

FRIENDSHIP NEWSLETTER

Tips & Tools to Include Friends

FOURTH QUARTER 2017



A Publication of
Friendship Ministries

 **Friendship**
MINISTRIES



FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Lessons from Community Theater

I had the pleasure of attending a community play recently with some of our best friends. The play was funny and fast moving, but a bit difficult to hear due to the British accents and rapid-fire dialogue. With good concentration and a bit of ear straining (even sitting toward the front of the theater), I enjoyed the play immensely.

During one of the fast-paced comedic dialogues, I looked down my row and observed a gentleman who has Down syndrome. As I warmly watched him react to the play, I wondered about how much of the dialogue he was absorbing. I discovered that whenever the crowd roared with laughter, he would look around, see the audience in stitches and then burst out in a delayed loud laugh followed with enthusiastic applause. It was so delightful to see him join in the fun around him. His gleeful participation caused me to pause and think about my own surroundings as well, and to give thanks for the opportunity that I had as I enjoyed time with not only my good friends, but also the broader community.

The play possibly would have been OK if I was the only one in the audience, but the experience of togetherness and fellowship made the experience much more enjoyable and memorable for me and for the gentleman down the row. We were a part of something bigger, sharing the experience with those around us. Twenty years from now I probably won't be able to remember the play, but I will be able to recall the enjoyment of fellowship with my friends that night.

As my life has been absorbed these last few years with the creation, production, fund raising, marketing, and sharing of our new curriculum called **TOGETHER**, my observations and thoughts about the play cause me to reflect about how this amazing new Bible study also brings us together and encompasses so much of what we're all seeking: belonging, community, togetherness, sharing and friendship.

The **TOGETHER** Bible study seeks to break down barriers that keep us from coming together as equal partners in

Christ, and it provides opportunities to develop meaningful friendships and grow in relationship with God and with one another. It brings us into the same room, to enjoy each other's company and to celebrate life...together.

When it's all said and done, aren't we all longing for simply an opportunity to be a part of a greater community in Christ and to love, cry, laugh and clap and pray together?

May God bless us all as we seek to ensure that all of God's people are in the "theater" when the play begins.

In Him,

Tom

For more information about **TOGETHER**, visit www.togethersmallgroups.org

Tom VanWingerden

Executive Director, Friendship Ministries

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888.866.8966





NOTAS DE AMISTAD

A THANK YOU NOTE TO YOU FOR ALL THE GREAT THINGS THAT YOU HAVE DONE FOR US:

With your help we were able:

- To open several Amistad groups in Argentina, Brazil, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, and Mexico.
- To host several inclusion conferences with the principal topic of “moving teachers from theory to action.” We were able to reach around 300 teachers from 70 churches and prepare them for children with special needs.
- To serve as a go-between as the Kitchener Friendship group from Canada helped to open a new Amistad group in Cuba, and as the Friendship group from Osborne Baptist Church in Eden, NC helped open a new Amistad group in Costa Rica.
- To receive beautiful and powerful testimonies about inclusion that help other groups.

Thank you very much for donating to the Mary Louters fund for Ministerio Amistad and allowing us to continue with this blessed ministry.

We thank God for guiding us in this journey and for all your contributions. We wish you a blessed Christmas with your family and that God will provide many blessings in 2018.

In Him,
Elizabeth Rodriguez

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Ministerio Amistad
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MY TRIP TO BRITISH COLUMBIA

Heather DeBoer

Last year, Friendship Ministries Canada received a grant that is enabling staff to visit Friendship Groups and churches across the country to help start new groups, encourage existing groups, and celebrate together all that God is accomplishing through Friendship. Last week, Shellie Power (who chairs the Board of Friendship Ministries Canada) and I were able to do all of those things in British Columbia.

The weather held true to form: chilly, soggy days outside lent a feeling of coziness to churches in Surrey, Abbotsford and Chilliwack. In Surrey, we held an evening event where we invited area churches to come learn more about disabilities and how to welcome people living with disabilities into the life of the church. We visited two club leaders together with the pastors of their churches, learning about the things that work very well for them and their challenges, too. We were also able to visit the very new leaders in beautiful Chilliwack (I'm from Ontario...I can't get enough of the mountains!) who were eager to learn more about what Friendship has to offer. During these visits, we also had the opportunity to share our new TOGETHER curriculum, which was met with enthusiasm—especially since Canadian groups can try the materials for free, thanks to the Ride for Refuge fundraiser.

The highlight of our westerly trip was an evening of celebration at Trinity CRC in Abbotsford. Our worship leader was singer/songwriter Brian Doerksen (“The River,” “Come, Now is the Time to Worship,” and much, much more! Look him up!), who led our 70 guests in some lovely worship time. Shellie demonstrated her exceptional story telling skills and object learning ideas, including her ingenious prayer pillow. And of course, we ended the evening with coffee and some delicious cheese and crackers. What a great time we had together! Our many thanks to the volunteers who made the evening a hit!

As we travel, one of our goals is to encourage church leadership to ‘lean in’ to their Friendship programs. It is so easy for programs that run well to be left alone, but even when groups are thriving, we should always

be asking, “What more can we be doing? How can we include the program in the fabric of the church?” We want churches to move away from an ‘us’/‘them’ mentality, and start thinking of people of all abilities as a natural part of ‘we’. Please cover Friendship Ministries in prayer as we travel to various locations around the country. Pray for our safety, for open hearts and minds among Friendship and church leaders, and for continued impact on the lives of people with and without intellectual disability.

Is your group interested in receiving a visit from Friendship Ministries Canada staff? Contact Heather at canada@friendship.org for more information!

canada@friendship.org
800.730.3490 x 4279

E-NEWS SIGNUP

www.friendship.org/newsletter-signup



Did you know that we have a wealth of helpful FREE tools online? Find curriculum descriptions, ways to recruit volunteers, practical tips for including Friends in ministry, and more helpful resources at friendship.org



THE MIRACLE OF ANA SOFIA

As Told by Parents **Monica and Alejandro Herrera**
To **Elizabeth Rodriguez** of **Ministerio Amistad**

ANA SOFIA “MILAGROS” (“MIRACLES”) HERRERA was born on December 7, 2001 at 11:59pm, weighing only 870 grams. She was born at just 6 months gestation, in the city of Morón, Buenos Aires.

Due to the lack of oxygen in her brain at birth, Ana Sofia has cerebral palsy that affects the speech and mobility of her lower limbs and her central nervous system.

She was very affected by the humidity of Buenos Aires on her respiratory system and because of that she was in intensive care for 15 days. Then, we made the difficult decision to move to a province where there was not so much humidity, and by medical recommendation we moved to live at General San Martin, in Mendoza, in March 2003.

Ana Sofia Milagros had 47 hospitalizations due to respiratory problems. She had an operation in her stomach, and was fed by Gastric Button, then she had a lobectomy (an operation on her right lung), and two hip operations with prosthesis included.

Throughout this time, God took us to meet many people, and to enter into a world of parents with sick children, which we would not otherwise have known.

Many people surrendered to the Lord Jesus and whole families received Christ through our interactions. We have seen healings in very sick children, even in adults, and we have been able to accompany those parents through those difficult times. For the glory of God!

At school, Ana Sofia was given special recognition for promoting home teachers for children with disabilities. Glory to God! She is now 15 years old and understands perfectly what she is told, and she is always in a good mood. Through the Ministerio Amistad material, we began to give her Bible School lessons at home. We learn together to

enjoy everything God created. While I hold her, I explain that God made heaven because he loves us and loves her mom and her Dad, and at night we see the stars—which God made—and we see the tall trees—that God made. We have visited the lemon factory (because I have a lemon tree on the patio of the house) and we touched the leaves and the fruits and we sensed its smell.

For today’s topic we ask, “Anita, where is heaven?” And she raises her arms, and says, “Up!”

I ask her, “What are the trees like?” And she raises both of her arms to say, “The trees are tall.”

We see that God made the fruits and vegetables. While we cook the food, we share with her the photos and the objects (taking advantage of the idea of a table of creation) apple, potato, lettuce, mandarins, oranges, etc.

With regard to water (we touch and sense that it’s wet), we see the sheets of sea-like material and the streams and I put music on my computer. And I let her touch snails, which reside in the sea, and are alive.

We went through the Lesson of the Little Sheep (I have a doll with a sheep dressed as a shepherd with his staff). Jesus is the good shepherd, who takes care of us because he gives us the house, the bed, the roof, the food, and takes care of us at night, and I remind her of this every night during bed time.

It is a very precious work because I also enjoy it with her.

 The Mary Louters Fund provides inclusive resources to Friendship groups in Latin America. Support Friends like Ana Sofia by donating to the Mary Louters Fund at friendship.org



UPCOMING EVENTS

Symposium on Worship

January 25, 2018 | Grand Rapids, MI

Come hear Friendship's Executive Director, Tom VanWingerden, board members Erik Carter and Anne Masters, and TOGETHER author Barb Newman speak on Universal Design for Worship and other important topics.

Register at friendship.org/events/symposium-worship

Break Forth One

January 26, 2018 | Edmonton, Alberta CANADA

One God. One Church. One Weekend.

Break Forth One exists to unify, serve, equip and empower the church in Canada to live out the mission of Jesus. Come visit Heather and Shellie at the Friendship booth to learn more about our new TOGETHER curriculum!

Register at friendship.org/events/break-forth-one

Deep & Wide (APCE 2018)

January 31, 2018 | Louisville, KY

In Matthew 25:35, Christ says "I was hungry and you gave me food. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me." In Louisville we will have the opportunity to explore this call to welcome all through unending hospitality.

You will also have the opportunity to meet Ruth VanderHart, the principal editor of our new TOGETHER Bible Study Curriculum!

Register at friendship.org/events/deep-wide-apce-2018

Golf Outing 2018

August 13, 2018 | Grand Rapids, MI

Save the date for our next Golf Outing: August 13, 2018! At Railside Golf Club.



PRAY.!?

"REJOICE ALWAYS,

PRAY CONTINUALLY, GIVE THANKS IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES; FOR THIS IS GOD'S WILL FOR YOU IN CHRIST JESUS."

1 THESSALONIANS 5: 16-18

Looking for a fresh perspective, new tools, and an infusion of inspiration for your conversations with God? Released in January, this unit on PRAYER will invite you into new ways and reasons to "pray continually."

TOGETHER is an innovative, inclusive Bible study that is designed to enable us to create a more collaborative community where all can participate fully as part of the body of Christ. togethersmallgroups.org

WE NEED FIELD TESTERS!

Many Friendship groups have started using (and loving) TOGETHER, and we're so glad for that. But did you know that TOGETHER is also designed to be an effective "regular" small group study? We long to see persons with disabilities become truly enfolded in this important part of church life.

Would your small group be willing to include one or two persons with intellectual disability and try TOGETHER in that context? For a limited time, we will offer a free unit of TOGETHER to small groups who are willing to participate in an evaluation when they finish with the study. For more information, contact LaVonne at admin@friendship.org



CHURCH PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

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

Sustaining

Beckwith Hills CRC of *Grand Rapids, MI*
Community of Meadowvale CRC of *Mississauga, ON*
East Strathroy CRC of *Strathroy, ON*
Neland Avenue CRC of *Grand Rapids, MI*

Growing

First CRC of *Thunder Bay, ON*
Hagersville Community CRC of *Hagersville, ON*
Inglewood CRC of *Edmonton, AB*

Expanding

Ebenezer CRC of *Trenton, ON*
Immanuel CRC of *Hamilton, ON*
Peace Reformed Church of *Middleville, MI*
River Park CRC of *Calgary, AB*

Global Outreach

First CRC of *Taber, AB*
Maranatha CRC of *Woodstock, ON*

WELCOME TO FRIENDSHIP MINISTRIES

Join us in welcoming the following groups:

Bethlehem CRC of *Thunder Bay, ON*
Cuyahoga Valley Church of *Broadview Heights, OH*
Fairfax Community Church of *Fairfax, VA*
Fellowship Bible Church of *Northwest Arkansas*
Friendship Group of *La Mirada, CA*
Friendship Group of *Milton, FL*
Manor Church of *Lancaster, PA*
Parkland United Reformed Church of *Ponoka, AB*
St John's Lutheran Church of *Arnold, MO*
Trinity Lutheran Church of *Estherville, IA*
Trinity Reformed Church of *Lethbridge, A*

WE WOULD LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU:

- 888.866.8966
- friendship@friendship.org
- www.friendship.org
- www.friendship.org/blog
- [facebook.com / friendmin](https://www.facebook.com/friendmin)
- [@ FriendsMins](https://twitter.com/FriendsMins)

Friendship Ministries 2215 29th Street SE, Suite B6 Grand Rapids, MI 49508	Friendship Ministries Canada PO Box 1636 Stn LCD 1 Burlington, ON L7R 5A1
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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

Mail a check to: Friendship Ministries 2215 29th Street SE, Ste. B6 Grand Rapids, MI 49508	Mail a cheque to: Friendship Ministries PO Box 1636, Stn LCD 1 Burlington, ON L7R 5A1
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We Are Grateful For Your Gifts In Memory of:

Loved ones from Heritage CRC of Byron Center, MI
Mary Louters

As your inclusive ministry wraps up 2017, we would love to hear about how God has moved in your lives! Send your story, photos, or video to friendship@friendship.org.



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