

INSIDE THIS ISSUE ▾

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

On the Road	p.2
Friendship Family News	p.3
Try This	p.4
From the Director	p.5
Living God's Way	p.6
<i>...and more!</i>	

WHAT CAN I DO TO MAKE LARGE-GROUP PRAYER MORE MEANINGFUL?

If you've ever asked this question, you've probably asked another: "What is prayer?" The answer may be simple—prayer is talking with God—but of course this simple answer raises even more questions! And perhaps your old answers to these questions have changed as you've experienced prayer with people for whom spoken communication is difficult or impossible.

In the context of so much intriguing mystery, we would like to share some practical ideas to consider as you seek to enhance group prayer:

1. Give some clue that it's time to pray, and keep it the same each time. This cues group members that you'll be transitioning to prayer.
2. Consider using a song to transition to prayer time (ex. "God Is So Good,"

"Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying," "Be Still and Know," "Open Our Eyes Lord").

3. Allow for friends' leadership in prayer. Ask what they want to pray about, and don't be surprised if it's the same thing week after week. However, don't be afraid to help them find new things to pray about.

4. When taking prayer requests from a friend whose speech you find hard to understand, watch body language, think about context, and learn sound substitutions to help. You may need to rely on the assistance of a person who knows your friend well. Do not be bashful about asking for repeats of the request.

5. Record prayer requests. A prayer board that is referred to weekly is a way to remind us that God was petitioned—now we wait for answers. And in God's time we hear or know the answer. Be clear that God hears all our prayers and answers them in a way that is best for us.

6. Use your friends' names as you offer up their requests in prayer.



Mark prays with his Friendship group. ::



25 Years of... Sharing God's *Love*

...continued from page 1

- 7.** Speak clearly, but don't "talk down." For corporate worship it is helpful if the speaker uses a moderate speaking pace but is not condescending. For example, slow down the tempo of the Lord's Prayer—you may be amazed at how the prayer's meaning hits home to you!
- 8.** Use concrete language, and remember that synonyms can be confusing (ex. "reign" and "rain").
- 9.** If your congregation prays a particular prayer regularly, pray it in your Friendship group regularly, too—that way everyone will be able to participate on Sunday morning. Explain what the prayer means. Don't assume that the meaning will be clear to everyone.
- 10.** Responsive phrases can be especially useful for those who have difficulty articulating prayer requests. If you know from the context of your friend's life that there is an issue, name the issue in prayer, with your friend responding with words or signing "Lord, have mercy," or "Lord, hear my prayer."
- 11.** When using litanies, have the response available in print, rehearse the words together, and use the litany for several months if possible.

Read "From the Director" on p. 5 for additional thoughts on prayer, including ideas for praying together one-on-one.

- 12.** Use kinesthetic prayers or interpretive signing. If a friend cannot move his or her own hands for prayer, ask whether you may help. Be careful about moving hands that cannot move, and be aware that some group members may be tactilely defensive. Motions to accompany the Lord's Prayer are found on pp. 48-51 of the Friendship resource "Learning the Lord's Prayer"; another example is the "Prayer for the Holy Spirit's Illumination":

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| God be in my mind | (touch forehead) |
| and in my mouth | (touch mouth) |
| and in my heart. | (touch heart) |
| Be on my left hand | (touch left side of chest) |
| and on my right hand. | (touch right side of chest) |
| May the words of my mouth | (reach with outstretched hand) |
| and the meditation of my heart | (touch heart) |
| be acceptable in your sight | (reach outstretched hand up) |
| through Jesus Christ our Lord. | (raise one finger skyward) |
| Amen! | (return hand to side or make fist as if to say "yes") ■ |

Share what works in your group!
888.866.8966 / friendship@friendship.org

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 3: Church Advocates of Ontario, Kitchener, ON

May 28-30: American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, Washington DC

September 17-19: Committee on Disabilities, National Council of Churches, Holland, MI

September 20: One Body Together in Christ, Holland, MI

Ralph & Carol

May 6-15: eastern MI & OH

Elizabeth (*Amistad*)

May 15-20: Expolit, Miami, FL

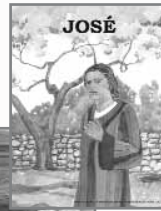
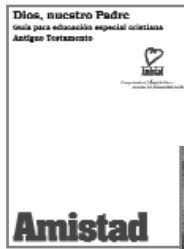


Notas DE AMISTAD



NUEVOS MATERIALES

We are thrilled to announce that the new *Amistad* "God, Our Father" Bible study materials are now available! This series joins the "Jesus, Our Savior" series to present a more complete picture of God's love.



TESTIMONIO

The new *Amistad* materials couldn't have come at a better time for *Kids Aguilas*, or "Eagles Kids." The group was founded six years ago by the Evangelistic Church Center of Zapote, Costa Rica with a mission to ensure the spiritual growth of children with special educational needs. Sixteen "Eagles Kids" who have disabilities learn alongside their peers who do not have disabilities. For the group's leader, Adriana Gomez, and its nine other teachers and twelve volunteers, the biggest challenge has been the lack of appropriate materials. Now that they've found *Amistad* Bible studies, much of the energy they spent developing their own materials can be used to nurture the group in other ways.



Members of Kids Aguilas, Zapote, Costa Rica.

One parent, Rocio Aguilar Mora, describes what Kids Aguilas means to her:

"Among the many needs I had when I arrived at the church was to find a place where my daughter Gabriela, 15 years old and with special needs, could receive care while I could hear the word of God that I deeply needed. I met with the blessing of a group where I could leave my daughter, and they not only take care of her but also share with her the teachings of the Love of God. Now I have many blessings to count on. Gaby loves the Eagles group so much. She follows the songs and loves to move, dancing and praising God. I believe that all churches should have a group to care for people with special needs. They are a great blessing." ■



Welcome to the family!

Join us in welcoming the following groups:

- Christ Community Reformed Church of Clifton Park, NJ
- Christ's Covenant Church of Winona Lake, IN
- Field Street Baptist Church of Cleburne, TX
- First Church of the Nazarene of Jackson, MI
- First Church of the Nazarene of Kankakee, IL
- Northland Community Church of Longwood, FL
- Park Street Church of Boston, MA
- Pennway Church of God of Lansing, MI
- Saylorville Baptist Church of Des Moines, IA
- Trinity Presbyterian Church of Charlottesville, VA ■

Know of a group that's not on this list? Has your group or someone in it received an award? Or appeared in your local newspaper?

If so, let us know! Contact Gwen at 888.866.8966 or genzinkg@friendship.org

Try This!

VISIT A GROUP HOME

Since the group at **Woodlawn Christian Reformed Church** and **St. Paul's Catholic Church** in **Grand Rapids, MI** has many mentors who are college students, they found themselves short of mentors around Christmas break. They turned a problem into an opportunity by dividing the remaining mentors into two groups and paying visits to the two group homes where many of their friends live. They celebrated Christmas with carols and treats, and the mentors learned more about what their friends' daily lives are like.

BE A MISSIONARY

Each member of the REX Friendship group at **St. Theresa's** in **Federal Way, WA** decorated an envelope into which they placed information on their program, the year's schedule, and an invitation to join them. Then they each gave an invitation to one friend and prayed that the friend might come to the next meeting.

START A PRAYER TRADITION

The Friendship group at **King's Way Baptist Church** in **Concord, NH** ends each of their gatherings by holding hands in a circle and praying together. Similarly, **Friendship Groups Newaygo** in **Newaygo, MI** closes with what they call a "friendship circle": they stand in a circle holding hands as they sing a final song and close in prayer. The friend or mentor who offers the prayer then starts a hand squeeze that travels around the circle until it reaches the final person, at which point the group lifts their arms and says "good night." ■

Share Your Ideas! Every Friendship group is unique and has creative ideas to share. Call us: 888.866.8966 or send an email: friendship@friendship.org



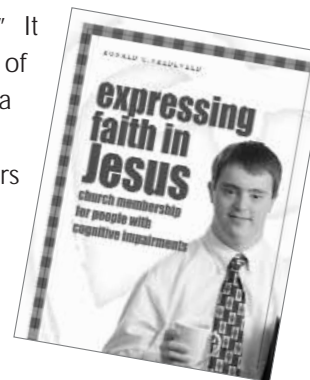
Wendy on the day she publicly expressed her faith in Jesus

WENDY EXPRESSES FAITH IN JESUS

One member of **Maranatha Christian Reformed Church** of **Cambridge, Ontario** described January 20, 2008 as "An incredible day—an example of God's kingdom." It was the day Wendy Boycott, a member of the church's Friendship group, became a full member of the church by making Public Profession of Faith. Several others made Profession of Faith and were baptized the same day.

A mentor in the group created a plaque for Wendy based on the art project in the Friendship resource "Expressing Faith in Jesus." The church also gave Wendy an angel rather than the standard gift of a Bible, which she already had.

The next time the Friendship group met, Wendy showed photos and explained what the experience meant to her: "I love Jesus." ■



We would love to hear your "Expressing Faith in Jesus" stories: Has someone in your group become a full member of the church? Have you tried the art project? **Let us know!**
Tel: 888.866.8966 / email: friendship@friendship.org



FROM THE DIRECTOR

In this issue of Extras, we are focusing on prayer. Friends join our programs with a wide range of spiritual experiences.

Some have had strong spiritual training from parents and church, while others have not had any at all. Combine this with different abilities, and many leaders are perplexed about the best ways to pray with friends.

Because our friends are so often set aside—not known by name or even asked to use their gifts, prayer is a wonderful way for them to know that God hears them, understands them, and cares about them.

Over the years I have discovered that many of my friends have **strong gifts of prayer**. I have experienced the blessing of having friends with cognitive impairments walk alongside me in ministry as prayer partners. These friends lift me up when I travel for Friendship Ministries. They have taught me so much about our awesome God really hearing prayers and answering them. For this reason I do not script prayers for my friends very often. They need to know that their prayers are worthy just as they offer them to God.

As I reflected on praying with people who have cognitive impairments, I went to my study Bible and looked up the different ways people prayed. This was really interesting, as many of them involved a **physical position**:

- "...he placed his hands on them..." (Matthew 19:13-15)
- "...with his face to the ground..." (Matthew 26:39)
- "...knelt down and prayed to the Father..." (Luke 22: 41)
- "...lift up holy hands in prayer..." (1Timothy 2:8)

Positioning the body in a particular way can help us focus on prayer. These passages also reinforced to me that **prayer is more than just our words**. We express that we are talking with God in the way we use our bodies. Some friends will not be able to articulate the words of a prayer,

but they may be able to pray with a cadence that lets you know they are participating. If you know the sound substitutions of an individual, you may be able to discern words that at first seem unclear. But even if you can't understand, that's okay—God can!

Prayer journals work well for many individuals. They're a great way to remind friends what they prayed for and to look back at how God has answered prayer. Pictures or symbols can be used instead of words.

Sometimes friends become stuck on the same prayer request each week. **Prayer cards**, which offer ideas for things to pray about, can be useful in helping both mentor and friend focus on something new. Reproducible prayer cards can be found in Unit 5 of the Friendship Bible Study series "The Spirit, Our Helper."

As you pray with your friends, look for the gifts of prayer they have to share: one friend may consistently remember those in the church family who are ill, another may have a deep, intuitive sense for prayer and worship. Over the years I have learned so much from my friends about how to pray. **Therefore, let us pray together!** ■



Learn how to create this banner at www.friendship.org

Nella Vitolug



LIVING GOD'S WAY

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

We kept the title the same, but the rest is new! This rewritten study on the Ten Commandments begins with an Overview Session to introduce the two tables of the law: "Love God," and "Love Others." Ten sessions—one for each commandment—follow, using Bible stories and activities to teach friends and mentors how to live gratefully by God's guidelines. The basic themes are expressed in the session titles:

LOVING GOD

Session 1: Trusting God Alone

Session 2: Worshiping God Alone

Session 3: Speaking Respectfully About God

Session 4: Honoring God

LOVING OTHERS

Session 5: Showing Respect

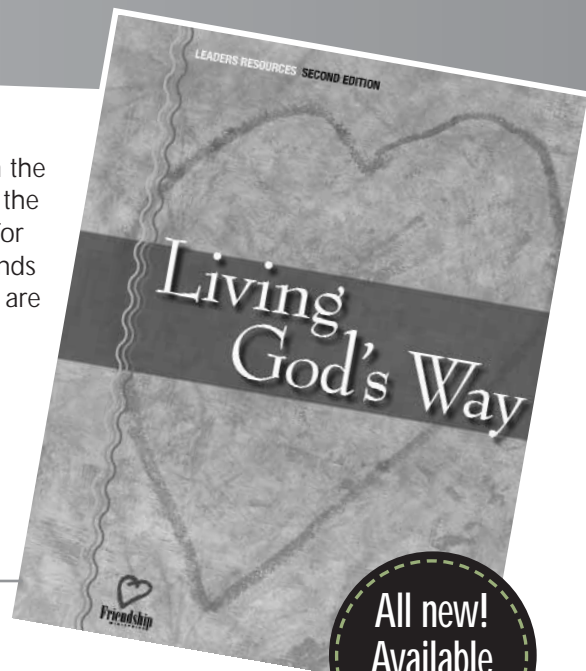
Session 6: Respecting Life

Session 7: Respecting the Gift of Sexuality

Session 8: Respecting Things That Belong to Others

Session 9: Speaking the Truth

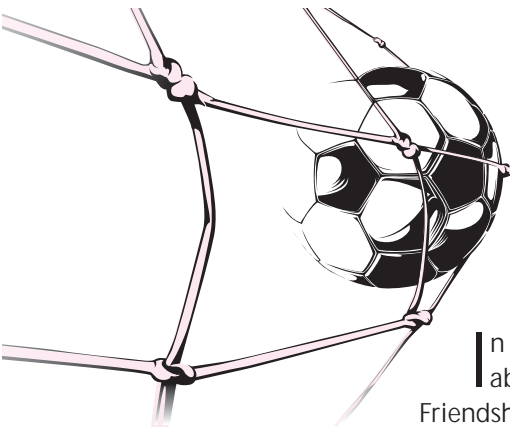
Session 10: Living in Gratitude



All new!
Available
in July.

A two-part Review Session and a closing Celebration Session wrap up the study, and an art project is also included. One friend's interpretation of the art project is on the cover (see photo above)! So as you consider your group's plans for the fall, why not try "Living God's Way"? ■

For more information, call us at 888.866.8966 or email friendship@friendship.org



PROGRESS TOWARD OUR GOAL

In an earlier issue of Extras we told you about our goal of starting 40 new Friendship groups in 2008. As of the writing of this issue, the number stands at 37. Not bad, but there's still work to do. And we know that even if we do reach our goal, the job will not be done.

If we can help you reach out to a church in your neighborhood, please be in touch! Together we can spread the word so that more and more churches embrace friends who have cognitive impairments—and are blessed by their gifts. ■



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