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...and more!

Sharing God's *Love* with People who have Cognitive Impairments

RONALD VREDEVELD WINS HENRI NOUWEN AWARD

with developmental disabilities and enabling spiritual growth in cooperation with our community." As part of its ministry, AIM hosts **three weekly Friendship groups**, attended by more than 180 friends. AIM also partners

It is because Ron is not only an author and pastor but also a fellow pilgrim and friend of people with cognitive impairments that Friendship Ministries nominated him for this award. We hope that you, too, will catch a glimpse of his pastoral heart by listening in on a few words from his acceptance speech:

Congratulations to Rev. Ronald Vredeveld, winner of the 2006 Henri Nouwen Award! The award is presented annually by the Religion and Spirituality Division of the AAMR (now the AAIDD) in honor of Henri J. M. Nouwen, beloved professor, pastor, and author of books such as *The Wounded Healer* and *Adam, God's Beloved*. It seeks to acknowledge "individuals who reflect a 'Nouwen style' of compassion, commitment and dedication to ministry and servanthood that values and esteems people with developmental disabilities."



Nella and Ron at the award ceremony

You may recognize Ron as the author of Friendship's *Expressing Faith in Jesus: Church Membership for People with Cognitive Impairments* and *Caring Relationships: Helping People with Mental Impairments Understand God's Gift of Sexuality*.

He is also a chaplain and coordinator of the Association for Interfaith Ministries (AIM), which he describes as "an organization dedicated to valuing the spiritual gifts of persons

with twenty-seven churches of different denominations that seek to include people with cognitive impairments into the full church life of worship, fellowship, and service.

In his role as chaplain at the Mt. Pleasant Center, a Michigan residential treatment facility, Ron reaches out to residents in their daily lives, walking beside them in times of celebration and grief.

"An important part of my ministry is a ministry of presence: reflecting the love of God to others and noticing their reflection of God's love back to me. In my relationships with individuals, I have the privilege of hearing the stories, incidents of life that are so important to the individual but might seem trivial to some people. These meaningful encounters are the heart of ministry....

The world we live in is a broken hurting world, obvious in the continued warfare in Iraq and hurricane disasters. The brokenness is also seen in the places we serve, both in the persons with mental impairments and their caregivers. We are the wounded healers who walk through that wounded world. May God's blessings continue to guide and strengthen us in the wonder of our ministries. May God continue to bless us through people with mental impairments as they remind us of God's goodness and love." ■



Sharing God's love with people who have cognitive impairment

FRIENDSHIP FAMILY



Libby and Merele, charter members of the Second Christian Reformed Church Friendship group



Merele and Libby, still friends 23 years later

WELCOME TO THE FAMILY

- Abundant Life Fellowship of Tacoma, WA
- Asbury United Methodist Church of Allentown, PA
- Christ's Community Reformed Church of Fort Wayne, IN
- Dayspring Assembly of God of Bowling Green, OH
- Grace Community Church of Tempe, AZ
- Northwoods Presbyterian Church of Houston, TX
- Peace Lutheran Church of Grand Island, NE
- Saint Phillip Presbyterian Church of Hurst, TX

ANNIVERSARIES

As Friendship Ministries prepares to turn 25 in 2007, we're once again thinking anniversaries. We've heard from a number of you about your group's anniversary, which we are pleased to acknowledge:

- The Exceptional Class of Trinity Baptist Church in Lexington, KY, celebrating its **44th** anniversary this year.
- The Pathfinder Class of Lima Baptist Temple in Lima, OH, celebrating its **31st** anniversary.
- The Friendship ministries of the Association for Interfaith Ministries in Mt. Pleasant, MI, celebrating their **27th** anniversary.
- Friendship Club of Second Christian Reformed Church in Grand Haven, MI, celebrating its **23rd** anniversary.
- Friendship Club of Grace Community Christian Reformed Church in Oak Lawn, IL, celebrating its **18th anniversary**.
- Friendship Club UA of St. Peter of Alcantara in Port Washington, WI, celebrating its **17th** anniversary.

Friends, mentors, and leaders from each of these groups could no

doubt tell stories for hours about the things they've experienced together.

Imagine what you would learn if you could

sit down with Joe and June Richey, who started the group at Trinity Baptist Church and are still involved 44 years later. Monyeen Boyed of the group at Lima Baptist Temple has this to say, **"Nothing I've done (the other teachers agree) has been as satisfying as this spiritual adventure!"** ■

FOR THE NEXT EXTRAS

• We would like to hear from groups that began between 1990 and 2000. Drop us a line if this includes you!



Will one of us be in your neighborhood? Give us a call or send us an email if you'd like to meet!

Nella

August 22-26: World Down Syndrome Congress, Vancouver, BC

September 23: Church Training Event at Grace Presbyterian, Houston, TX

October 12-14: The Arc National Convention, San Diego, CA

Ralph and Carol

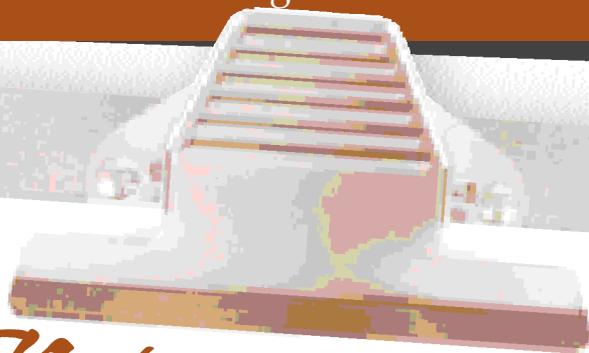
October 19-November 16: OH, VA, WV, NC, SC, GA, FL, TN

Tony & Diana

October 4: Circle of Support, The Arc of Greater Prince William, Woodbridge, VA

Elizabeth (Amistad)

October 20-24: Expo Cristiana, Mexico City, Mexico



Notas DE AMISTAD

Big news for Ministerio Amistad (the Spanish-language version of Friendship): Amistad Representative **Elizabeth Rodriguez** has moved from Miami to **Bucaramanga, Colombia!**

Elizabeth will still be available to share her expertise with Spanish-speaking congregations in the United States, but now she will be closer to the growing number of Amistad groups in Latin America. There are currently approximately 1200 friends in 79 groups throughout Central and South America, with new groups beginning on a regular basis. This includes **ten new groups in the city of San Salvador, El Salvador** alone!

Many of these groups are unable to afford to purchase Bible study materials and depend on generous gifts received through the Mary Louters Amistad fund in order to provide high quality materials that help friends learn about God's love. If you personally would like to give to this fund, or if your Friendship group or church would like to, please send your gifts directly to the Friendship offices (our address is on the back page), and mark them "support for Amistad groups."

If you would like to get in touch with Elizabeth to learn more about Ministerio Amistad, contact her at info@ministerioamistad.org

Liliana de Castro, an Amistad leader from Villa Nueva—Cordoba, Argentina, shares this testimony: *"Carlitos said yes to Jesus! Paola also tells us that she is happy with Jesus. It is truly wonderful when they get to understand a concept and we give many thanks to God."* ■

MENTOR TIPS: READING THE BIBLE TOGETHER

by Barb Newman, consultant
for Friendship Ministries

Part of every Friendship lesson includes time for mentors and friends to read Scripture together. But what if your friend can read only a limited number of words? Or what if your friend can't read or speak at all? Do you skip this part?

The following tips will provide ideas for friends who are **fluent readers**, **beginning readers**, and **non-readers**. As you read the Bible with your friend, remember that you're not the only one at work. In Isaiah 55, God promises us that: "[My word] will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it." Trust God for His part!

FLUENT READERS

The task of reading aloud is very different from comprehending what you read. It's possible your friend will read fluently but will be unable to answer questions about the passage. Try working on strategies to improve your friend's comprehension.

You might like to try to...

- Bring along a small stop sign. When you hold it up, it's time for your friend to stop and answer a question about the passage or have a discussion with you.
- As one of you reads, the other can find illustrations in the take-home paper that go with the story. For example, as your friend is reading about Zacchaeus, point to him in the take-home paper.
- Make 2 copies of the passage and split up the reading. If there are different characters, use a highlighter and decide who will be Zacchaeus and who will be Jesus. Divide up the other verses as they make sense. If

appropriate, take along props (a leaf for Zacchaeus and a head covering for Jesus) to hold up as you say the characters' words.

- Put two joints of PVC pipe together to make what looks like a telephone receiver. Remind your friend that God's Word is important—something to share with others. Ask her to speak into the phone as she reads. Not only will it reinforce spreading the good news, it will let her hear her voice magnified, highlighting the words of the text.

BEGINNING READERS OR NON-READERS WHO ARE VERBAL

Many of our friends know how to read some words but may not be able to tackle a whole Bible verse. For these friends, it helps to have some creative ideas to allow them to participate without feeling frustrated.

You might like to try to...

- Have a copy of the passage that you can mark up. Create a "code" sheet that includes story characters or words you know your friend can read. For example, you might write the word "Jesus" and highlight it with yellow and write the word "the" and highlight it with green. Then teach the code sheet to your friend. Highlight the Scripture passage to match. When you reach the highlighted words, your friend can read them.
- Create a phrase your friend can speak or read. For example, "Thank you, God" could be inserted into the reading of the creation story. Write the phrase on a piece of paper. Each time those words seem appropriate, pause from the text and ask your friend to read the phrase.
- Leave out words as you read. When you pause, ask your friend to guess what word might go in that place. You can create even more success by using the pictures in your take-home paper as cues. In the creation story, for example, you might point to the fish or the sun.
- Make your own picture Scripture. Many Friendship lessons include the Bible passage with pictures inserted to allow your friend to "picture read" as you read the other words. If this is not included, make your own. Simply find the words that are used several times and insert a picture beside or above the words. Computers are a great tool for this.

NON-READERS WHO HAVE LIMITED SPEECH:

Many of our friends have difficulty communicating with words but will still be involved in the time of reading Scripture. It's important to know your friend well. For example, I have a friend who is only able to look up to say "yes" and down to say "no", but she is a fluent reader experiencing the effects of Cerebral Palsy. I would structure our time together differently than for someone who is a non-reader.

You might like to try to...

- In many of the take-home papers, figures of the characters are available along with other pictures. As you come to a word in Scripture, display 2-6 images (depending on the ability level of your friend). Have your friend touch the picture that goes with that word.
- Attach pictures of characters to tongue depressors. As you are reading words from a person in the story, the friend can hold up that person like a puppet.
- Use pictures for the fill-in-the-blank idea mentioned for beginning readers. As you leave out words, have your friend guess what word belongs by touching one of the pictures.
- Teach a phrase to your friend in sign language. For example, you might learn "I love you, Jesus." Ask your friend to insert that sentence throughout your reading where appropriate.
- If you have a copy of the Scripture with pictures inserted, see which words might have a sign or gesture you could use. Make up a few if you need to. If a character is blind, the gesture might be to touch your eyes. Instead of reading the picture, your friend can do the gesture.
- Your friend may enjoy having you read Scripture over him. See if there are ways to insert his name in the passage, turning phrases into prayers. Make it personal: connect the passage to your friend's life.

I hope this idea bank will get your own creative juices flowing. Set up a meeting with another mentor who has a similar friend and brainstorm together. How can this time be most meaningful for your friend? Watch as God's Word "accomplishes what He desires!" ■



FROM THE DIRECTOR



Crystal and Nella share a story with the group



Sometimes it is simply seeing the smiles between mentor and friend, or the shared joy of an accomplishment. Often it is through the eyes that we gain insight into our friend's hearts and minds. It takes time to observe these wonderful treasures.

When I lead the music and prayer, I am privileged to have the best position in the house for observing these moments. Watching the faces and interactions or listening for that prayer request that is out of the ordinary are opportunities to see our friends as precious image bearers.

This past year in our program we witnessed the profound depth of a man's faith. His faith had been slowly growing through the years, but it took us some time to become aware of the change that had been taking place. When we asked him to read scripture for a Sunday morning worship service, we had no idea that he would give up a rare chance to go home that day in order to read in church. Once we learned this from his group home, we started to notice a change in his prayer requests as well: he had begun praying less for himself and more for others he cared about. Shortly after our group's summer vacation began, he sent me an e-mail saying he planned to invite a friend to Friendship next fall. He ended the note "In Christ's Name." Paying attention to these small incidents created a beautiful picture of who this man had become.

It takes time to observe these wonderful treasures.



It takes a willingness to see these small incidents for the blessings they are. They need to be savored, taken out later and pondered. Sharing them with others is a way to give them the real significance they should have.

Thank you Ron for reminding me to savor the blessings of being part of this ministry. ■

Nella Vitolug

"In my relationships with individuals, I have the privilege of hearing the stories, incidents of life that are so important to the individual, but seem trivial to some people. These meaningful encounters are the heart of ministry...." –Ron Vredevelde

These words really struck home as I listened to Ron give his acceptance speech for the 2006 Henri Nouwen Award in Montreal this past May.

How often in Friendship programs do we witness seemingly trivial incidents that, put in the context of a person's life or the program, are actually very significant?

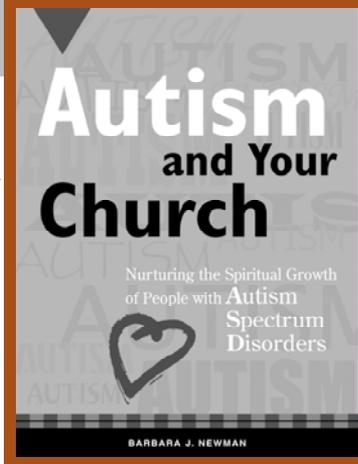
One evening during the singing time in our Friendship group, a friend named Deb noticed that Caleb, sitting next to her, was not able to clap his hands to the music. She reached over with one hand and clapped with him. Later she asked him about his cane. This was done with care and sensitivity by a woman who often asks her mentor the same questions each week: Who drove you here? Where's your car? Paying attention to a small incident like this gave her mentor insight into Deb.

ents and enabling them to become an active part of *God's* family.

IT'S HERE!

(Drum roll please...) The autism book is finally here!

Thank you for your patience and all the interest you've shown. We're just as thrilled about the release as you are. It's truly a unique and rare resource that will surely help churches more fully embrace our friends with autism spectrum disorders (ASD).



The resource offers both practical and philosophical information and will enable churches to:

- appreciate those with ASD as persons created in **God's image**
- learn about **five specific disorders** included in ASD
- discover **ten strategies** for including people with ASD
- develop an **action plan** for ongoing ministry.

Reproducible resources included are:

- Sample **Interview Questionnaires** for Adult and Children's Ministry
- Sample **Observation Form**
- Sample Parent/Adult **Permission Forms**
- Sample **Job Description** for Coordinator of Ministry to Children and Adults with Special Needs
- Sample **Individual Spiritual Formation Plan (ISFP)**.

Here's what others are saying about the resource:

A wonderful resource that will empower churches to enfold individuals with ASD and their families into the life of the church. Basic information about the diagnosis helps demystify the responses of these individuals, and practical tools provide a means to celebrate their gifts and meet their unique needs.

--Laurel A. Hoekman, executive director, The Gray Center for Social Learning and Understanding

This book proclaims with faith and love that all children are children of their heavenly Father. Each is treasured by him and must be treasured by the church. The book will be most helpful to churches in living out that commitment.

--Rev. Len Kuyvenhoven, pastor, and father of Lizzie, a child of God who has autism

Barb Newman has combined the most current understanding of ASD with her 21 years of experience in Christian schools to develop this practical guide to help churches welcome children and adults with ASD into the body of Christ.

--Dr. David Winstrom, psychologist, Neuropsychology P.C.

Questions, comments, or orders? Contact John at 888.866.8966 (ext. 4) or kimj@friendship.org, or visit www.friendship.org/Autism ■

WHAT FRIENDSHIP MENTORS NEED TO KNOW

Free, downloadable resource now available!

Whether you're a brand new Friendship mentor or have been involved for years, this new resource is a must-read, answering questions like "What does a Friendship mentor do?" and providing helpful tips for working with the friends in your group.

Leaders, we encourage you to print out a copy for every volunteer in your group (or email them the file). Download the document from our website at www.friendship.org/support

If you don't have Internet access, give us a call at 888.866.8966.



We would love to hear from you:

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