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Sharing God's *Love* with People who have Intellectual Disabilities

INSPIRED TO CONTINUE: A GROUP LEADER'S TESTIMONY

By Caroline Beren



•• Margaret and Caroline work on a Friendship scrapbook.

Have you ever felt like quitting? Throwing in the towel? Have you wondered whether being a Friendship group leader really matters?

I was at this point 5 years ago. The Mount Forest Friendship group had been in operation since 1989. Our friends and mentors enjoyed the weekly meetings of fellowship, singing, lessons, sharing and snacks. They were great; I was the one who was tired and wanted to quit.

About this time, I was invited to go on a trip to Medjugorja in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This is a spiritual place where people from all over the world gather. I went.

Part of the experience is attending church services. Every hour a church service is held in a different language.

English was the 10 a.m. service. There were so many people filling the pews from the side doors that I found myself at the front of the church between the altar and the first pew with about 100 other people.

Right beside me was a group of people with intellectual disabilities, whom I never saw again for the duration of my stay. Near the beginning of the mass, the priest asked for prayers for all of the people with intellectual disabilities **and** their staff (I have also worked for Community Living for 25 years). That grabbed my heart, my mind and my attitude. I left with a resolution in my being that **no matter what, Friendship was going to continue.**

Returning home, I asked our congregation to pray for leaders. Five new leaders came forward! Affirmation! Here are a few things that would have not happened the following year without the Friendship group:

- Two friends asked us to pray that they come to know Jesus.
- One of our friends, Gail, died, and we had such a great funeral, singing her favorite songs and sharing fellowship as only we can. This caused a few people in the audience to return to their home churches.
- In honour of Gail, monies were collected to buy Bibles for Friendship.
- A new friend started to attend Friendship and was very excited to take one of those Bibles home. His family hadn't gone to church for years because someone at their church thought it was inappropriate for him to be in Sunday school.



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- His mother and sister are now reading the Bible stories to him every night.

We are joyously continuing the Friendship ministry. Another friend has passed, and a couple of people have moved away, but we also have new people joining. What a joy. So glad I didn't quit. And yes: Friendship group matters.

“My dear brothers and sisters, listen to me. Hasn't God chosen those who are poor in the world's eyes to be rich in faith? Hasn't he chosen them to receive the kingdom? Hasn't he promised it to those who love him?” James 2:5 (NIRV) ■

Caroline Beren is a Friendship group leader at First Baptist Church of Mount Forest, ON

Denim & Daisy fundraiser dinner: a success!

On June 4, 2011, fifty people came together at beautiful Stonechurch Vineyards in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario to enjoy the vineyard, the wine, and Friendship! After a time of hors d'oeuvres and a structured wine tasting, Lambert Hunse and Heather DeBoer (father and daughter duo) took guests on a wagon tour of the vineyard. They shared stories of how the winery was named, some family background, and expertise on grape growing and winemaking.

The dinner was a lovely pig roast from a local catering company aptly named “Pig Out.” The guests heard from a friend, Cheryl, and her dad, Kevin, about what Friendship means to them and from Grace Hunse about the impact Friendship has had on her life. Jessica Hunse, longtime member of a Friendship group, was the guest of honour.

We don't want to forget Nella! Nella shared some facts about Friendship Ministries and what the funds will be used for: growth. It is Friendship's desire to see a Friendship program in every community, and for now our goal is to help start eight new programs in Canada over the next twelve months. John Nyholt kindly asked everyone to give generously, and give they did. We raised just over \$15,000! To God be all the glory!

Again, many thanks to Stonechurch Vineyards for the use of their facilities, and to Ellie Nyholt and Christy DeJong for their fabulous talents in organizing the event. ■



Readers, if you believe in the work of Friendship Ministries and think that you, too, could help raise some funds, please email Heather at canada@friendship.org (for Canada) or Nella at friendship@friendship.org (for USA). **We will be happy to get you started and to offer whatever support we can.**



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 17: Joni and Friends Conference, Columbus, OH

October 4-6: One God, One Call, Lutheran Services of America Disability Network, Philadelphia, PA

October 15: Training session at Central Christian Church in Rockford, IL

October 22: Disability Ministry Conference, Grand Rapids, MI

October 27: Friendship Concert at Plymouth Heights CRC, Grand Rapids, MI

November 17-19: Alliance for Full Participation, Washington, DC



Notas DE AMISTAD

WELCOME NEW GROUPS!
I want to welcome the following new Amistad groups:

- Centro Evangelistico Internacional of Bogota, Colombia; 4 amigos.
- Iglesia Vencedores de Cristo, of Barranquilla, Colombia; 30 amigos.



Members of the Amistad group at Iglesia Bautista El Fundamento of Lima, Perú

- Escuela Bíblica, of La Patagonia, Argentina; 2 amigos.
- Iglesia Avivamiento Maranatha, of Barinas, Venezuela; 7 amigos.
- Iglesia Evangélica Hermanos Libres, of Córdoba, Argentina; 2 amigos.
- Iglesia Bautista Miramonte, of San Salvador, El Salvador; 50 amigos.
- Lutheran Mission, of Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic; 12 amigos.
- Iglesia Bautista El Fundamento, of Lima, Perú; 23 amigos.

Actually Ministerio Amistad includes more than 3,300 friends, in 280 groups, located in 22 countries. Glory to God! And thanks to you for supporting our ministry.

May God Bless You,



Elizabeth R.
Elizabeth Rodriguez
Ministerio Amistad

FRIENDSHIP FAMILY



Welcome to the family!
Join us in welcoming the following groups:

- Ancient Paths Evangelical Free Church of Denver, CO
- Bethel Christian Reformed Church of Princeton, MN
- Central Baptist Church of College Station, TX
- Christ Fellowship Church of Palm Beach Gardens, FL
- Colonial Presbyterian Church of Kansas City, MO
- Country Bible Church of Blair, NE
- First Baptist Church of Eules, TX
- First Baptist Church of Johnsonburg, PA
- First Baptist Church of Meridianville, AL
- First Lutheran Church of Williston, ND
- First Presbyterian Church of Camden, AR
- First United Methodist Church of Beardstown, IL
- First United Methodist Church of Oak Lawn, IL
- First United Methodist Church of Henderson, KY
- Hope United Methodist Church of San Diego, CA
- Kingsland Baptist Church of Katy, TX
- North Uxbridge Baptist Church of North Uxbridge, MA
- Ottawa Friendship Club of Nepean, ON
- Prestonwoods Baptist Church of Plano, TX
- St Philip/Deacon Lutheran Church of Plymouth, MN
- Vineyard Community Church of Cincinnati, OH

What's happening in your part of the Friendship family? Be in touch! By phone: 888.866.8966, or email: friendship@friendship.org



ADD SOME **DRAMA** TO YOUR FRIENDSHIP

By Jolynn Bosch



Usually people value friendships that don't have a lot of drama. However, when it comes to Friendship Groups, I say the more drama the better!

I know from my experience as a special education teacher that learning comes most easily when it is entertaining and when it involves participation. What better way to accomplish this than through drama?

SCRIPTS ARE GUIDES

If putting drama into your Friendship meetings seems scary, let me give you some tips. I have been telling stories at Friendship for years, and it comes pretty naturally to me now. When I first started, there weren't as many dramas written into the lessons. Now it has become easy because so many of the lessons include script options. "Option" is a key word here. You do not have to stick exactly to the script. The most important thing is to involve people and have a little fun. No one in Friendship is expecting professionalism.

PARTICIPATION IS KEY

One of the best things about incorporating drama is that it takes the focus off you and spreads it around to the people who count the most. As I begin assigning roles, I often start with larger reading roles, which I may assign before the meeting starts. I may take a key role, such as narrator. Otherwise, I often give the biggest talking parts to a mentor and ask his or her friend be in a supportive role. You may have friends in your group who read well enough to take a larger talking role.

I admit that I typecast when I give out roles. For instance, we have some bearded seminarians attending our Friendship meetings, and I often give them the role of Jesus, a prophet, or another character who probably sported a beard back in Bible times. Before the seminarians came along, I gave these types of roles to a mentor who could be counted on to play up the part of Jesus with proper flair. Also, I

tend to consistently assign the role of God (or God's voice) to an older mentor who is tall, well respected, and has white hair.

Once you have the main speaking parts taken care of, the rest is easy. Sometimes I ask for volunteers and then assign them a role. Other times I announce the role and then ask for a volunteer, for example, "Who would like to be a disciple?" I am especially mindful to choose people who may not be good speakers for roles that don't involve talking. Additional volunteers can be used to fill in the crowds. People still seated can be used to provide necessary sound effects for the story, such as cheering or jeering.

PROMPTS AND PROPS

To help the actors in their impromptu roles, I often whisper lines to them or have them mime the parts while I do the speaking. This is true for both friends and mentors. A friend and mentor pair may also work together in this way to play a role.

When you assign and describe roles in front of everyone as part of the process, this helps to set up the story you are about to tell. Then when you actually do the drama, you're in effect reinforcing the story a second time.

Another key part of dramas is the props. Our group has two large covered tubs of what I'll call "Bible costumes." Do you remember the Peanuts Christmas special where Linus turned his blanket into a shepherd's head wrap? Old donated robes turn into the robes of kings. Large pieces of brown or gray cloth with head holes cut into them can be the clothes of disciples when you add a waist tie from the robes. Smaller pieces of cloth tied around the head can turn anyone into a desert-dweller or shepherd. White sheets with holes can outfit sheep or angels, depending on your accessories. We like to use

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FROM THE DIRECTOR

Friendship's mission is to share God's love with people who have intellectual disabilities and to enable them to become an active part of God's family.

It is clear that many Friendship programs take the second part of the mission statement seriously. We've heard of at least two friends who have become deacons in their congregations. But other groups aren't there yet. They may meet on a weeknight but have very little participation outside of that time. If this describes your group, I want to encourage you to take seriously the importance of enabling friends to attend Sunday worship, be greeters, read a liturgy, or serve on the hospitality committee. In short, to be active members of your church.

I hear about the barriers to making this happen. Here's a common one: "We don't have family contact information, so we can't invite them." What can group leaders do to change this? If you put serious effort into building relationships with group home staff, eventually you will be able to ask for this information. Another approach is to ask your friend to invite you to his or her annual person-centered planning meeting so that you can help your friend advocate for making Sunday morning worship part of the plan.

Another common barrier: "There is no Sunday transportation." Is there someone who could pick up your friend for church? Would your congregation pay for transportation? Often they will do this for other folks; why not for our friends?

Perhaps the largest barrier is lack of knowledge about how to include someone with behaviors with which the congregation is unfamiliar. You may be able to help your friend learn which behaviors are appropriate during worship; you may also need to educate your congregation. They may need to be reminded that the gospel is for

ALL people, not only those who act in a certain way. You may want to bring up the Parable of the Great Banquet. Or you could quote Mark 16:15, where Jesus said, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all people." Put together, these passages teach us about God's people in community together.

Have you tried setting up a team to surround your friend and thus enable him or her to be more active in church life? Focusing on your friends' gifts is important for success. One way to do this might be using the Friendship Life Study "We All Have Gifts." When your friends use their gifts, they bring God glory and bless the church family. By being part of the congregation, my friends have begun to pay attention to the church's prayer list. On Friendship nights they remind us which people need prayers and cards. What if they never had that opportunity?

Yup, this is tough talk. I know it comes fraught with all kinds of issues. I can assure you most of these can be worked out. If you want to talk this over, call us. We have done this in our congregations. And as members of my congregation will tell you, we are all changed for the better by including more of God's people.

I don't want to leave you without a pat on the back. When you spend time each week with your friend, you are sharing God's love. As someone recently pointed out, the time he spends with his Friendship friends is actually more time than he spends with most of his other friends. ■

Nella Vitolug



David is baptized, becoming a full member of his congregation



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Christmas garland for halos. Light blue sheets make fabulous robes for women. Let your imagination fly for additional props such as staffs. I will often quickly rearrange available chairs and tables to help set the proper scene.

PEANUT BUTTER OVERBOARD!

Finally, it is important to remember to go with the flow. Years ago, we were telling the story of Paul's journey by sea to Rome. Along the way, a storm comes up and passengers must toss the cargo overboard. One of the friends onboard the "ship" suggested that we also needed to throw over the peanut butter. At that moment I knew he got it, so we threw

over the peanut butter, then the spaghetti, and the cereal boxes--all of which were imaginary, of course. That same friend recently volunteered to be a sheep in the story about the good shepherd. However, he was in no mood to stay in the corral. So he became the difficult sheep that would be left to the wolves if the good shepherd did not work extra hard to bring him in. The best part about these deviations is that everyone gets very involved in the story, and they remember it for years to come. ■

Jolynn Bosch is a Friendship storyteller and mentor, and a special education teacher, in Grand Rapids, MI.



CHURCH PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

Heartfelt thanks to these new and renewing members of our Church Partnership Program

◆ Sustaining Partners (\$250 per year):

- Calvary CRC of Dundas, ON
- First CRC of Taber, AB
- First CRC of Prinsburg, MN
- First CRC of Thunder Bay, ON
- Medicine Hat CRC of Medicine Hat, AB
- Westend CRC of Grand Rapids, MI

- First CRC of Red Deer, AB
- Friendship St. Catherines of St. Catherines, ON
- Immanuel CRC of Caledon, ON
- Sussex CRC of Sussex, NJ

◆ Global Outreach Partner (\$2000 per year):

- Stratford CRC of Stratford, ON

◆ Growing Partners (\$500 per year):

- Bethel CRC of Waterdown, ON
- Ebenezer CRC of Leduc, AB
- First CRC of Guelph, ON

◆ Expanding Partners (\$1,000 per year):

- Calvary CRC of Edina, MN
- Immanuel CRC of Hamilton, ON
- Inglewood CRC of Edmonton, AB
- Smithers CRC of Smithers, BC

To learn more about the Church Partnership Program, contact LaVonne at 888.866.8966 ext.2—3 or admin@friendship.org ■



In honor of:

- Coda & Caiden Locke

In memory of:

- George Hoekstra

IT'S HERE!



Download a sample at: www.friendship.org/Autism



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