

Spring 2004

Extras



Friendship
MINISTRIES



MARY'S LEGACY LIVES ON

Mary Louters, a long-time member of a Friendship class, passed away this past January, but her memory lives on.

Grace Goudzwaard, the leader of Mary's Friendship class at Palos Heights (IL), wrote us this letter about how Mary will live on in the hearts of the other people in her class:

Mary Louters will always be remembered by the Palos Heights Christian Reformed Church Friendship Club. She was a loving member of the Friendship Club for many years until she had a stroke in the year 2000.

Mary will be remembered for her unconditional love to everyone and her exciting and sweet attitude. We will always picture her arriving at Friendship Club, raising her arms in the air and saying as loud as she could, "Here I am!" Then there were hugs and laughs for all.

We also will never forget the Sunday she stood in front of her church and professed her faith in Jesus Christ. As part of her profession, she sang "Jesus Loves Me."

Mary was of great value to God and His church. She set an example for all of us by her love, and we have been abundantly blessed by her life here on earth. Now she spends eternity with the One whose love was shown through her. Praise the Lord!

Mary's family recommended Friendship Ministries as the organization to which people could give gifts in her memory. We at Friendship wanted to make these gifts very special, and we designated them to assist churches in Latin America which could not afford to purchase materials for their work with people who have mental impairments. Through these gifts we have already been able to help three groups in their ministry.

One of these is a group in Peru called *Sonrisas de Amor* (Smiles of Love). Elizabeth (our representative in Latin America) tells us that this group is one year old and that, even though they have very limited economic resources, they have

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



Spotlight on Another New Group

We're always excited when new ministries to people with mental impairments begin. And it's always interesting to hear just how they began the ministry. The stories are always different, but always inspiring.

Northwood Church in Keller, Texas, just began a brand-new class in the middle of March. It is an adult group which meets on Monday evenings, as part of the small-group ministry of their church. It developed as a natural outgrowth of their children's program. This program is called "Revive" and is a weekend retreat for children who have mental impairments, along with their parents. This group meets twice a month and often has 150 children attending!

They also had around 20 adults from neighboring group homes attending their worship services, and just as they were thinking about beginning a program for adults and wondering how to go about it, a person joined their church who had been involved in such a ministry in another church. They saw the need, got some input, and began a ministry (in spite of not even being in the budget this year!)

Interestingly, it all began with one young lady with mental impairments (who recently passed away), who just softened the hearts of the congregation, Randy says.

Blessings on your ministries, Northwood Church!

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a lot of love to give. We are delighted to be able to help this group by providing them with our Spanish-language *Amistad* materials.

Nora Rueda, the leader of the class in Peru, send us this e-mail (translated from Spanish):

We have a group of 14 young people, along with their parents and volunteers that work with them. The parents are very happy because there is a church that remembers them. While there are other churches in Peru that serve people who have physical disabilities, there are no others that serve people with mental impairments. We have many dreams and goals, but we are pioneers in this.

Thank you very much for not forgetting us. This is an answer to the prayers of my people and family, prayers that we have been praying for 18 years, ever since the birth of my daughter Nataly, that there would someday be a ministry for people who have mental impairments.

MELANIE'S QUILTS



It began in the fall of 2000 at Melanie's annual planning meeting with the staff of her day activity program. One of the women mentioned how much Melanie loves babies and suggested that she make and present a blanket for a newborn baby. I was touched by the sensitivity to her needs, but hesitant. It is true. She is beguiled by babies. Though she is pretty much nonverbal, she'll often say, "Aw-baby-cute." I didn't know how successful

Melanie would be, but gave it my whole-hearted approval.

They shopped together for materials and Melanie worked on it through the fall and into the winter. The week of Christmas, the quilt was wrapped and bundled along with Melanie and Petra (one of the workers who had been helping her), and they were off. They presented it to the nurses on duty, who thanked them and gave Melanie a tour of the nursery and let her see the many precious newborns. The only request Petra made was that the recipient of the quilt be told of the special person behind it. They left the hospital hoping it would be given to someone special who could use it.

A few weeks later a card arrived addressed simply "Melanie" c/o Allegan County Mental Health, and was sent home with her. It brought tears to my eyes. It was a thank you note from the new parents of the baby boy born on Christmas Day. They expressed gratitude for the quilt with a picture of their baby lying on it. They wanted her to see "Whom you blessed with your kindness."

This prompted me to reply with a note and picture of Melanie. The note explained how equally proud we are of Melanie, as they must be of their newborn. We believe very strongly that Melanie is a gift and a blessing. **Special people like Melanie are here to teach the rest of us how to live. They don't discriminate; they love all unconditionally.**

Sue Miklusak, Mom of Melanie, a member of NE Allegan Special Friends

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

AND THE WINNER IS...!

The month of February saw the 2nd Annual Pinewood Derby at the NE Allegan (MI) Friendship Club. It all began as the brainstorm of the director, Allegra (otherwise known as “Speedy”) Hibma. Her son was working on a derby with a boys club, and Allegra thought: Hey, why not do one with our Special Friends? So they started planning, the ideas kept flowing, and their own annual pinewood derby began.

One of their great ideas was making the derby a family night affair. The parents were so excited, Allegra reports, for their children with mental impairments because they had never had the chance to do something like this. All their brothers did, but they did not. One mother cried, she says, when her son raced his car and got 1st place. Her son’s car won!

They go all-out for this race! Allegra happens to have a brother-in-law who is very big in racing. He sends them racecar posters, hats, pit passes, and racecar calendars. (They call him their sponsor.) And they go all out on decorating: everything black and white checkered!

All leaders and students make their own cars. They buy them pre-cut, then one week they paint them (with washable paint!) and the next week they design them.

They run the derby just like the big races on TV. They begin with the National Anthem and prayer and then announce, “Special Friends, START YOUR ENGINES.” Leaders and students first race against each other, so that each gets a ribbon—either 1st or 2nd place. Then the students race each other or other leaders, and the leaders race each other, and the racing goes on all evening. The leaders have as much fun as the students!

There is a lot of time between racing, so they have several different tables to keep the friends busy. One features a Nascar video. Another has racecar coloring books. One has materials for making a “sweet race car” out of packages of gum, mints, and Hershey squares.

The highlight of the whole evening is meeting real racecar drivers from the local race track. They come with their uniform, helmet, racing cards, and pictures. They sign autographs, and one driver even brought his go cart for students to sit in and have their pictures taken.

They are already planning for next year, and they have some brand new ideas! GO, SPEEDY! (If you have any questions for Allegra, she would be very happy to respond to them. You can reach her at 616-878-1652. But beware: her excitement is pretty contagious!)



Richard, Fred and Brian are anxiously waiting for their cars to come down the track.



The cars are all painted and ready to go.



Race driver welcomes Jack, a 27-year member of the Friendship group.



from the director

Friendship groups come in all sizes, schedules and formats. Some classes meet on Sunday year round, others meet on weekday evenings every other week; some meet year-round, others meet only during the school year and have some special activities like picnics in the summer.

Whatever your shape and size, you do need support in order to stay fresh, motivated and inspired. But very often ministering to people with mental impairments in a lonely business because there are no other similar ministries for you to network with. We would like to emphasize that **we are here to help support your ministry.**

Some of the groups are in touch with us regularly—the leaders call with questions about the materials or questions about how to handle a specific challenge in the group or just to chat about the joys and challenges of their ministry. Sometimes we call you to see what is going on, but with all the churches involved, it is hard for us to get in touch with you.

Here are just a few things we can help with:

- Recruiting volunteers
- Setting up a new class
- Activities to enhance your class
- Handling problems in your class
- Questions about the curriculum

I would like to encourage to contact us—by phone, e-mail, postal mail, whatever. If we are not in the office, leave a message—we promise to respond to you just as soon as we are able.

Nella Uitvlugt

MAKE SURE
to sign up for e-mail
newsletter—send us
your e-mail address!



We are thrilled that because of Mary, the love of God will be more widely shared with Spanish-speaking people both in the United States and in Latin America. If you would like to carry on someone's memory, please keep Friendship Ministries in mind.



Friendship
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