

# Extras



**Friendship**  
MINISTRIES

## From Heavenly Orchestration to Transformation

### A Dream

The city of **Saline, Michigan** is known in its region for inspiring Special Education and Special Olympic programs, but when the mother of a teenager with cognitive impairments asked **First United Methodist Church of Saline** what they had to offer her son, they had to admit they had very little. This bothered youth worker Roger Heffelbower. As he sat in the balcony on Sunday mornings, his eyes were drawn to the students with special needs sitting on the main floor. God was sending more and more of them each year, and it seemed unfair that they did not have access to the relationship-building and spiritual nurture opportunities offered to the rest of the church's youth.

### The Dream Becomes Reality

With the launch of a Friendship Group on September 27, all that has changed. Roger explains that "After two to three years of denying this call on my life and feeling totally inadequate and unqualified to launch a unique ministry like this I finally said 'yes' to God and ALL the doors of opportunity came flying open!" God provided vision and "delivered all the necessary and qualified shepherds out of the woodwork of our church family and the community." From university professors and paraprofessionals, to experienced volunteers and the "vivaciously passionate individual who has always dreamed of working with students with special needs." "As a matter of fact," says Roger, "I don't believe I have ever witnessed a more blatant obvious orchestration of God in my entire life!"

*Tina and Lisa on opening night*

### A Special Relationship

One key to getting this ministry off the ground was the relationship First UMC developed with **Ann Arbor Christian Reformed Church**, which has had a Friendship Group for nearly fifteen years. Roger had heard about this group years earlier from a friend whose son participated in it. So in November 2004 Roger called group leader Barbara Buiten and began conversations about his aspiration to launch a Friendship program. He took interested students, families, and volunteers to the Ann Arbor ministry to experience it firsthand. Then in June a panel of volunteers from the Ann Arbor group came to Saline for a night of teaching, testimony, and encouragement. This group included the Tsai family, who were the impetus for beginning the ministry in Ann Arbor all those years ago.

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

## Welcome to the Family

Perhaps there are times when you feel like your group is the only one on the planet, but the reality is that you are a part of a wide—and growing—community! We would like to acknowledge a few groups that are new to the Friendship family, and you'll notice that we are a pretty diverse crowd:

- Auburn United Methodist Church, Auburn, AL
- Fellowship in the Pass, Beaumont, CA
- First Baptist Church, Madisonville, KY
- First General Baptist Church, Osceola, IN
- First United Methodist Church, North Platte, NE
- Kentwood Community Church, Kentwood, MI
- First United Methodist Church, Saline, MI
- St. Patrick Parish, Newport, NH
- St. Patrick Presbyterian Church, Greeley, CO
- Trinity Christian Reformed Church, Grandville, MI
- Woodland Valley Church, Mars, PA

Know of a new Friendship group that's not on this list? Contact Gwen at 888.866.8966 (ext. 3) or [genzinkg@friendship.org](mailto:genzinkg@friendship.org)

## 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:

**February 1-4:** Association of Presbyterian Church Educators, St. Louis, MO

### Ralph & Carol:

**October 18-29:** OH, NY, PA, MA

**November 4-6:** Chicago & northern IL

**December 12-23:** GA & eastern FL

### Elizabeth:

**October 18-24:** Mexico

### Tony & Diana:

**November 5:** *Circle of Support* (The ARC of Greater Prince William), Woodbridge, VA

## College and Seminary Students Reflect

We'd like to share with you the reflections of several students who have been involved in — and changed by — Friendship groups. The first three reflections are from students of Joan Bacon, Special Education Professor at Augustana College in Sioux Falls, SD. They volunteered as mentors in the group at Shalom Christian Reformed Church in Sioux Falls. The next three are from students of Ron Nydam, Professor of Pastoral Care at Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, MI. They visited a variety of groups in the Grand Rapids area as part of their class requirements.\*

"At the conclusion of our time together Kristen and I always prayed together....It was amazing to pray with Kristen....Although I did not completely understand Kristen's words, I felt the presence of the Holy Spirit surround us. I learned the art of what Kristen and I can do together in ministry, instead of what I can do for Kristen." —**Noel C. Kahl**

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"Belonging had the biggest impact on me. From the very beginning, this group has been all about belonging, and I wrote about that everyday in my journal.... They are one family that shares in each other's joys and pains." —**Sarah Kohn**

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"This practicum has been a joy. I feel as though I have grown as a person and am very grateful for the opportunity. I am beginning to come to a point where I can look past the students' disabilities and see the other aspects that encompass who they are; aspects that were shadowed by my own vulnerability and ignorance.... I have decided to continue serving as a mentor despite the fact that the practicum has come to a close." —**April Lindquist**

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"Unlike the rest of the world, where we constantly worry about what other people think about us, at Friendship class you are accepted

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



Ken Medema

## Melodious News

We are happy to announce our new partnership with Ken Medema, a highly gifted Christian performer who ministers to people through his musical performances and inspirational recordings. Though blind from birth, Ken has demonstrated his extraordinary musical vision to a growing number of loyal fans across the nation and around the world.

Friendship Ministries and Ken Medema are joining hands to better serve our disability community, and we are putting our heads together to think of specific ways to do so. Please keep your ears tuned for any special events that may come your way in the near future.

Meanwhile, you can check out Ken “in action,” as he is always traveling around the country to provide inspiration and even healing to hearts ([www.kenmedema.com](http://www.kenmedema.com)). If you meet Ken, be sure to tell him that you’re part of the Friendship family!

Questions or comments regarding this partnership? Contact John at 888.866.8966 (ext. 4) or [kimj@friendship.org](mailto:kimj@friendship.org)

unconditionally. It doesn’t matter what you do for a living, how talented you are or how bright your future seems — Friendship students just love you for being you! This is how Jesus loves.” —**Micah Bruxvoort**

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“One of the most moving moments came when a worshipper got up and sang ‘Because he lives’.... Worship with him and the others in the room, singing words like that is something that needs to be a part of the whole church. The passion with which he sang that and with which the others sang it is clear that they, like all the rest of us, need to be able to worship God as a part of a church community.” —**William Jensen**

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“I know that I should be doing some theological reflection here, but let it be

enough for me to say that I was ministered to much more by James than he was ministered to by me. Friendship ministry is so important not just for the mentally disabled to experience worship, but for all of the church to realize their humanity and their place within the body of Christ.” —**Steve Wolma**

*\*Friends’ names have been changed to protect their privacy.*

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**Looking for mentors** for your group? Contact the Special Education Department at a college near you or a Professor of Pastoral Care at a local seminary. Volunteering in a Friendship group would be a wonderful experience for their students — we’ve given you the quotes to prove it!

## From Heavenly Orchestration to Transformation

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### Transformation for All

Another important step the Saline group took as they worked to shape their ministry was to interview the families with special needs already attending the church about what they were looking for from such a program. Out of this grew the current structure of their Friendship Ministry, which will meet the second and fourth Tuesday evenings of each month for worship, Bible study, and fellowship. A Parent/Caregiver support group will meet simultaneously, alternating weekly between guest speakers and time for discussion and support. Child care for siblings will also be available.

The ministry began with an open house for friends and their families, complete with a welcome team to greet them at the door and “shepherds” to provide tours through the various rooms, where Friendship volunteers answered questions about the ministry.

Throughout all of the labor and excitement, Roger has remembered a message preached in his church several years ago: the message was that “whole church families can be transformed when they begin to view the world and serve others, unconditionally, in love, with a missionary’s heart.” First UMC’s Friendship Ministry is a blessing to the mother and son whose request set the gears in motion several years ago. But even more so, their participation in the church is a mighty blessing to the entire church family.



## from the director

**B**y now you have settled into your routines in the Friendship program you are part of. Some of you have had extensive training, others haven't had much at all.

One area that is always good to reflect on is our role as mentors. *What does it really mean to be a mentor?* What should our group leaders be encouraging us to do?

First we need to acknowledge that it is likely to be somewhat different for each person. Some of you have one friend, others have two, and still others have several. This affects how you do your mentoring. However, some aspects are the same for everyone. **You all need to be prepared.** If you know what needs to be done during your one-to-one or small group time, you can get started quickly. Reading steps 5 and 6 in the leader/mentor guides of the Bible Studies and Life Studies are key to this success. They include "mentor helplines" that provide ideas for adapting the take-home papers.

Beyond being prepared, **being a friend is most important.** How do you go about this? Often you may not know much about your friend, and details can be hard to come by in this day of privacy. One way to learn more is to visit your friends where they live. Yes, this takes time beyond the program. Seeing your friends in their homes, or even at work, will give you a much better understanding of their interests and abilities. You can attend group home open houses, birthday parties, or special events. These are the kinds of things we do with our other friends, and it should be no different with those relationships we form in Friendship groups.

Lastly, I would like to encourage you to **think about being part of the planning for your friend.** There is a "person-centered planning" meeting that is held annually for each friend. At these meetings, guardians/parents, case managers, social workers, your friend, and other interested parties come together to plan for work, supports, and community involvement. If you were to get yourself invited as the involved mentor who attends parties and pays visits, you could advocate for things like church attendance on Sunday, transportation issues for getting to Friendship Group, and the possibility of full church membership if that is desired. Your involvement at this meeting would be

## Mentors:

We often hear from group leaders, but we know that you mentors have stories and ideas to share, too! Be in touch at 888.866.8966 or [friendship@friendship.org](mailto:friendship@friendship.org)

once a year but would have a major impact on your friend's life. To do this you need to build relationships with those involved in your friend's life. A Friendship mentor's involvement in planning could change a service provider's image of what their "client" believes and desires as a member of God's family.

Think about it.

*Nella Uitvlugt*

## AN ARTISTIC ALERT:

The deadline for entries in the Friendship Art Contest is December 1, 2005. For more info, visit [www.friendship.org/artcontest](http://www.friendship.org/artcontest) or call Gwen at 888.866.8966 (ext. 3).



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MINISTRIES

**We would love to hear from you:**

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