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

## MINISTRY WITH A VISION

The launching of the Friendship Club of **Grace Baptist Church of Bountiful, Utah**, is a remarkable story of how two strangers—both fathers of children with special needs—found a common purpose in starting a ministry with a big vision for its community.

Mike Menning had previous experience with Friendship Ministries, having helped start groups in Willmar, MN and Edgerton, MN. Mike's son had also attended Friendship groups in Sioux Falls, SD and Rock Valley, IA. When the Menning family moved to the Salt Lake City, UT area, Mike saw a need for Friendship programs in his new community.

He began by writing a letter inviting eighty local churches to attend a noon luncheon that would introduce them to Friendship Ministries. Ralph and Carol Honderd, Volunteer

Representatives for Friendship Ministries, traveled to Salt Lake City to share their knowledge and experience at the meeting.

Members of about ten churches attended the luncheon, including Pat Edwards, the pastor of Grace Baptist in Bountiful, which is just south of Salt Lake City. This was an exciting development for Mike, since his son now lives in a group home in Bountiful.

Pat was impressed with what he heard and decided to present the idea to his congregation, a small church with a deep commitment to its community. One of several people who responded to the idea was Jim Gunnuscio, who also had a child with special needs, and who had volunteer experience working with people with disabilities.

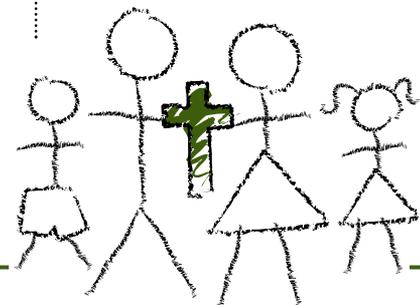
He knew there were others in his community who longed for a church to embrace their entire family.

As a parent, Jim had known the pain of having to take turns with his wife going to church because their congregation did not know what to do with their daughter. He knew there were others in his community who longed for a church to embrace their entire family.

After meeting with Mike and his assistant to learn more, Jim committed to leading the effort to start a Friendship group at Grace Baptist. Jim and several volunteer mentors began by recruiting at the local group home where Mike's son lives. "They were standoffish at first," Jim remembers, "We were even told 'Go away, we're watching TV.'"

But the mentors were persistent. The Friendship Club is now in its second year, and on an average week, six to eight members of the twelve-member

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group home attend—four never miss! Jim has seen big changes already: "At first they were stoic and clenched. They were not responsive to what we were teaching. Now we sing together and pray together, and they share their prayer requests with us." The group's eight mentors are also being blessed. "They, too, are experiencing the love of God," Jim says.

The Friendship Club works hard to reach out to the group home residents who do not attend the Tuesday night meetings. For Valentine's Day, they frosted enough cookies to share with everyone at the house. During the summer, the group takes a break from its regular meetings and plans three activities such as a barbecue or a visit to the zoo. All group home members are invited.

This summer the group also plans to redecorate its meeting room to make it more joyful, an idea one friend proposed and everyone heartily agreed with!

## They're sponsoring newspaper ads and radio spots to spread the word to the greater Salt Lake City community

Jim and Mike have dreams for what this one Friendship group could mean beyond Grace Baptist and beyond the local group home. They're sponsoring newspaper ads and radio spots to spread the word to the greater Salt Lake City community. Jim will be sharing his experience with any church that would like to start a Friendship group of its own. There is also grant money available from the



closing of a local church to fund 50% of the cost of materials needed to launch a new group.

Jim and Mike pray that as this ministry spreads, it will reach not only those with disabilities, but also their families and the staff of their group homes.

Jim's advice for anyone starting a group is to get as much information as possible about the need in your community: you might be surprised that amidst all the social opportunities, there are few opportunities to learn about God and his love.

He also advises learning as much as possible about Friendship Ministries in order to be able to answer questions from your congregation, as well as friends, their families, and group home staff. ■

The staff of Friendship Ministries heartily agrees—we would be glad to help you prepare for the adventure of starting a new ministry. See the back page for contact details.



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

### Nella

**May 21-24:** American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD), Atlanta, GA

**September 8:** One Body in Christ Together, Grandville, MI

**September 29:** Friendship Groups Canada, Kitchener, ON

**October 11-14:** Arc National Convention, Dallas, TX

### Elizabeth (Amistad)

**May 17-23:** Expolit, Miami, FL

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



## Notas DE AMISTAD

### NUEVOS MATERIALES

We are pleased to announce that the *Amistad* program (that's Friendship in Spanish) will be releasing an **Old Testament Bible Study** series **this June**. This project has been several years in the making and will be a great addition to *Amistad's* materials. We are thrilled to have it available at last for use by *Amistad* groups around the world.

### BIENVENIDOS

Join us in welcoming the latest additions to the *Amistad* community:

- Taller Protegido of Arrecifes, **Argentina**
- Iglesia Cristiana Evangelica of Cordoba, **Argentina**
- Fundación Puerta Esperanza of Santa Fe, **Argentina**
- Asociación Cristiana Deficientes of Fozdo Iguazu, **Brazil**
- Iglesia Cristiana Evangelica of Antioquia, **Colombia**
- Centro Rehabilitación of Bogota, **Colombia**
- Iglesia Nazarena El Renuevo of Bogota, **Colombia**
- Iglesia ciudad de Dios of San Jose, **Costa Rica**



## FRIENDSHIP FAMILY

TUESDAY  
**NEWS**

## FRIENDSHIP GROUP RECEIVES AWARD

Congratulations to the **Friendship Circle** at **St. Andrew Presbyterian Church** in **Shreveport, LA**, winners of the **2007 James Goodpasture Award for Ministry with Special Populations**.

The Goodpasture Award is presented each year by Union Theological Seminary and the Presbyterian School of Christian Education (Union-PSCE) to a Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) that demonstrates excellence in ministry to people with developmental disabilities and their families, incorporation of people with developmental disabilities into the life of the church, and the spiritual development of volunteers in the program.

The award was established in 2006 in memory of James Goodpasture, the developmentally disabled brother of Rev. Dr. McKennie Goodpasture, who was professor of Mission at Union Theological Seminary in Richmond for 30 years, by Dr. Goodpasture's widow. In addition to the pick-me-up the award gave members of the Friendship Circle, it came with \$1,000 to fund the program—enough to keep the program running for the next two years!

If you know of a Presbyterian ministry that should be considered for the award in the future, contact April Swofford at Union-PSCE: [aswofford@union-psce.edu](mailto:aswofford@union-psce.edu). ■

Has your group or someone in it received an award?  
Or appeared in your local newspaper?  
Know of a group that's just getting started?

If so, let us know! Contact Renee at  
888.866.8966 (ext. 2 -- 3) or [buistr@friendship.org](mailto:buistr@friendship.org)

# TRY THIS!

## EDUCATE YOUR CHURCH

Since 1980, Terry Cloyd, leader of the Friendship group at **St. Francis of Assisi/St. Maximilian Kolbe** in **Detroit, MI** has written a weekly column about special needs in her church bulletin. She has used the space to do everything from describing disabilities, to providing information about sources of testing and support groups, to sharing inspiring success stories. She has even branched out to subjects like caring for the elderly and others who are often marginalized.

## CELEBRATE OLD FRIENDS

Each Valentine's Day the group at **River Terrace Church** in **East Lansing, MI** celebrates another year of friendships by getting dressed up and going out for an elegant dinner. They reserve a banquet room at a local restaurant, which they decorate for the occasion.

## MAKE NEW FRIENDS

In order to reach out to new friends, the **St. Theresa REX Friendship Group** in **Federal Way, WA** is planning a pizza party to which each member is

encouraged to bring a friend. In addition to eating pizza together, the group will share information about their program, including a DVD and pictures. Parents and caregivers are also invited to attend.



Leroy, Carl & Mark share Valentine's Day dinner

## CONNECT WITH OTHERS

The group at **Auburn Hills Christian Center** in **Auburn Hills, MI** has found some fun ways to connect with their community: They recently challenged a local Christian school's varsity basketball team to a game of hoops. They also planned a bowling outing with their church's youth group. ■



**Share Your Ideas!** Each Friendship group is unique and has creative ideas to share. Send yours to Renee at [buistr@friendship.org](mailto:buistr@friendship.org) or call 888.866.8966 ext. 2 -- 3 (mail works, too—see the back page for details).

To: [friendship@friendship.org](mailto:friendship@friendship.org)

Subject: God Is A Surprise

Message:

# GOD IS A SURPRISE

For the past few months I have been jealously guarding \$20 and 2 postage stamps which represented all the funding I had for our Friendship programs. At this time we have two such groups which we call **Faith, Fun, and Friendship**, and while they don't cost a great deal, snacks and games and other odds and ends do add up over time. Our local Knights of Columbus have been very generous, and I had requests in for some help from them, but it would mean waiting until May or even June before we could expect financial support from that source.

There is an old song entitled "God Is A Surprise," and even as I fretted off and on about how nice it would be to win the lottery, God had a surprise all ready and waiting. The phone rang, and I was informed that the students at one of our local Catholic churches had held their annual reach-out sale and had decided that their profits would go to **Faith, Fun, and Friendship!** Furthermore, they were sending us a check for more than \$600—enough to finish out this year and get a really good start on next year! We read in the Bible that God will not be outdone and we do believe this, but tangible evidence certainly helps our unbelief. Thank you, Lord—again.

Terry Cloyd, St. Francis of Assisi/St. Maximilian Kolbe, Detroit, MI



# FROM THE DIRECTOR

## CONNECT WITH YOUR COMMUNITY TO...

As I read the articles for this issue of *Extras*, I found myself reflecting on the ways Friendship programs are reaching beyond their walls and into their communities.

### share your gifts

First, every member of every group has gifts—gifts given by God. If we believe this, we will find ways to enable our friends to share these gifts. Friendship Ministries' commitment to enabling others to share their gifts is the reason we provide Life Studies like *Helping Each Other* and *We All Have Gifts*. And that's why our Bible Studies often include service suggestions.

How do our friends feel when they are given opportunities to serve? They are usually honored and extremely willing. Why? Because they know that they are often overlooked and thought of as being unable to contribute to the community. And how do people in the community react when they receive these gifts? They are often humbled and grateful. Their eyes are opened to see others and themselves in new ways.

We're glad that so many Friendship programs are sharing their service ideas—not only here in *Extras* but also in church bulletins and community newspapers. This kind of coverage validates the value of our friends and helps change attitudes.

Here are some ideas groups have shared:

1. Send cards and pray for people who are sick. (One pastor says that if you need serious prayer, just ask the Friendship program!)
2. Fill shoeboxes with items for children in an orphanage far away or a shelter nearby.
3. Send a care package to a Marine in Iraq or Afghanistan.
4. Schedule a work trip at a food pantry.
5. Invite a youth group to join you for an evening of fellowship and fun.

### spread the word

Another way to reach out is to help start a Friendship program at another church. After all, one group is rarely able to meet an entire community's need. Here are a couple of ways to spread the word:



Beverly and Marilyn share the gift of music



1. Host visitors thinking about starting a program. This often gives the best picture of what Friendship is about and takes the "fear factor" away.
2. Staff a table of Friendship materials at a local conference. Terry Cloyd of MI, Mike Menning of UT, and Rhonda Cattley of CA are just a few who have done this recently. Have you thought about trying it—and bringing one of your friends along?

### receive support

Finally, your community can be a great source of support. (And as you ask for support, you'll also be spreading the word!) Here are some ways to tap into its resources:

1. Write a grant proposal to a local foundation. One mentor requested funding for a bus with a lift to bring friends to a minor league baseball game.
2. The Knights of Columbus have supported a number of Friendship programs. Some stores also offer community grants.
3. Approach an individual about sponsoring the cost of one friend in your program. Breaking down needs into doable portions often allows others to partner with you.

As you think about ways to connect with your community, **remember: all will be blessed as you share and receive gifts.** ■

*Nella Vitolug*

# SAVE THE DATE!

# September 2007

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
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				6	7	8

This fall, we will be convening a half-day conference co-sponsored by Friendship Ministries, the Christian Learning Center, The Gray Center for Social Learning and Understanding, and Disability Concerns of the Christian Reformed Church. If you can make the trip to suburban Grand Rapids, MI, you're welcome to join us! Here are the preliminary details:

**Potential sectional topics include:**

- Recruiting and Training Friendship Mentors
- Transitional Issues
- Inclusion for Adults/Children with Disabilities
- Pastoral Care to People with Disabilities and Their Families
- Mental Illness
- Sensory Integration
- Q&A on Autism

**Theme:** One Body in Christ  
**Date:** September 8, 2007  
**Time:** 8:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.  
**Place:** Trinity Christian Reformed Church, Grandville, MI  
**Cost:** \$30, including a fabulous brunch and limited to 300 attendees

Watch the next Extras for more information...

## Special Gifts



We at Friendship Ministries would like to give special thanks for gifts we have received over the past several months **in memory of Jess Nuñez.**

We are grateful for all of you—individuals, churches, and organizations—who share our vision and support it with your gifts. Friendship Ministries depends on you!



We would love to hear from you:

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