

Spring 2002

Extras



IT TAKES A COMMUNITY

A group of churches, working together through the Holland (MI) Deacons' Conference, actually own and operate five state-licensed group homes for people with mental impairments. The homes offer a Christian home environment for six adults who are encouraged to grow in all of their skill areas and experiences and to contribute to the development of God's kingdom.

Around 20 years ago, a pastor in the area was concerned about

the future of his son who has mental impairments. He approached the local organization of churches about the possibility of a Christian home for men with developmental disabilities. That same year **My Brothers' House** was built and licensed, and a few years later **My Sisters' House** followed.

But they didn't stop there. Thanks to generous support from their church communities, businesses, and individuals, they were able to add several more

group homes: two more for men and one more for women.

It all began with the dream of a single parent. But it was made a reality by the cooperation of a group of churches which work together to do ministry that one church would not be able to do alone.

(Taken from Breaking Barriers, a newsletter published Disability Concerns of the CRC Church)



Residents and staff at Brother's House I enjoy Fellowship time.

Laurie Tubergen, the director of the five homes, reports that all thirty residents of these homes attend a Friendship class on Thursday evenings. She says it is a great experience for them. The worship time is inspiring, and friendships are developed, as each resident has a mentor/buddy.

"We believe everyone is created in God's image and can relate to God. We also

SPOTLIGHT ON ST TIMOTHY LUTHERAN CHURCH



The choir proudly wears their new red robes!

Mavis Heidemann from St. Timothy in Fremont (NE) recently wrote us a much-appreciated letter about the Sunday School class for people with mental impairments in her church. (We love it when you share your stories with us and with each other!) Their class is celebrating 30 years of existence. They have used various materials but for the past four years have used Friendship curriculum.

Mavis writes about the **wonderful integration of the members of the class into the full life of the church**, which is really the goal of Friendship Ministries:

Some of our members have been baptized. Many have been confirmed and have joined our church. Some serve as acolytes, some as ushers and greeters. All use offering envelopes and are faithful in their giving. All are joyfully accepted by our church.

They also take part in worship services of the church. They sing for the worship service three times a year and have even sung in a neighboring church. They have potluck meals for families and friends of the students.

And the church members respond! She writes that one staff member wrote a confirmation study

for them. One family purchased Bibles so that each member of the class has a Bible, which they use every Sunday. One teacher enabled them to get new red choir robes. (Note the picture of them proudly wearing the robes)

They have now completed 30 years of ministry! "God has been good to us," Mavis writes. "We give Him all praise and glory." And she adds her personal note: "**Nothing in my life has been as rewarding or fulfilling as working with these special people.** I feel I receive more than I give."

believe salvation is a gift that is not dependent on a certain level of intelligence.”

AND NOW A WORD FROM THE ASSISTANT

It's a quiet Friday morning in the publishing offices where we work. The printing presses, which normally provide a constant throbbing background noise, are not running. The phones aren't ringing. There are no voices coming from the adjoining offices. Everyone seems either to have taken the day off or to have taken their work home.

Work has been hectic lately. We are in the middle of revisions of our curriculum. We are restructuring our relationships with the Marketing Department of CRC Publications. We

are arranging details for numerous conferences. We are rewriting a brochure for Friendship Ministries. And always little crises come up—we are suddenly out of letter-head stationary, the phone rings and somebody needs something—right away. And so it goes.

Nella and I don't normally work on Fridays. But I came in this morning. I need to organize those stacks of papers and notes on my desk, if nothing else. Going through those piles, I came across a little publication I put aside earlier, and I stopped

sorting and started reading. It's *Letters of L'Arche*, the news-magazine of L'Arche International. An article in it grabbed my attention. It was specifically written about the need for reconciliation between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland. But it speaks very directly to me about what our work at Friendship is all about. These are the lines that particularly strike me:

*Over the years we have come to see that we are **not necessarily called to do the big or the mighty thing** that could make a difference, but, rather, to do the little things that are possible for everyone.*

*When we bring, not our strengths, our rightness, but our brokenness and vulnerability together, then Jesus is most surely present. **It is then that we learn to label in a different way.** The label we begin to give each other, regardless of culture, nationality, ability, creed is that of **“the beloved,”** which to me is not only a description, but also a command, one that comes from Jesus Himself, **“Be loved.. Be loved within yourself, be loved by others, be loved by Me, I who am the Beloved..”***

And then I remember what we are all about: **sharing God's love with people who have mental impairments and enfolding them into God's family here on earth.** Well, my stacks aren't any lower, and I still have little stickies everywhere reminding me of tasks to do. But I have new motivation to do it. I think I should come in more often on these quiet Friday mornings.

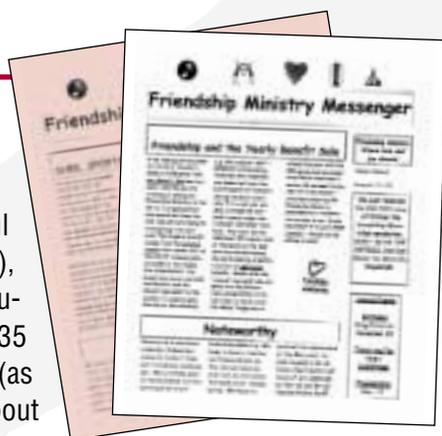
TEACHING IDEA

John and Peggy DeHoog, faithful Friendship leaders in Muskegon (MI), recently sent us a copy of the communique they use to keep their 35 Friendship leaders and mentors (as well as their pastor) informed about what is going on in their ministry.

They produce a one-page format newsletter **every week** titled *Friendship Ministry Messenger*. They say that there is so much going on that it is easy to fill all the columns.

They write news about their Friendship groups: about activities that are coming up, new volunteers, birthdays of students, things that encourage bonding and build up morale. And they also point out articles of interest in magazines or their local newspaper.

It sounds like a great idea. If you would like to get some ideas for yourselves, I'm sure the DeHoogs wouldn't mind if we sent you a copy or two of their letter as samples.





from the director

In the last issue I wrote about serving communion in my class. We followed that up with the mini course *When People Die*. This course made a great follow-up. I didn't really plan it that way, but that is how it turned out. It even led right in to Easter. By talking about death and grieving, our students had to think about not only Jesus dying for them and rising again, but what happens to their family and friends when they die? And what about themselves?

One mother told me she was so grateful that we had finally addressed this issue. Her husband had died several years earlier and her son who is in our class has had a hard time dealing with his death. The first week her son would not even talk about the lesson. He was

very uncomfortable. His teacher decided to let it go and try again the following week. This time he was a bit more open to doing the lesson. On the third week I was the substitute teacher for him. I had a bit of advantage I guess in that I am the leader of the group. I told him how I had a son Nathan in heaven and that I hoped Nathan would know this man's father who was also in heaven. This seemed to really help him. He could see that we had something in common. I have to admit it isn't easy to share from personal experience. Sometimes it is downright painful.

The last week of the course we reviewed what we had learned and then did the *Cloud of Witnesses Bouquet* suggested in the review lesson. This went over well. We blew up balloons with lots of our

hot air. Then we wrote on them the names of people we hoped to see in heaven. I wrote *Nathan*. The man who had such difficulty with the whole idea was able to put *Dad* on his balloon. Others put *Jesus, Peter, Mom, Dad*, or another relative.

Then we celebrated by marching around the room singing *When the Saints go Marching In*. It was moving to see how some of the students and yes the teachers, were able to actually celebrate after such an intense topic. You never know what response there will be until you try something, even a difficult one. I learned that even though a course seems intimidating, it may be the most important one we do all year!

Nella Uitvlugt

Can't wait for the revision? Well here's the scoop!

We are hard at work on the seven full units of lessons from just the Old Testament. There are **many new stories to tell**. There is a theme song called Circle of Friends, which will be used in all the units of the Old Testament.

I have seen some of the **new artwork**. It is wonderful. The colors are so much brighter. In fact I fell in love with the pictures of creation and plan to frame them for the Friendship Office.

The **leader/mentor guides** will be so much more user friendly. We will have different colored boxes for youth and adult instructions. There will be boxes with leader tips and mentor tips.

The **Christmas and Easter books** have so many new ideas, I can't wait to try them. I am tempted to sneak a copy of the proof and use them next year!

We will keep you updated on what we do with old curriculum inventory. Get ready to order the new stuff! The Old Testament, as well as the Christmas and Easter books, will be ready in 2003. Are you coming to next April's Chicago conference? We'll have samples of the curriculum there to show you.



Friendship
MINISTRIES

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