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Sharing God's *Love* with People who have Intellectual Disabilities

BIG HEARTS MAKE BIG IMPACT

Don't be fooled when Susie Belknap tells you that the Friendship group she leads at **Overbrook Presbyterian Church in Columbus, OH** is just a small group—with four regular attendees and a fifth who comes when he can.

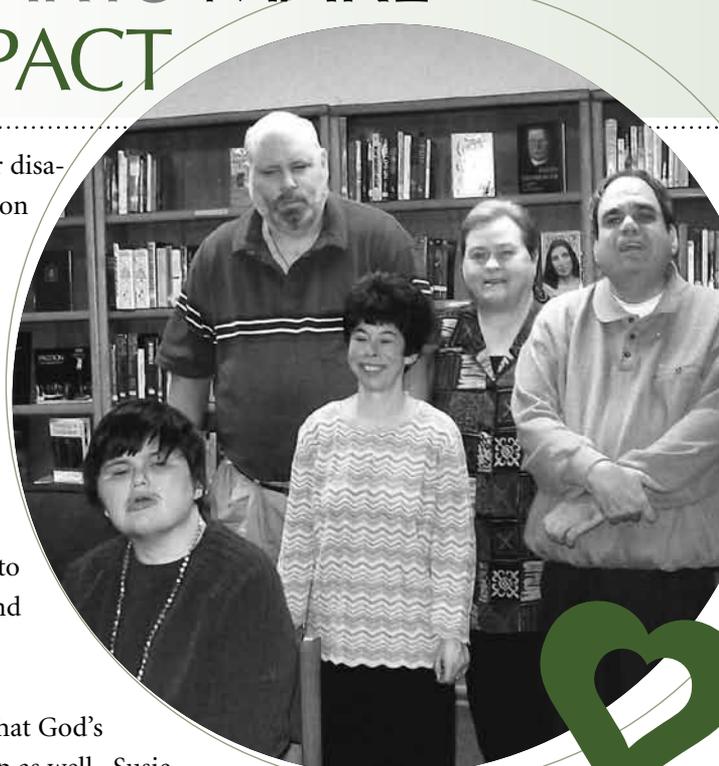
This is a group with a big heart—and loads of commitment to sharing God's love with the people around them. At their second annual Advent food drive, they collected more than a thousand pounds of food and \$2,000 for a local food pantry.

The Friendship group is also known within their congregation for their faithful ministry of sending cards, complete with decorated envelopes.

Susie explains it this way, "Every single person in our class truly wants to make a difference in somebody's life. We do not spend time on Sunday

morning talking about our disabilities. Our time is spent on the Friendship Ministries curriculum—which we embrace with passion—and on how we can use our love of Jesus Christ to make a difference for someone else. We are a small group in number, but we have so much love to share within our church and community."

It isn't surprising to hear that God's love is felt within the group as well. Susie says "these friends are like my own family."



●● left to right: Amy, Ron, Debbie, Susie, and Tom, Friendship group members



Show your group's heart:

- Ask your congregation for prayer requests. Pray for them during your meetings and in between.
- Organize a service day to help a neighbor or two with yard work.
- Ask a nonprofit in your neighborhood what your group can do for them. ■



Autism Webinar
NOW
Available Online

Check it out at www.friendship.org

Learn about **Autism & Children's Ministry** whenever it fits your schedule via our recorded webinar. Simply follow the link on our homepage, or go directly to www.friendship.org/AutismWebinar ■

Friend volunteers in **PERU**



Bob and friends in Los Cipreses, Peru ::

Bob Brink, a longtime member of the Friendship group at **Bethel Christian**

Reformed Church in

Lansing, IL spent eight days last fall traveling to Peru to deliver Hope Packs to local children. The Hope Packs, which are backpacks filled with school supplies, are assembled by people with disabilities at a Chicago-area facility run by Elim Christian Services. Many of the recipients of the packs would not be able to attend school without these supplies.

Judging from the photos, hope was not the only result of the trip. Bob made many friends along the way! In addition to sharing the story of his trip with you, he asked that we share John 3:16 in Spanish:



Porque tanto amó Dios al mundo, que dio a su Hijo unigénito, para que todo el que cree en él no se pierda, sino que tenga vida eterna. ■

(Nueva Versión Internacional)



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 13: OASIS, Collingwood, ON

June 8-11: Annual conference of the AAIDD (American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities), Providence, RI

September 12: One Body Together in Christ, Grandville, MI

October 22-25: Christian Educators Fellowship, Louisville, KY

HEATHER

May 14-16: Annual conference of the Canadian Down Syndrome Society, Regina, SK

ELIZABETH (Amistad)

May 13-19: Expolit, Miami, FL



Notas DE AMISTAD

My Dear Friends,

This time I want to let you know about a wonderful person who is a great gift from God. Meet my friend, **Victor Hugo**.

He is part of the **El Renuevo Evangelical Church in Bogota, Colombia**. His brother is the director of an art academy where Victor discovered his talent for painting. When we started the *Amistad* group in his church, Victor understood very well the message of inclusion.



From the moment that Victor heard about *Amistad*, he had a desire to incorporate this ministry into the art academy.

Until this time, the school did not offer opportunities for people with special educational needs. In the short time since Victor started an *Amistad* ministry there, this group of friends has become prominent within the academy. I thank God for the wonderful gift of Victor Hugo's ministry. I also give thanks for the following new *Amistad* groups:

- Iglesia Bautista de Trinidad of Trinidad, Uruguay
- Mision JESED of Lima, Peru
- Primera Iglesia Bautista Dios es Amor of La Libertad, Peru
- Vida Nueva pra el Mundo Sur of Mexico DF, Mexico ■

May God Bless You,



Elizabeth Rodriguez
Ministerio Amistad

FRIENDSHIP FAMILY



Welcome to the family!
Join us in welcoming the following groups:

- Lighthouse Fellowship Baptist Church of Kincardine, ON
- Preston Hollow Presbyterian Church of Dallas, TX
- Southside Church of Christ of Columbus, OH
- Westminster Presbyterian Church of Bryan, TX
- Westminster Presbyterian Church of Munster, IN

FUN & GAMES IN ONTARIO

Ontario groups, you won't want to miss the second annual Friendship Festival, to be held Saturday, May 29, from 10 a.m. until 2 p.m. at E.C. Drury High School in Milton.

Participants must **register by May 21**: send names to Marlene Nirula at lene@sympatico.ca. For more information, contact Herb Goodhoofd at 905-878-0575 ext 241.

The festival is hosted by the Friendship Club of **ClearView Church** in **Oakville, ON**. ■

What's happening in your corner of the Friendship family? Be in touch! By phone: 888.866.8966, or email: friendship@friendship.org

Psalms teaser

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We're furiously at work on the new Psalms study, which we hope to have ready for your use this fall. For the first time ever, we're including a DVD option for group leaders. We'll also be offering a CD for use in the group or devotional use at home.

Stay tuned for more information! ■

Words matter

Contrary to the old aphorism about sticks and stones, we have all felt the sting of unkind or thoughtless words. One of the tasks assigned to The President's Committee for People with Intellectual Disabilities was to replace the term "mental retardation" with a term that would not include the hurtful "R" word. The Committee also sought to eliminate the confusion caused by the association of the word "mental" with "mental illness."

Since its selection of the term "intellectual disabilities" as the best replacement, other organizations have followed the Committee's lead. You may have noticed that as we at Friendship Ministries print new materials, we are making the switch to "intellectual disabilities" as well. While the term we used previously ("cognitive impairments") is not offensive, we are adopting the most widely accepted language for the sake of clarity.

If you wish to commit to helping end the use of offensive language, check out the "Spread the Word to End the Word" campaign at www.r-word.org ■

Dear Nella,

November 22, 2009 was a very special Friendship service at Second Christian Reformed Church in Grand Haven, MI.

One of our members, Eileen Harden, made profession of faith. After our service was scheduled, we found out that Eileen had been baptized years earlier on that same date.

During the service another member, Ben Vanden Berg, sang a solo: "No, Never Alone." It was a very touching service.

Sincerely,
Betty Rodrigues



Ben Vanden Berg sings "No, Never Alone" ::



Eileen Harnden listens as Rev. Michael Koetje asks her to profess her faith ::





FROM THE DIRECTOR

PRACTICING FOR HEAVEN

Some Friendship nights, an air of spirituality moves through the room. The prayer requests are so heartfelt, the mentors and friends are in tune with each other, and you can almost physically feel the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Have you experienced this? It may be a chill or shiver that you feel when you sing together. It may be the tears in your eyes when you catch a glimpse of the profound ways life is shared in Friendship. It may hit you when you hear a friend testify, "I am glad Jesus is in my heart." Or when you hear David, at the end of the new Friendship video, declare "I can say one thing: I've been a better person than I was when I first started."

A visitor once told me that at Friendship he felt the presence of the Holy Spirit in a way he had never before experienced it in church. I wonder why this is so.

When I hear Big Joe from Kitchener, ON sing "He Knows My Name," I feel like I have experienced a piece of heaven here on earth. (By the way, this song will be included in our new Psalms study; see p. 4)

Looking around the room at Friendship I see a beautiful variety of people coming together to worship. Some friends have never been a member of a church:

they have not been baptized or included. Others were nominally included, or just tolerated, in church. They come from different ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. Mentors and staff members, too, represent a wide range of ages and backgrounds.

Then I think of the more than 1,100 Friendship groups from more than 65 denominations and 28 countries around the world. We are all part of the Friendship family and part of the family of God. Together we are striving to welcome those often ignored, because we know that the body of Christ is not complete unless it includes all of God's children.

I call this **practicing for heaven**. Why? *Because God has already included all kinds of people in his family, and we are called to follow his lead.* Let's continue to help our own church families reflect God's kingdom. We don't have to wait for heaven to experience some of the reconciliation and shalom of God's kingdom.

If you have never experienced a Friendship church, consider doing so. You will see the family of God in a new way. ■

Nella Vitellug

The body of Christ is not complete unless it includes all of God's children.



MORE WAYS you can support the work of Friendship Ministries



Have you caught the Friendship vision? Are you wondering how you could support Friendship's global ministry? Here are some creative ways others have contributed recently:

Franks for Friendship

Almost every year the **Goderich Friendship Group of Goderich, ON** holds a hot dog sale at their local Zehrs grocery store as a way to promote their

group to the community and to raise some funds. This year, the sale raised more than \$900, and the group decided to send \$500 to support the work of Friendship Ministries Canada.

Couple shares their heart

As they planned their wedding recently, a couple in Michigan decided that their kitchen was already well stocked and their towels were luxurious enough.

Rather than register for wedding gifts, they suggested that guests could send a donation to Friendship Ministries in honor of their wedding day.

Creativity not required

Give online anytime at www.friendship.org/give or by mail at the addresses on this page. ■

Heartfelt thanks to members of our Church Partnership Program

New Church Partners:

- Fairway Christian Reformed Church of Jenison, MI
- Grace Christian Reformed Church of Welland, ON
- Smithers Christian Reformed Church of Smithers, BC
- Stratford Christian Reformed Church of Stratford, ON

Renewing Church Partner:

- Calvary Christian Reformed Church of Edina, MN

To learn more about the Church Partnership Program, please contact LaVonne or Nella at 888.866.8966 ■



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Special Gifts

We are grateful for gifts in memory of:

- **Craig Spidell**
- **Alice Spoolstra**
- **Catherine Lydia Stephens**

And for gifts in honor of:

- **Jesus, Emilio, and Alaiya**, grandchildren of Lee & Arlene Forbes
- **Ralph Honderd**, longtime volunteer for Friendship Ministries, on his birthday
- **Bob & Helen Phillips**, in gratitude for the handyman work Bob did without payment ■