

Extras



Friendship Ministries Is Getting Even Better!

The basic curriculum of Friendship Ministries is twenty years old. It is a great curriculum—truly ground-breaking in its time. But ideas and attitudes and technology change in twenty years, and the curriculum is being revised to reflect those changes.

Technically the new materials are a revision, but actually they are far more like a brand-new product, with not only a new look but also new content:

- **DIFFERENT PACKAGING**—by separate five-week units
- **NEW FULL-COLOR ART WORK**—with illustrations that both realistically and compassionately depict people with disabilities
- **MORE BIBLE STORIES**
- **NEW SUGGESTIONS** for teaching the Bible stories
- **NEW IDEAS** for crafts and for music
- **BRAND NEW FRIENDSHIP PROGRAM GUIDE**—with many practical ideas for beginning Friendship leaders and for long-time leaders who need some fresh ideas
- **NEW CHRISTMAS AND EASTER BOOKS**—with lessons for use in a Friendship group and dramas to use for a production
- **NEW INTRODUCTORY KIT**—including the entire first unit of *God, Our Father (Old Testament)* as well as the *Friendship Program Guide* and an overview of all Friendship materials



**Order your
INTRODUCTORY KIT
now!**

It is available at a reduced price so that you can get the new materials in your hands and evaluate them as you plan for the coming year.

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

FROM OUR FRIENDS

A very special class in Warrensburg, Missouri, takes a collection every year for Friendship Ministries. Along with their latest donation their group leader, Diana O'Rear, sent this note:

*The Special Friends still want to help Friendship Ministries. Our class is considerably smaller than it used to be, but their hearts are still big. **Thanks for dedicating your time, talent, and love for our kids***

Another class, this one at Covenant Presbyterian Church in Rochester, New York, also sent in a donation with a note signed by all the members of the class. They wrote:

We heard recently that you are developing Friendship materials for people who speak Spanish. We have a small but growing Hispanic congregation at our church, so some day your new materials might be helpful in our church. Right now we would like to contribute some of the money we collect every Sunday morning at the start of Sunday School. We hope this money can help you in making Spanish materials available.

One of the leaders of that class also wrote us about her experiences with Friendship. She had this to say:

*My church has had a Friendship program every other Wednesday night since the mid- 1980's. My involvement over the past years had had a very positive impact on my own spiritual development, giving me a new understanding of the idea that **"In Christ, there is no east or west, in him no south or north, but one great fellowship of man throughout the whole wide earth."***

We received this e-mail from New Zealand:

*My name is Issjah KleineDeters, and I am the coordinator of the Friendship group in the Reformed Church of Avondale, Auckland, New Zealand. We have been going since 1984 and we have seen many lives changed through this ministry. We have a group of 32 students, and several of their caregivers have mentioned the change in behavior! Several of our students have been able to make their profession of faith. **So keep it up, folks. It may take a long time, but nothing is impossible with God.***



For monthly updates and tidbits—Simply go to our website (www.friendship.org) and click on Extras online.

Recently the Friendship class at Conrad, Montana, received a letter of appreciation from the local group home, which they passed on to us. We often hear such things from care givers at group homes, but Jessica McCutcheon from a group home in Conrad took the time to express her appreciation in a note:

On behalf of all of the men here at the group home, I would like to thank you for holding the Friendship meetings and giving the guys the opportunity to engage in a positive social outing. They all appreciate the kindness and acceptance you all have shown them. This kind of acceptance is often very hard to come by for these wonderfully unique individuals.

*I personally would like to thank you for also showing me friendship and appreciation. Quite often people don't give notice to people with disabilities or to the people who care for them. **So thank you for all the joy and excitement you bring to our guys.***

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

WE ARE THE CHURCH TOGETHER

(Even across the border!)

The elderly gentleman approached me determinedly from the center aisle, obviously intent on talking to me about what we had just experienced together in our evening service. With both hands he clasped mine and said huskily, tears welling up in his eyes, “Tonight, for the first time in my life, I’m proud to be the father of a mentally handicapped son.”

This man and his son with Down Syndrome had joined with other members of the congregation and community in our first-ever Friendship worship service. Together we experienced an infectious spirit of exuberance and joy in the Lord. Together we came to truly understand that **before the face of Jesus there is neither male nor female, blind nor sighted, mute nor vocal, mentally impaired nor mentally advantaged. We were—and are—all one.**

After that service, two college students came to talk to me. They commented about the exuberant joy demonstrated by the Friendship students. “They’re not handicapped in worship,” they told me. “We are.”

This article is excerpted from Friendship News, the newsletter Friendship Groups Canada, our counterpart north of the border. It was written by Bernard DeJong, one of their board members.

DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO WITH THOSE OLD MATERIALS?

Now that our brand-new, better-than-ever Bible Studies are coming out, we are sure you will be as excited about them as we are. But it may leave you with a dilemma: *What do I do with the old materials? They are still good. I don't want to throw them away!*

You may want to follow the example of the Association of Interfaith Ministries. They have been using the basic curriculum for eighteen years. Now they have all these materials on their shelves and they want to be good stewards of God's resources.

So **they are giving them away.** In the last issue of *Extras* we wrote about the new church in Colorado to whom they gave their *Year One* and *Year Two* materials. Recently they heard about a church in Michigan that was trying to start a Friendship program but was short on funds.

As a result, they not only gave them their Friendship materials, they also invited them to bring their Friendship teachers to their January teacher training session. Now, not only are the materials not gathering dust on a shelf or piling up in some landfill, but through their generosity, **God has provided another opportunity for our friends.**

FROM MY CORNER

I sit at a desk in the back of a little office at the end of a hall in a bustling office complex. I spend my time doing a myriad of little tasks that support the mission of Friendship Ministries. Many of these tasks involve just me and my computer. They seem far removed from the actual face-to-face (or rather, heart-to-heart) interaction of people have “out there in the field.” Now, I’m not complaining—I know that all these tasks are essential.

But one of the really inspiring things I get to do is to read the many newsletters and publications from other organizations that are involved in a similar ministry, as well as your notes and letters. In planning this issue, I looked over the articles I had put in a folder for possible use in a subsequent issue of *Extras*, and I was struck by the way in which Friendship crosses all boundaries—those of geography and denomination and age. One communication is from Canada and another from New Zealand. One is from a Presbyterian church in Rochester, New York, and one from an Assembly of God church in Warrensburg, Missouri. Another is from a 78-year-old man considering beginning a ministry to people with mental impairments.

We are truly all one!

gp



from the director

I want to tell you a story about one of my friends. David is an incredible person. He is about 4'9", blind and has cognitive impairments (new terminology for mental retardation). Most people probably look at David's differences and underestimate his gifts and his worth. But in the just the past year David has used his gifts and faith to teach so many people about the kingdom of God.

David made his profession of faith last fall. At his profession with the elders he answered the usual questions: Do you love Jesus? Did Jesus die for you? And so on. Then he was asked what his favorite song was. Now, you and I would likely answer with the title of the song. But not David. He answered by singing the first verse of "My Jesus I Love Thee." I think the elders were mush on the floor. I know I was

when I heard him sing this song during the worship service the following week.

I see David at Friendship class every week, and he always reminds me of the gifts of all God's people. David has a gift for memorizing scripture, and for praying for others—especially for his friends at school. After becoming familiar with using a microphone, he is becoming a confident singer. At Christmas he sang a moving solo: "What can I give him poor as I am? What I have I'll give Him—give Him my all."

David does give his all. I need David in my life to remind me to give my all to the Lord.

Nella Uitvlugt

YOU'RE NEVER TOO OLD TO BEGIN!

This past month we received a hand-written letter from an elderly gentleman with the postscript, "I apologize for the poor writing but my hand shakes so bad that things get kind of fuzzy."

He writes, "Hi, my name is Ed Spencer. Hope you are having a blessed day. I'm 76 years old and taking a distance learning course on disability ministry in the church." He then asks for materials for use in this course and adds: **"If the Lord tarries and I don't die first, I hope to put your materials and the knowledge I'm gaining from this course to use in God's kingdom for the glory of His son and for the blessing of people with disabilities."**

After he received our materials, he wrote another letter, expressing his appreciation for the work of Friendship Ministries but also his dismay that so few of the churches he has researched in his work for this class have any kind of ministry for people with disabilities. As for himself, he expressed appreciation for his growing awareness of ways to serve in disabilities ministries, and also his regret that he had not learned these things 50 years ago so that, in his words, "I would not have failed so many people in my attempts to serve God."

In a delightful follow-up phone call, Ed says he feels somewhat limited by his age, but he hopes to start a ministry in a local church. He is in the process of checking local churches for accessibility and is contacting the local ARC chapter to find out if there are any group homes in the area.

We are thrilled that someone is willing, at the age of 76, to learn and grow and to step out to further the kingdom of God, and we wish him God's richest blessings. Perhaps some of you who are involved in a Friendship class could write and encourage him.



Friendship
MINISTRIES

We would love to hear from you:

Nella Uitvlugt, Director
2850 Kalamazoo Avenue SE
Grand Rapids, MI 49560
Voice: 616-224-0842
Fax: 616-224-0834
E-mail: uitvlugn@friendship.org
Website: www.friendship.org
Toll-free: 1-800-333-8300