

FRIENDSHIP NEWSLETTER

Tips & Tools to Include Our Friends

FOURTH QUARTER 2014



A Publication of
Friendship Ministries

 **Friendship**
MINISTRIES



FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Can you spare a cookie?

It was time to get up in front of church and remind the congregation that our next Sunday service was the annual Friendship worship service. With my friend Patrick beside me, I began to list all the wonderful things that happen at our Tuesday evening Friendship class: greeting time, birthday celebrations, singing, prayer, Bible lessons, one-on-one time, crafts, and creating get-well cards. Then I turned to Patrick and asked him what his favorite part of Friendship was. He looked around, thought about it a moment, and then with a big smile on his face he announced loudly: cookies!

The entire congregation let out a roar of approval. They understand that for Patrick, and for many of our friends and mentors (including me), cookies to conclude the evening are not just a delicious treat. Instead, they signify so much more: community, happiness, fellowship, and – of course – friendship. The cookies are an essential part of our evening. I sometimes wonder if our devoted cookie bakers – there are quite a few of them – have any idea how vital and special their role is. Cookies show up in the kitchen every week – quietly, consistently, and faithfully. They're brought by people who love Friendship and everything that Friendship is about.

I can't help but think about the similarities between our weekly Friendship cookies and the thoughtful and generous gifts given so faithfully, quietly, and lovingly to Friendship Ministries by so many of you. Your gifts – much like our cookies – are a vital part of our ministry. Your donations come to our office week after week, quietly, consistently and faithfully. I don't know all of you, but I know that you too share this love for Friendship Ministries and its powerful mission. With your faithful donations, Friendship Ministries is able to continue to empower the Church to share God's love with all people, regardless of their ability or disability.

This year, Friendship Ministries will be working hard on curriculum development. We will assess our current materials, explore new ways to make curriculum more accessible and less expensive, and begin the process of revising old materials and creating new ones. We will also continue to challenge the Church to find new ways to grow into communities that understand and utilize the gifts of all God's people.

Our work is not possible without your help. Your gift – whether a single cookie or a full batch – is an essential part of Friendship Ministries. In this season as we celebrate Christ's birth and this new kingdom on earth, can you spare a cookie?

In Him,

Tom VanWingerden

Executive Director, Friendship Ministries

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EL AUTISMO Y TU IGLESIA TOUCHES A MOTHER IN URUGUAY

A recent testimonial from Ministerio Amistad:

Rebeca Herrera lives in Montevideo, Uruguay. She is a mother of two beautiful twin girls – age 5 – who have both been diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and a speech impediment. Rebeca and her children regularly worshipped at their local church, but stopped attending recently when her young girls were asked to leave their Sunday school class.

But Rebeca was in a local bookstore recently and found a copy of Friendship Ministries' *El Autismo Y Tu Iglesia* (Autism and Your Church). She purchased the book without hesitation and soon found answers to many of her questions: how and why should the Church become a place that welcomes families affected by ASD? How and why should the church include people with ASD in their ministry?

Rebeca also found a new call to encourage and support other families in similar situations. "This book awakened a strong desire within me to serve God in this capacity. I want to help others in similar situations and to share God's love with them," commented Rebeca.



This testimonial is evidence of God's work in and through our ministry. I am so grateful to Him for allowing us to continue His work and to you for helping us empower the Church to share God's love with people who have intellectual disability. Thank you for your continued support.

Blessings from God,

Elizabeth Rodriguez
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50 YEARS WITH FRIENDS

by **Martie Bultman**

How do I begin to share my more than 50-year history with friends? There are so many memories, so many stories, and so many opportunities to share God's good work and grace.

Perhaps a good place to start is with Friendship Ministries' chosen theme for the 2014-2015 academic year: Cheering Us Forward in Faith. Tom, our executive director, wrote about this theme earlier in the year and referenced the "great cloud of witnesses" that cheers us forward in our spiritual lives and also in Friendship's daily work.

When I look at my life and my work with Friendship Ministries, it is easy to identify many who have cheered me forward in faith.

Cheering me forward...

I discovered my vocation while attending Hope College in Holland, Michigan. I was a freshman when I responded to a request for student volunteers to come and play with children who had intellectual disability. The children lived in a small house behind Western Theological Seminary, and I was thrilled to interact with them and a small boy who squealed and clapped every time he completed a task. I remember volunteering there beside several talented and gracious staff members who had a heart for working with those who had disability, and I knew I wanted to do the same.

But there was a small problem: Hope did not offer the education classes I needed to become a special education teacher, and I – having traveled to Hope from Northern California – was not looking to transfer to another college. That's when I found the first members of my cheering section, the faculty

mentors and friends who helped me select courses from Hope and Western Michigan University's extension program to follow my dream and to become a special education teacher.

Cheering others forward...

After marrying, teaching special education for four years, and returning to Holland with two small children, I read an article in the Holland Sentinel about the Reformed Church in America and Christian Reformed Church initiative to teach catechism to children with disability one night per week. This was an opportunity for me to return to my vocation and to cheer others – specifically children with cognitive impairments – forward in faith, while also being a stay-at-home wife and mother.

Cheering Friendship forward...

The rest of my history is very deeply entwined in Friendship's history. My dear friend, Marcy Vanderwel, and I were co-directors of Holland's Special Education Ministry (SEM) for some time. In 1979, Marcy and I were asked to have our program become the model for Friendship Ministries and to write the first three years of curriculum. We eagerly obliged and were blessed to be a part of Friendship's beginning.

In 2016 my 4th three-year board term will conclude. My long involvement with Friendship Ministries has been one of God's greatest blessings, and I will always cheer her forward in faith, as she continues to share God's love and grace with those who have intellectual disability, and as we enable them to become active members of His family. I hope you will join us.



CHURCH PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

Heartfelt thanks to these new and renewing members of our Church Partnership Program.

Growing

Anaheim CRC of Anaheim, CA
Blythefield CRC of Rockford, MI
Calvin CRC of Sheboygan, WI
Fourteenth Street CRC of Holland, MI
Goshen CRC of Goshen, NY
Hope CRC of Brantford, ON
Mountainview CRC of Grimsby, ON
Palmerston CRC of Palmerston, ON
Smithville CRC of Smithville, ON

Expanding

Bethel CRC of Dunnville, ON
Clearview CRC of Oakville, ON
Fellowship CRC of Brighton, ON
Heritage Fellowship CRC of Brampton, ON
Inglewood CRC of Edmonton, AB
Stratford CRC of Stratford, ON
Williamsburg CRC of Williamsburg, ON

Sustaining

Alger Park CRC of Grand Rapids, MI
Bethany CRC of Holland, MI
Calvin CRC of Millgrove, ON
Covenant CRC of Grand Rapids, MI
Ebenezer CRC of Leota, MN
Graafschap CRC of Holland, MI
Kelloggsville CRC of Kentwood, MI
Lafayette CRC of Lafayette, IN
Lucknow Community Church of Lucknow, ON
Luctor CRC of Prairie View, KS
Maranatha CRC of Holland, MI
Oakland CRC of Hamilton, MI
Shawnee Park CRC of Grand Rapids, MI
Westwood CRC of Kalamazoo, MI

Global Outreach

Plymouth Heights CRC of Grand Rapids, MI

WELCOME TO FRIENDSHIP MINISTRIES

Join us in welcoming the following groups:

Blue Route Vineyard Church of Media, PA
Diocese of Wichita, KS
Franktown United Methodist of Franktown, VA
Grace Community Presbyterian of Mechanicsville, VA

Grace Reformed Church of Omaha, NE
Hope Lutheran Church of Shorewood, IL
Prairie Edge CRC of Portage, MI
Trinity Orthodox Presbyterian Church of Hatboro, PA



UPCOMING EVENTS

Friendship Thanksgiving

November 26, 2014, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Many individuals who have intellectual disabilities – including many who are involved in Friendship programs – do not have family or friends to share a Thanksgiving meal with. This event provides these individuals and their caregivers with a fantastic meal in a welcoming space. Learn how you can support this event at www.friendship.org

Global Access Conference

February 17, 2015, Westlake Village, California

Four days, 1000 people, One Mission: Global Access. Among all the other amazing speakers and worship leaders lined up for this event, come listen to Tom VanWingerden lead his first roundtable discussion as the Executive Director of Friendship Ministries. Space is limited, so register now.

Religious Education Conference

March 12, 2015, Anaheim, California

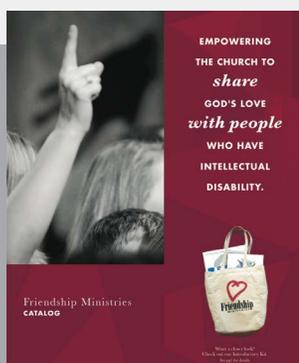
RECongress is the largest annual gathering of its kind in the world. The four-day event is held at the Anaheim (California) Convention Center and is sponsored by the Los Angeles Office of Religious Education. RECongress is open to people of all vocations and different faiths. Both Friendship Ministries and Ministerio Amistad will be there to share God’s love in two languages.

Friendship Ministries Golf Outing

June 29, 2015, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Consider joining us for the inaugural Friendship Ministries Golf Outing at Railside Golf Club. Friends will join us on the course for a unique spin on the traditional golf outing.

Learn more about each of these events at www.friendship.org/events.



PRODUCT HIGHLIGHT



Our 2015 Product Catalog is now available!

See our latest curriculum and resources online or request a print version by emailing contact@friendship.org

www.friendship.org



WE WOULD LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU:

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SUPPORT FRIENDSHIP MINISTRIES

Your financial gifts enable us to
carry out the work of this ministry.

Give online at:

www.friendship.org/give

Mail a check to:

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IN MEMORIAM

We are thankful for gifts received in celebration of the lives of:

Duane Denhof
Ruth Hennink
Nella Uitvlugt

**WATCH YOUR INBOX
FOR A VERY SPECIAL CHRISTMAS VIDEO**

from our friends.



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