

Extras



Friendship
MINISTRIES

Five Friends Express Faith in Jesus

It was a day of great rejoicing when five young people who have cognitive impairments were confirmed as members of **Grace Presbyterian Church in Houston, TX**. It was a milestone of faith for the young people, a day of encouragement for their families, and a beautiful thing for the entire congregation.

It was also the culmination of a lot of hard work by the leaders and participants of **CanTeen**, Grace's ministry for teens with cognitive impairments. Group leader Pam Clack designed the nine-month course of study that led up to Confirmation, taking great care to create a program that would be just as "meaty" as the Confirmation process normally used at Grace but that would also be meaningful to the members of CanTeen.

Combining materials from the Presbyterian Church with lessons from Friendship Bible Studies, Friendship's book *Expressing Faith in Jesus*, and other resources, the group explored subjects including "What Do We Believe?," Baptism, Communion, "Sharing Your Faith," and "Making Choices as a Christian." They sang songs from the Friendship materials throughout the year, and each teen kept a



Nathan, Frank, Eugenia, Amy, and Markeeta on their day of Confirmation, with group leaders Laura and Pam.

confirmation notebook containing the faith concepts taught each Sunday.

To underscore the service component of Christian life, Grace has a tradition of including a service project as part of the Confirmation process. CanTeen served by collecting canned goods for West Houston Assistance Ministries (WHAM), as well as visiting WHAM to see what happened to the food once it left the church. The teens also prepared survival bags for the homeless.

When it came time to prepare for the day of Confirmation, pairs of CanTeen friends and mentors discussed questions including: "Who made everything?," "Who is Jesus?," "Does Jesus love you?," "Why did Jesus die on the cross?,"

"What is God's special book?," "and "Why do you want to profess your faith in Jesus?" Then the group moved on to questions in the format that would actually be used in the Confirmation service. They practiced answering the questions until everyone felt comfortable with what expressing faith before the church would be like.

"Nothing, no nothing, can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ," is our mantra," said Pam Clack. She continued, "The embrace of the congregation for our confirmands that day was palpable, and God's presence was also palpable." When asked why she wanted to profess her faith in Jesus, seventeen-year-old Markeeta Burns replied, "Because it's the truth."

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

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 21-24: Alliance for Full Participation, Washington, DC

Ralph & Carol:

Late May: Iowa & Minnesota

Tony & Diana:

July 7-10: NDSS, Chicago, IL

July 29-31, NDSC, Anaheim, CA

Nella, Gwen, John, and Ralph & Carol:

April 30: *Lives That Make a Difference* conference, Sioux Falls, SD

Update on *Expressing Faith in Jesus* Materials

As we have reported in earlier issues of *Extras*, we are completely revising and supplementing our materials on *Expressing Faith in Jesus*. Whether your church approaches this subject through **Baptism, Confirmation, or Profession of Faith**, these materials are designed to guide friends in your group in making this important and exciting faith step.

The revision, which will be available this June, includes an expanded version of the current **book**, a year-long lesson **planner**, brand new **take-home papers**, and a keepsake **certificate** to commemorate the day.

As you read the stories in this newsletter about friends who have publicly expressed their faith, think about friends in your group who may be ready to do the same. And get ready to be inspired!



"A Day Without Worry"

That's how Jonathan's mother, Robin, describes Respite Saturday, a day-long respite program offered one Saturday each month by the **Friendship Connections Ministries** at **Peace Lutheran Church** in **Gahanna, Ohio**.

"It is something I wished for throughout the years," Robin said of the program at Peace. Like most caregivers of individuals with special needs, Robin and her husband have responsibilities twenty-four hours of every day in caring for their son. "It is virtually impossible to find even a few hours of appropriate, safe care for a young adult with developmental

disabilities," Robin continued. After dropping Jonathan off for his first Saturday in the Peace program, "my husband and I went to a movie at a theater for the first time in many, many years."

Peace Lutheran Church started a weekly Friendship group three years ago, and the Respite Saturday program began a year later. The goal was to provide a much-needed "day off" for the friends' care-givers in addition to offering expanded Christian learning and fellowship opportunities for the friends themselves. Starting with only four friends, the program has now grown to sixteen teens and young adults.

Mentors and other volunteers team up with the friends in Bible study, songs, games, and crafts. The *Friendship Life Studies* are used each month for the study component. Mentors are asked to serve for one three-hour period during the respite sessions. Other volunteers provide food for lunch and dinner and serve the meals. The day ends with both friends and mentors joining other members of the Peace congregation at the Saturday evening worship service. This worship opportunity welcomes the friends into the larger church community and has helped promote congregational awareness of the Friendship Connections ministries.

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

He's Back!



John Kim

You may remember that we printed a profile of intern John Kim in these pages last fall. We are pleased to announce that he has returned to Friendship as our *Communications & Public Relations Manager*, a new position here.

John's degree in Christian Education from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, as well as his experience in disability ministry with Vision New England, The Arc of Danvers, MA, and Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital, have laid a solid groundwork for his work with us. John also has professional experience in marketing.

You will no doubt be hearing from John from time to time. Please feel free to be in touch with him by email at kimj@friendship.org or by phone at 888.866.8966.

As you would expect, the friends love Respite Saturday. Lauren gets so excited about coming that her mother waits until Saturday morning to tell her that "today is the day." Otherwise she'll wake up before 5:00 a.m. and be ready to go.

In July, 2004, the Friendship Connections Respite Ministry at Peace was featured on the Hallmark Channel's *Sowing Seeds* program. You can see a description or download the program segment by going to www.sowingseeds.tv and searching for "Respite Saturday."

In addition to the weekly Friendship Bible Study and Respite Saturday programs, Peace sponsors a week-long summer residential camp for friends with cognitive impairments.



Jonathan, Heather, Jessica, & Courtney show off an art creation

Please contact us if you would like more information on expanding your Friendship ministry to include respite care. We would be happy to give you contacts and tips on how to get started.

Pat Tietz, Friendship Connections Ministry Coordinator, patt@peacegahanna.org

true value

"Living with Adam, loving Adam, has taught me a lot about the truth. He has taught me to look at things in themselves, not at the value a brutal and often senseless world assigns to them. As Adam's mother I have been able to see quite clearly that he is no less beautiful for being called ugly, no less wise for appearing dull, no less precious for being seen as worthless. And neither am I. Neither are you. Neither is any of us."

Martha Beck, Expecting Adam, (c)1999, published by Berkley Books.

Peace Lutheran Church's program is based on the model established by Lutheran Disability Ministries (LDM) of Indianapolis, IN.

Check out their website at

www.ldminc.org or contact them at: 317.876.7099.



from the director

Since we began advertising that we are revising our book *Expressing Faith in Jesus*, we have been hearing from many interested people. Some of them are sharing stories about how their churches have helped people with cognitive impairments become full members of the congregation.

My favorite story that I have heard recently is from a church in New Jersey. A pastor called and told me about Tom (not his real name) who has attended his church and the Friendship Sunday School class for a long time. The pastor and Sunday School teacher talked about how Tom was ready to express his faith in Jesus. During the process of working with him, they found out that he had not been baptized. So, on June 12, Tom will both be baptized and make his profession of faith. One glitch has come up, though: Tom feels sure that if he is baptized, he will go to heaven right away, and he is not sure now is the time! To help with this, they will be including him right up front at a baby's baptism in May. That way Tom can see that it is OK to be baptized!

During my time as a Friendship leader, I have participated in services at which friends have expressed their faith publicly. Each time, it has been a thrill. Sometimes I have had to encourage the parents and/or pastor that this is the appropriate step for them to pursue.

About a year and half ago, David Knol from my Friendship class went through this in his church. In the new Friendship Bible Study, *The Spirit Our Helper*, you will read about David in the lesson on expressing faith in Jesus. This past month, David went to be with his Savior, Jesus Christ. At David's funeral, Dr. Ron Hofman, David's pediatrician from birth, gave a time of remembrance. Here is what he said about David's profession of faith. "The phone call I'll always remember is the

one in which Faye (David's mother) invited me to David's profession of faith. That day was truly a pinnacle event for me as a Christian reflecting on God's promises to his people."

The impact of our friends being recognized by congregations as image-bearers and lovers of God is profound. Many times we hear that services in which friends profess their faith are among the most powerful services a congregation experiences.

Dr. Hofman concluded his remarks by saying: "It is in the brokenness of damaged eyes and kidneys that we see the most profound of relationships—those that David had with us and those that he and we have with the Great Shepherd. And of course he now has seen the Great Shepherd as we have not. And I believe that when David looked in the face of Jesus for the first time, he reached up to feel that face and to wipe a tear from the eye of the Savior."

Nella Uitvlugt

Share Your Stories

Have friends in your group publicly expressed their faith? We would love to hear your stories. Or if you have questions about how this might work for one of your friends, we would be happy to talk with you about that as well. Don't hesitate to be in touch!



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We would love to hear from you:

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