

FRIENDSHIP NEWSLETTER

Faith. Friendships. Belonging

FIRST QUARTER 2017



A Publication of
Friendship Ministries

 **Friendship**
MINISTRIES



FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

“Do you think it’s easy being retarded!?”

This was the question that my friend shouted out as we drove in the group van to our Friendship meeting one night. She was in the front passenger seat and had been trying to tell me about her parents in the nursing home. I was digging for more information, trying to get more of her story and also assuring her that I was engaged in the conversation. She was having some difficulty expressing herself as I continued to ask some more questions, when she blurted out her statement.

I was taken aback not only by her shouting and what is now considered offensive terminology, but even more so by her statement. She was fully aware that in her ability to express herself, she wasn’t like others that she knew, and it frustrated her.

She followed her first blast with another:
“I just want to be treated like everybody else!”

We brought the volume down a bit in the front seat and talked quietly about her feelings of frustration. This was not the first time that she had loudly expressed her frustration about something, but it was the first time that she expressed her perception of herself and those around her.

I share this story not because I want you to think about self-awareness, self-actualization or communication, but about what is really at the core of what many of us need and want. Most of us yearn for community—a place to belong where we are loved and accepted for who we are and for what God has created in and through us.

As I think about Friendship Ministries and the relationships that are formed, I have seen time and again true desire and conscious effort in looking for opportunities to come together, to be engaged in each other’s lives, and to be treated with dignity and love in a caring and nurturing community.

Not only is this sense of community evident at Friendship meetings, but also in the intentionality of our new Bible study curriculum called TOGETHER. TOGETHER

provides us with a wonderful new format that breaks down barriers of exclusion. Its ease of use and universal design creates opportunity to for all people to come together in unity. It is such a blessing to witness learners of all abilities find meaningful content in the studies as they grow in faith together in community.

Let’s continue to seek ways to come together and celebrate how much we have in common through the promise of Jesus Christ, to “treat us like everybody else”, with unending love, grace and salvation.

1 John 4:11 Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

In Him,
Tom VanWingerden

Tom VanWingerden
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NOTAS DE AMISTAD

Many Blessings for you during this New Year!

I thank God for allowing us to move forward in this beautiful ministry, and I feel blessed to introduce the following new Amistad groups:

Argentina

- Fundación Pan del Cielo, Bread of Heaven Foundation, located in Mendoza, Argentina. Mónica Cianciardo, director, 12 Friends
- Fundación Recrearte, Recreation Foundation, located in Provincia General Alvear, Mendoza, Argentina. Pastor Herrera, director, 7 Friends
- Escuela Bíblica Villa Atuel, Villa Atuel Bible School, located in Villa Atuel, Mendoza, Argentina. Pastor González, director, 10 Friends

Brasil

- Escola de Educação Especia oração, Prayer special education school, located in Pindamonhangaba, Brasil. Marta Suana, director, 8 Friends

Mexico

- Congregación Abba Padre, Abba Father Congregation, located in Mexico City, Mexico. Vero Sánchez, director, 5 Friends

May God Bless You,

Elizabeth Rodriguez
Ministerio Amistad
info@ministerioamistad.org
954.514.7960

CANADIAN CORNER

The Board of Directors of Friendship Ministries Canada is seeking applications for a board member position. If you have a passion for helping to develop opportunities to create a sense of true belonging among people of all levels of ability, we would love to talk with you about board leadership opportunities in Canada.

Please contact Canada Board President, Shelly Power at shellie@hopecentreministries.org or Executive Director of Friendship Ministries, Tom VanWingerden at tomvw@friendship.org 888.866.8966 x 1



What have you learned in your own Friendship group? Or in one you've seen? We'd love to hear from you! Email your stories to admin@friendship.org.

TOGETHER SMALL GROUP SAGA

By LaVonne Carlson

In the last Friendship Newsletter, I shared a story about how my TOGETHER small group got started. We are a group of four: myself, Johnnie, Sherrie, and Kate, who has Down Syndrome. We have been meeting regularly and working our way slowly through Jesus: Face to Face.

One of the features of TOGETHER is that every session uses a system of icons to create a visual schedule. This helps group members who find comfort in structure know which part of the lesson the group is in. We had never used that feature. All the members of my group are pretty flexible, easy-going types, and I have never felt the need to point out the icons or make it clear where we were in the session. We just go with the flow.

But Kate noticed the icons.

In one of our recent lessons, there was a very powerful first person account from a woman who was dying of cancer. Kate's mother died of cancer some years ago, and she still grieves. When the story was finished, we began discussing it. Kate pointed at my computer screen and flipped her hand, indicating that she wanted me to scroll down.

I didn't really know what she wanted, but I scrolled, and scrolled, almost to the bottom of the screen, until the Prayer icon appeared. "That!" Kate said, pointing at the praying hands. Even though she hadn't seen that icon in the lesson we were on, she must have known from previous lessons that it would be there. And when she pointed to it, what she wanted became obvious: she was saddened by the story we had heard, and she wanted to pray.

Kate doesn't have a very big vocabulary, and when she does speak her words are often hard to understand. But given the right tools, she can figure out how to communicate effectively. I am so thankful to have this opportunity to begin to understand what's on her mind--and, more importantly, what's in her heart. I think, in the course of this Bible study, we're all going to learn as much from Kate as she learns from us.

A NEW BIBLE STUDY CURRICULUM
TOGETHER
by Friendship
MINISTRIES

AVAILABLE NOW:

The newest installment of TOGETHER is now available for purchase on togethersmallgroups.org!

UNWRAPPING YOUR GIFTS

God has showered all of us with gifts—but sometimes it's hard to recognize what they are! Through this study, your group will explore both biblical and contemporary stories and examples that will help all of you unwrap and use the gifts God has given you.

TOGETHER is an online, 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.

CHURCH PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

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

Sustaining - gifts totaling \$250-\$499 in 2016

Beckwith Hills CRC of Grand Rapids, MI
Faith CRC of Pella, IA

Growing - gifts totaling \$500-\$999 in 2016

Blenheim CRC of Blenheim, ON
Calvin CRC of Millgrove, ON
Calvin CRC of Rock Valley, IA
Community CRC of Brinston, ON
East Strathroy CRC of Strathroy, ON
Emmanuel CRC of Calgary, AB
First CRC of Ripon, CA
First CRC of Sioux Center, IA
Friendship Group of Exeter, ON
Mountainview CRC of Grimsby, ON
Woodlawn CRC of Grand Rapids, MI

Expanding - gifts totaling \$1,000-\$1,999 in 2016

Bethel CRC of Waterdown, ON
Heritage Fellowship CRC of Brampton, ON
Luctor CRC of Prairie View, KS
Trinity CRC of Edmonton, AB

Global Outreach - gifts totaling \$2,000 or more in 2016

Maranatha CRC of Calgary, AB





UPCOMING EVENTS

That All May Worship

March 10, 2017

Virginia Beach, Virginia

Faith Inclusion Network is hosting their fifth bi-annual That All May Worship Conference. This year's theme is Pathways to Powerful Inclusion. Join Disability Ministry leaders from around the country--including our own Tom VanWingerden--for this one day conference.

For more info, visit faithinclusionnetwork.org

Accessibility Summit

March 24, 2017

McLean Bible Church, Washington, DC

Join families, caregivers, faith-based organizations (like Friendship Ministries!), service providers, teachers, and other professionals connected to the special needs community at the Accessibility Summit in Washington, DC.

For more info, visit accessibilitysummit.org

Inspire 2017

August 3-5, 2017

Detroit, Michigan

Inspire 2017 is a conference to connect people from 1,000+ churches for three days of powerful worship, practical workshops, engaging speakers, and conversation. Let's gather to refresh, refocus, and reimagine how our shared calling finds expression in our local communities and beyond. If you're involved in ministry at any level in your church, this event is designed for you.

For more info, visit inspire.crcna.org

Friendship Ministries Golf Outing 2017

August 14, 2017

Grand Rapids, Michigan

Mark your calendars for the Third Annual Friendship Golf Outing at Railside Golf Club. Tell all your friends and get a foursome together!

Already planning to come? Register at friendship.org/golf-registration

Would you like to contribute to this event? Visit friendship.org/sponsor



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)

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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-usa

www.friendship.org/give-canada

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We Are Grateful For The Gifts We Have Received: In Honor of:

Ralph and Carol Honderd

In Memory of:

Connie Allen
Duane Denhof
Norma Donovan
Nella Uitvlugt



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FRIENDSHIP NEWSLETTER
Tips & Tools to Include Our Friends

