Context of Friendships

Anyone who has been in a Friendship program for long knows it's all about mutuality. As friends and mentors spend time together learning about God and each other, they discover

community as God intended it to be: welcoming to all, rejoicing together in joyful times, and weeping together in sad times. And that's why so many friends and mentors are in Friendship groups for the long haul. *(Hear what friends and mentors have to say in their own words on p. 2.)*

### Full Inclusion in the Church

From the beginning, Friendship Ministries' dream was that churches would fully embrace people with cognitive impairments and their families. Our most visible work has been helping churches start new Friendship groups and keep existing groups vibrant and healthy. But we also consult with churches in other areas that are critical to full inclusion, such as:

- including children in Sunday school
- recognizing and using spiritual gifts
- the process of church membership
- inclusive worship

In addition, Friendship Ministries has worked with countless group homes, camps, and other organizations to facilitate spiritual growth and inclusion outside the context of church.

### Reaching Out to All Denominations

Friendship Ministries' mission has also been interdenominational from the beginning. Friendship materials focus on the central message of the gospel recognized by all Christians, which



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churches may supplement with information specific to their own tradition. This is one reason Friendship programs thrive in so many different churches today.



Pam and Lisa, longtime friends

## IT'S ALL ABOUT... Friends and Mentors in Their Own Words

In fact, many programs are collaborations between churches of different denominations. The newest Friendship program, for example, is a partnership of **St. Paul's Catholic Church** and **Woodlawn Christian Reformed Church** in Grand Rapids, MI.

A highlight in Friendship's 25-year history was becoming not only multi-denominational but also multi-lingual with the establishment of *Amistad*, Friendship's Spanish-language ministry. (Read about where *Amistad* is thriving today on p. 3.)

### A Vision for the Future

So where do we go from here? Read Executive Director Nella Uitvlugt's reflections on the future on p.5. But first please take a moment with us to give thanks for God's love, which inspires our vision and binds us all together in community. ■

"Can you remember doing something special for 20 years and loving it? It's the friendships, past and present, which keep me involved. My words of wisdom for others: JOIN US!"

--Amy Schrotenboer, *Holland Special Education Ministries*

"I have attended SEM for at least 20 years, ever since I started living at My Sister's House. At SEM I enjoy meeting my friends and singing songs. I like the Bible stories and the lesson material."

--Pat Oetman, *Holland Special Education Ministries*

"I like Friendship group. It's cool. I get to see my friends. Talking to friends and inviting new friends who've never been there are my favorite parts. I ask my friends, but I don't push them too hard."

--Aimee Smith, *Plymouth Heights Friendship Group*

"I began at SEM when I was in high school. My service started as an opportunity to be a friend to one of the students, and it developed from there. I have learned things from each friend! Eventually the program became a part of my weekly routine and part of my life."

--Pam Bos, *Holland Special Education Ministries*

"I like the singing and crafts part of the Friendship Club—the desserts also! :)"

--Bob Brink, *Bethel Friendship Group*

"Nothing I've done (the other teachers agree) has been as satisfying as this spiritual adventure!"

--Monyeen Boyed, *Lima Baptist Temple*

## ON THE ROAD

Will one of us be in your neighborhood? Give us a call or send us an email if you'd like to meet!

### Nella

**September 8:** One Body in Christ Together, Grandville, MI

**September 17-19:** National Council of Churches' Committee on Disabilities, Chicago, IL

**September 29:** Friendship Groups Canada, Kitchener, ON

**October 11-14:** Arc National Convention, Dallas, TX

**October 20:** Friendship Groups Canada, Edmonton, AB

### Tony & Diana

**November 3:** Circle of Support, Arc of Greater Prince William, Woodbridge, VA



# Notas DE AMISTAD



## Bienvenidos

Join us in welcoming the latest additions to the *Amistad* community:

- Hogar Alicia Guzman of Mendoza, **Argentina**
- Hogar Daniel Ticera of Berrotaran-Cordoba, **Argentina**
- Iglesia ciudad de Resistencia of Chaco, **Argentina**
- LAPEN of Bell Ville-Cordoba, **Argentina**
- Piedras de testimonio of Puerto Iguazu, **Argentina**
- Flor de Amancaes of Lima, **Peru**
- Iglesia Evangelica Centro Zarate of Lima, **Peru**
- Ministerio corazones de vida of Lima, **Peru**
- Iglesia Bautista Cristo Reina of Paso de los Toros, **Uruguay**
- Soldados del Rey of Las Piedras, **Uruguay**
- Asociación Civil Betesda of Puerto Ordaz, **Venezuela**
- Educación Cristiana Ovice of San Cristóbal, **Venezuela**
- Fundacion Amor en accion of Upata, **Venezuela**

## Testimonio

"We are a small church but with big visions and projects. Our Lord supports us every day, and I give thanks to him for that. Our income is not enough for a special room for this ministry. At this time I dictate to the class in the kitchen of the church with an accordion divider, but with happiness and a lot of joy.

Thanks to the mercy of our Lord, Facundo is having a big change in his life. Before he could not stand still more than five minutes because he got angry. Now he can stay in class for more than 45 minutes without being startled.

Thank you so much for your interest in our necessities. May God continue blessing you, and use you every day to extend the kingdom of God for those that many times people reject in our society."■

--Mary Guevara, *Jesus Te Ama*, Assemblies of God, Uruguay



Members of the *Jesus Te Ama* group are learning the joy of God's love

# LEADING THE WAY

## Friendship Materials Chart New Territory in Nurturing Spiritual Growth and Embracing Spiritual Gifts

Our celebration of 25 years of God's faithful work through us wouldn't be the same if we didn't acknowledge what God has allowed us to do in the area of developing materials that nurture the spiritual growth of our friends.

From its earliest days, Friendship Ministries has been leading the way in helping churches, parishes, and group homes fully embrace friends as active members of God's family. To support the more than 800 Friendship programs worldwide that have caught this vision through the years, we've been steadfast in our effort to provide unique and often groundbreaking materials, including:

### • Friendship Bible Studies

...help friends come to know the completeness of God's love shown throughout the Bible from the creation and fall, to Jesus' crucifixion and ascension, to the sending of the Spirit.

### • Amistad Bible Studies

...help friends in Spanish-speaking cultures come to know God's love



through this Spanish translation of Friendship Bible Studies. The first—and only—of its kind!

• **We All Have Gifts**

...helps friends discover their spiritual gifts and share them with their community. One of several Friendship Life Studies.

• **Expressing Faith in Jesus**

...helps friends become full members of their faith communities through baptism, confirmation, or profession of

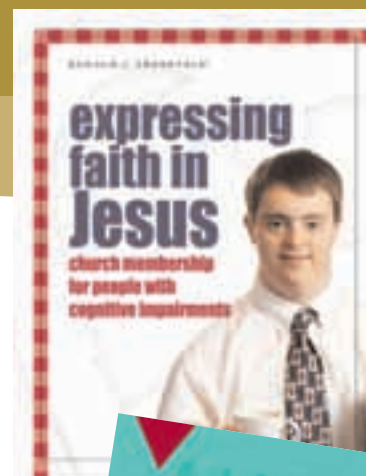
faith. A unique resource with practical suggestions to guide the membership process.

• **Autism and Your Church**

...helps churches integrate friends with autism spectrum disorders into the full life of the church. One of the most groundbreaking materials available on autism written specifically for the Christian community.

We feel privileged and humbled to have been a part of God's great work of extending God's boundless love to ALL, and we look forward to continuing to *share God's love with friends who have cognitive impairments and enable them to become an active part of God's family!* ■

—John Kim, Director of Marketing Communications



To:

Subject:

Message:

## TESTIMONIAL:

### Discovering Friendship Materials Was One of My Better Days

Back in 1979 when we began our program, we had to rely on our own knowledge and experience for everything—the work of researching, planning, and writing lessons.

I don't recall how I came to be aware of Friendship Ministries' materials, but it was certainly one of my better days. Here was everything we needed to be able to offer a cohesive, well-organized system of teaching. From the Old Testament through the New, everything was laid out in good order. Furthermore, it came with so much hands-on material to help reinforce what we taught. It was easily adaptable to meet the needs of students across the learning spectrum. It could be used with young people or adults. Above all, it was so easy to center on the teachings of our own denomination.

Today we continue to teach both children and adults. Our children are all Roman Catholic, but our adults come from a variety of Christian denominations and from among the unchurched. Friendship Ministries' materials continue to meet our needs on all levels. I have children with Down syndrome, ADD/ADHD, CP, Autism and Asperger's and adults with all these as well as emotional problems. Friendship Ministries continues to make lessons easily adaptable even as more disabilities emerge. Thanks to all who work so hard to make life easier for so many.

—Terry Cloyd, St. Francis of Assisi/St. Maximilian Kolbe, Detroit, MI



## FROM THE DIRECTOR

### The Baby Grows!

After the open house celebrating Friendship Ministries' new offices, Cele Mereness, our first Executive Director, wrote a letter to the Board of Directors with congratulations on the changes in Friendship Ministries over the years. In it she wrote, "The baby is growing up!" Yes, Friendship has grown and changed in wonderful ways.



Mary Ann, who is Nella's prayer partner, holds baby Ruben

### Dreams for a Future Full of Joyful Stories

Through the years we have heard many stories, both sad and joyful, about the response of churches to people with cognitive impairments. Yes, we still hear sad ones, but the success stories are

rapidly increasing. Our dream for the future is that Friendship Ministries will be able to facilitate more and more joyful stories. Even the sad stories can have wonderful endings of change within a congregation!

Something happened just this week that reminded me that God has already included friends with cognitive impairments in his family. We are here merely to embody God's inclusion, not to think of ourselves as the great 'includers.' Here's the story:

**Monday:** A mother e-mailed from Aurora, CO saying she needs a church that will include her daughter so she doesn't have to find a babysitter while she attends worship.

**Tuesday:** A father e-mailed that his congregation in Littleton, CO, a nearby town, is ready to seriously think about disability ministry.

**Wednesday:** A woman who is on the Autism Spectrum called from Golden, CO, another nearby suburb. She is longing for a congregation willing to provide her with a support person. She had read Friendship's book *Autism and Your Church* and wanted to thank us for it.

### Friendship Ministries can get them all together!

As Friendship becomes more widely known, we have more opportunities to help give stories like these a joyful ending. Maybe in the future I can tell you more about what happens in this developing story....

### More Dreams for the Future:

- That more programs will begin within each denomination we serve. We'll help you determine who to contact in your denomination if you're willing to spread the word. Some of you are already attending regional church conferences to share Friendship stories—thank you!
- That Friendship programs, their churches, and the families who benefit will see Friendship Ministries as a resource, not simply a publisher of materials, and that they will support our mission with financial gifts. This is critical if we are to continue to provide free consulting and other services.
- That Friendship Ministries will reach more churches internationally. Did you know there is an Amistad group in a Spanish-speaking church in Tokyo, Japan? How's that for God including all his people?
- That more friends will become full members of their congregations and be encouraged to share their gifts.

What will Friendship Ministries look like in 25 years? I can't predict, but I do know that God is directing this ministry in ways that sometimes stop me in my tracks and cause me to say, "I would never have imagined this was possible!" God's ways are truly inspiring and exciting. ■

*Nella Vitolug*



# COME SPEND A DAY LEARNING WITH US!

Sign Up for Workshop by September 1



**Theme:** One Body Together in Christ  
**Date:** September 8, 2007  
**Place:** Grandville, MI

- **Audience:** college students, pastors, Sunday school teachers, Friendship mentors, youth leaders, parents, and volunteers
- **Co-Sponsors:** Friendship Ministries, the Christian Learning Center, The Gray Center for Social Learning and Understanding, and Disability Concerns of the Christian Reformed Church
- **Cost:** \$30 (includes brunch)
- **To register:** visit [www.togetherinchrist.us](http://www.togetherinchrist.us) or call Virginia at 888.463.0272

▪ **Keynote Speaker:** Sondra Williams, from Columbus, Ohio is a woman with an autism spectrum disorder, a wife, mother to four children with ASD, a classroom aide, author and a member of the Ohio Autism Task Force. Her insights into autism and life are truly an inspiration for others!

## Workshop Sectionals:

- Recruiting and Training Friendship Mentors
- Inclusion for Adults/Children with Disabilities
- Sensory Integration—What It Is and How To Help
- Panel Discussion on Transitional Issues
- Pastoral Care to People with Disabilities and Their Families
- The Processing Pyramid: Promoting Successful Outcomes For Individuals With Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)
- Autism Q&A
- Opportunities for Compassion: The Church and Mental Illness
- G.L.U.E. Teams

## Special Gifts



We at Friendship Ministries would like to give special thanks for **gifts received in memory** and **gifts received in honor** of people whose lives have intersected Friendship in various ways:

**In memory of:**  
Susie Bylsma

**In honor of:**  
Betty VanderZee  
Joe

We are grateful for all of you—individuals, churches, and organizations—who share our vision and support it with your gifts. Friendship Ministries depends on you!



**Friendship**  
MINISTRIES

We would love to hear from you:

**Nella Uitvlugt**  
Executive Director  
tel: 888.866.8966 (ext. 2 -- 1)  
email: [friendship@friendship.org](mailto:friendship@friendship.org)

**Renee Buist**  
Administrative Assistant  
tel: 888.866.8966 (ext. 2 -- 3)  
email: [bustr@friendship.org](mailto:bustr@friendship.org)

**John Kim**  
Marketing Communications Director  
tel: 888.866.8966 (ext. 2 -- 2)  
email: [kimj@friendship.org](mailto:kimj@friendship.org)

**FRIENDSHIP MINISTRIES**  
2215 29th Street SE #B6  
Grand Rapids, MI 49508  
[www.friendship.org](http://www.friendship.org)