

Extras



Friendship
MINISTRIES

Friendship Rep Tells Her Story

Arlene Reith is a faithful Friendship representative and group leader in Long Island (NY). **She inspires us with her excitement about Friendship and her willingness to travel to conferences** to help spread the word about Friendship, in spite of her busy life as a mother of eight children, two of whom have Down Syndrome.

She recently wrote her story as a tribute to the person who inspired her to begin her work with Friendship Ministries. We are passing along part of her story, which was included in the quarterly newsletter of Northport Baptist Church, titled *Friends for Heaven's Sake*. She met Carolyn eleven years ago, when Carolyn intro-



Arlene (on the right) with one of her volunteers

duced her to the ministry to people with developmental disabilities. Arlene was burdened for the ministry, but events in her life interfered. About that time, she and her husband adopted their fifth child, which necessitated a move to a larger house and away from Northport Baptist Church. But Carolyn had planted a seed that did take root. Arlene writes:

*As time passed, I began to feel a burden on my heart to begin such a ministry in the church that we were attending. However, having five young children was enough reason for me to keep putting it off...but the Holy Spirit kept tugging at my heart even to the point of waking me up at night. **I knew I had to obey God** and telephoned Carolyn to share my burden with her. She was so helpful and encouraging and invited me to attend their Exodus 4:22 Ministry on Sunday.*

***When I left that Sunday, I knew exactly what the Lord was calling me to do.** Eight years ago, the first Friends for Life Ministry began with six volunteers and two congregants. Today, the church ministers to as many as 40-60 congregants on a bi-weekly basis*

in the cafeteria of Maryhaven Center of Hope in Port Jefferson (NY).

*Carolyn had given me material that she found helpful in her ministry. It was the Friendship Ministries materials! **I found the curriculum to be perfect, and I have been using it ever since.***

Four years ago I became the Regional Area Representative for Friendship and now travel to churches, conferences, and conventions teaching workshops on how to integrate the mentally retarded into our church community and how to use the Friendship Ministry curriculum.

Friendship Ministries

enables churches to reach out to people with mental impairments, to their families, and to their communities. It was founded on the belief that we are saved by divine grace, not by human intelligence, and that all of God's people need fellowship and have gifts to share.

"We believe everyone is created in God's image and can relate to God. We also

A Senior Citizen Looks at the Past

We recently heard from one of our long-time supporters who describes herself as a senior senior-citizen. She read the last *Extras* and was moved to write to us, reminiscing about how people with mental impairments were treated when she was young and how thankful she is that things have changed. Now she sees people working, living in group homes, worshipping God. But things weren't always like that she says:

I well remember four little girls with Down Syndrome in our church. "They can't learn" was the common phrase. But they did learn and they had fantastic memories!

One family lived a mile from church and the child had to walk the distance. When she was about eleven, the family made the trip on a hot Sunday afternoon for the 2 pm service and back again at the 3:30, as usual. But she became very ill, and they called the doctor. Upon examination he discovered she had a very bad heart and she was not permitted to walk such lengths anymore.

Then there was a young man who neighbors said "had fits." As I grew up I learned he had epileptic seizures. He went to the consistory to make profession of faith, and he was told to memorize the Compendium to the Heidelberg Catechism and then to come back.

I am very thankful that things have changed and that your materials are available to help those with disabilities love Jesus and express that love, as each of them can.

FRIENDSHIP CONFERENCE *May 18-20 in Orlando!*

The brochure on the CCPD/ Friendship Conference should be coming out shortly. When we have it, we will mail it to you ASAP! In the meantime, here is a run-down of the workshops which Friendship Ministries will be offering.

Cathy Taylor teaches in the Abeline (TX) public schools and leads bell choirs for people with retardation both in the school system and in the state institution. She will give a workshop on **how to start a bell choir** in your Friendship class.

Ron Vredevelde is the Coordinator of Ministry for the Association of Interfaith Ministries in Mount Pleasant, MI. He has written the book *Caring Relationships: Helping People with Mental Impairments Understand God's Gift of Sexuality*. He will present a workshop on sexuality based on this book.

Ron will also present a workshop on the topic of **grief and people with mental impairments**. He will speak from personal and professional experience.

Tony and Diana Rock are long-time Friendship leaders and volunteer representatives. Tony is blind, and Diana is a special education teacher in Pittsburgh, PA. They will give a workshop on **storytelling techniques that work in Friendship classes**.

Tony and Diana will also present a workshop on **integrating Friendship students into the life**

of the church. They will talk about some specific worship ideas as well as ways to include the friends.

Arlene Reith has been a Friendship representative and leader for several years. She is also the mother of eight adopted children, two of whom have Down Syndrome. Arlene will give a workshop on **how to start a Friendship group** and why it is important to do so.

Bill VanDyken is the chaplain for Hope Haven in Rock Valley IA. He will present his work of **facilitating spiritual retreats for Friendship students**. He has personally led several such retreats in the Midwest and has also recently led one for three weeks in Guatemala using the Friendship Amistad materials.

Bill will also present a workshop on the necessity of **servicing communion to our Friendship students** and bringing them to the feet of Jesus. He will give practical ideas on how to ensure that they understand the basic concepts of communion and different ways to serve them.

Steve Boles is the Director for Mark II Ministries, which ministers to people with mental impairments as well as to the deaf community. He will speak about **communicating with non-verbal students**. He will present ideas of how to recognize if your friends are understanding what you are saying and how to figure out what they are trying to communicate to you.

believe salvation is a gift that is not dependent on a certain level of intelligence.”

FROM OUR READERS: SOME ANSWERS

In the Fall 2001 *Extras* Terry Cloyd wrote about her frustration in getting group homes fired up for Friendship. Monyeen Boyd of Lima OH has some suggestions for her:

In our church we started our Pathfinders Class 26 years ago. From the very beginning we worked with the local organizations: with the ARC chapter and with our local special school workshops. I became very friendly with the executive director of both, plus the company that runs our group homes.

We send out invitations to the group homes in our area, and we also visit the homes. We have a van that picks up pupils in the main area of our town. The directors of the home encourage the staff to either see that their people are ready for the van or to bring them themselves.

One side advantage to the staff coming is that we get acquainted and have ministered to them also. What a joyous experience! We have around 50 students each Sunday and about 6-8 staff. A couple of the staff from the group home have enjoyed our class so much that they're actually asked to work on Sunday so then can attend too!

In the same issue we raised the issue of Friendship students taking communion even if they are not able to understand the creeds of the church and make a “regular” confession of faith. Monyeen responded to that one also:

*We recently started having communion for our class two to three times a year. Our teachers “prepare” the students by reminding them about our relationship with our Savior, how to pray for forgiveness, and what communion means. **Many of our students have professed faith in Christ. Some, though not verbal, have nodded “yes” or “no” to our questions, and a few, I believe, are simply “covered by the blood.”***

Our head deacon feels that we are adequately prepared and as much in need of communion as anyone is. Our deacons come in to serve communion and also explain what it means. The last time we had one person who did not partake because, as she said, “I’ve never asked Jesus to be my Savior yet.” We respected her reason.

I hope this helps others with their decisions about communion. Nowhere in the Bible does it say you have to take a class to take communion. Just use God’s word!

It’s About the Heart, not the Head!

We who are involved with people with mental impairments know that **faith does not depend on intellectual ability**. But it is always good to get affirmation of that truth. In the last issue of *Extras*, we raised the issue of the faith and salvation of mentally impaired people who may not be able to verbally make a confession of faith. In this issue we are including some responses to that question: a story, a letter, and this article.

We receive any journals and newsletters about people with mental impairments. One that recently struck our attention was the *Journal of Religious, Disability & Health*. The article entitled “God in the Oven: About the Demonstration of Faith and Gifts of Persons Who Have Developmental Disabilities” particularly hit home because it is about the very question that we raised.

It is a long article with a long title, but it’s not as intimidating as it sounds. In it the authors discuss the difference between head knowledge and heart wisdom. We are just pulling a few paragraphs from it. (And we won’t even try to explain the title. You can maybe guess its significance.)

The authors state, **It is the sin of arrogance to require that persons prove their faith through displays of knowledge**. They go on to say that we need to look for the fruits of the Spirit in each person (Galatians 5:22). **And these gifts—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control—are not dependent on knowledge**. Spiritual fruit, they say, trumps the “right answer” every time. And they give several real-life examples:

Shy, introverted Minnie greets and takes leave by gently hugging and laying her head on one’s shoulder. Minnie doesn’t say much, but her actions speak volumes about demonstrating love. Phyllis can squawk out only a few recognizable syllables, but she claps her hands with joy when she is the first person to recognize a plaque of praying hands as the latest addition to the worship space. During an enactment of the “Lost Coin” Kathy models generosity as she offers one of her own shiny silver quarters to replace the missing coin.

I’m sure you all have your own examples of people who despite, or maybe because of their lack of intellectual sophistication, somehow show the rest of us what true faith and trust really is. **Tell us your stories**. Send a picture along with them! Maybe we can share them in future issues of *Extras*.



from the director

Last fall I wrote about communion. After that I thought about how so many of my students are unable to come to church on Sunday. It seemed like a good idea to have a communion service during our class time on a Tuesday night. So I went to the elders of our church and asked permission. They asked several questions, but they were very supportive. During the two weeks before the communion service, we (the leaders and I) individually asked our students many of the questions that are in the back of *Expressing Faith in Jesus* as a way of determining whether they were ready to take communion.

This last Tuesday, with our pastor and eight elders assisting us we served communion to our class. For many this was a first-time experience. The reaction of the stu-

dents was incredible. When Karen had the oyster cracker that we used for the bread, she turned to me and looked down a long row of teachers and students and said, "Jesus died for me" with a huge smile on her face. Matt's face glowed so much afterwards that I thought of how the people at Pentecost must have looked. I asked him if this was his first time. He loudly said, "Yes!" For him it was so special to finally participate in something he sees often in his church on Sunday but has always been excluded from. I hope to help Matt become a full member of his church in the near future.

This past Sunday, I was privileged to meet with the Sonbeam Friendship Class at Calvary Temple in Seattle WA. They asked me to talk about what I had do for my job

as Director of Friendship Ministries as a follow up to their study of *God's Gift of Work*. At the end of my talk, one of the students, Eric, asked me, "Nella, do you do all your work as unto the Lord? Colossians 3:23." I was really amazed. I answered yes, but as the week went by I kept going over that in my mind and I really have to confess that sometimes I don't and that Eric had made me think about my attitude towards my work. This was a valuable lesson for me. Maybe I better sit down and just read through that short course again.

Nella Uitvlugt

Who Ministers to Whom?

Casey Kuperus, one of our Friendship leaders here in Grand Rapids, recently told us this story about Joan, a member of his Friendship group.

First the background: Joan always-earnestly-prays for the conversion of Rowdy Roddy Piper, her favorite wrestler. Whenever there are prayer requests, Joan always brings up this same request.

One recent Sunday evening at worship service, the pastor asked the congregation for prayer requests. Predictably, Joan raised her hand. Kindly, the pastor asked for her request, probably expecting the usual one. This time, though, Joan said, "I need to come to the front." Once up there, she said, "Now I need the mike." Then, to the pastor, "Get down on your knees. You need to put your back to the congregation and face me." Then she put her hands on the pastor and prayed for his new grandchild and that the pastor would be a good grandfather, after which she announced, "Someone should have done that this morning." (At the morning service the pastor had announced that his first grandchild had just been born.) Then she returned to her seat.

Wow! And who says WE minister to THEM?!



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