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

FRIENDS SERVE THEIR COMMUNITY

We thought it was time to **give back**, so we did.

By Vicki Standley

service, but they very rarely have opportunities to serve. We thought it was time to give back, so we did:

- We raised money for milk to be purchased for a local women and children's center.
- We collected food for a mission food pantry.
- We assembled boxes of snacks and goodies to be sent to our servicemen overseas.
- We used our offering to buy books for a low-income family with small children.
- We made goodie bags for the volunteers who visited Cedar Rapids during the 2008 flood.

It's hard for me to believe that our Friendship group started 14 years ago at First United Methodist Church in Marion, Iowa. 14 years ago, with just five friends in attendance.

Today, we see between 15 and 20 friends each Sunday. We sing. We pray. We get to know each other, and we build relationships with one another. Most importantly, we learn how much our God loves us.

In recent years, our team of mentors decided our friends should learn to serve their community through service projects. So often individuals with disabilities are on the receiving end of

Not only have we served our community, but we have also served our church. Many of our friends are not regular members of First United Methodist Church (FUMC), but they do consider it "home." At FUMC we attend many special events, including concerts and puppet programs. We also help serve meals – a soup supper



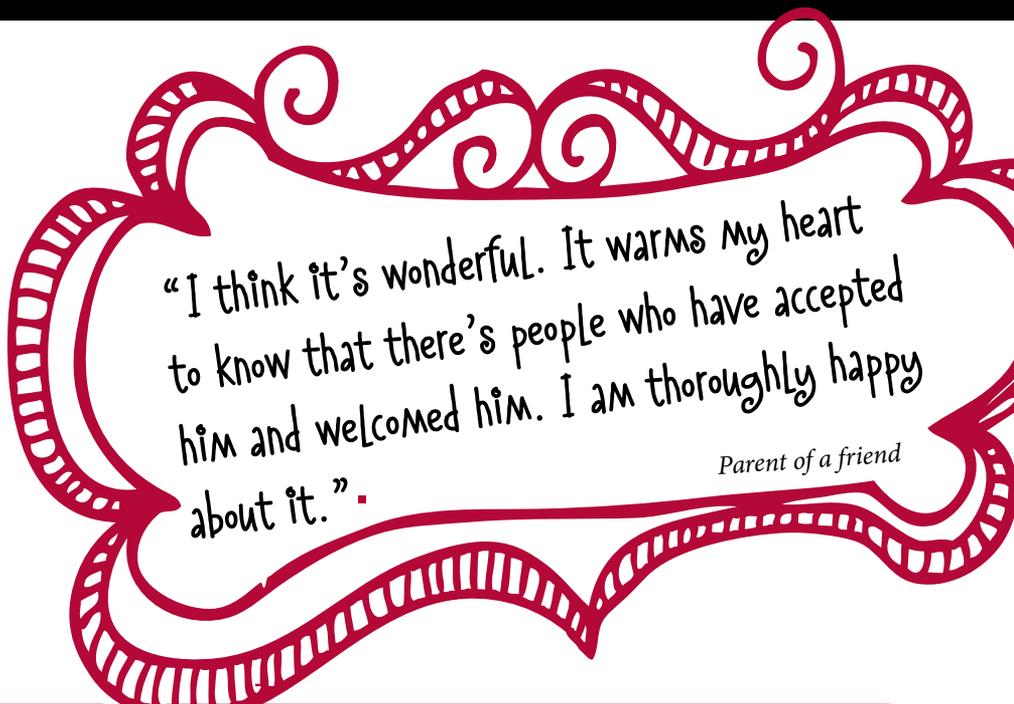
and a spaghetti supper – along with our men's group two times per year, which has proved very rewarding. Both our friends and the United Methodist Men enjoy working together.

One of the most unique – and moving – events, however, is the spring handbell Concert. Thanks to Mary Lee, the director of the FUMC handbell choirs, each of our friends is invited to participate in the spring concert. It is a beautiful, joyous event that leaves many in the audience in tears.

Why do we do what we do? Why do we serve our community and our church?

Because when we serve our community and our church, the individuals we encounter get to know us and our friends. They get to know our joy, they get to know our faith, and they get to know who we are as people.

The relationships we have developed as a result of the service we have done are invaluable. We have been blessed, and we are a blessing. We would encourage Friendship groups around the world to do the same. ■



"I think it's wonderful. It warms my heart to know that there's people who have accepted him and welcomed him. I am thoroughly happy about it."

Parent of a friend



Find us on Facebook
[facebook.com/FriendMin](https://www.facebook.com/FriendMin) &
 while you're online, Say
"HELLO"
 to the All-New [friendship.org!](http://friendship.org)

On the

ROAD



Will one of us be in your neighborhood? Give us a call or send us an email if you'd like to meet!

February 18-21: Children's Pastor Conference, San Diego, CA (**Chris Scotti**)

February 21-24: Religious Education Congress, Los Angeles, CA
(Elizabeth Rodriguez, Nella Uitvlugt)

February 23: Journey of Disability Attitudes, Anaheim, CA (**Nella Uitvlugt**)

March 14-15: Faith Inclusion Network, Norfolk, VA (**Ralph & Carol Honderd**)

April 24: The Orange Conference, Duluth, GA (**LaVonne Carlson**)

April 26: IN, Winnipeg, MB (**Bernie de Jonge**)

April 27: Joni and Friends, Chicago, IL (**Nella Uitvlugt**)

June 3-6: AAIDD, Pittsburgh, PA (**Nella Uitvlugt**)



Notas DE AMISTAD

Happy New Year!

This year is off to a great start for Ministerio Amistad, thanks to your prayers, your support, and your ongoing commitment to ministering beside individuals with an intellectual disability.

What makes the beginning of this year so special?

After much anticipation, *El Autismo Y Tu Iglesia* has been released! This new book, the Spanish-language version of *Autism and Your Church* by Barb Newman, is a valuable resource that will enable church leaders to:

- See individuals with ASD as persons created in the image of God
- Learn the six common areas of difference in individuals with ASD
- Discover 10 practical strategies for including individuals with ASD in the life of their church
- Develop an action plan for ongoing ministry beside children and adults with ASD



For more information on *El Autismo Y Tu Iglesia*, visit www.ministerioamistad.org.

Thank you, as always, for your continued support. ■



God bless you,

Elizabeth Rodriguez
Ministerio Amistad

FRIENDSHIP FAMILY



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

- Bethel Church of San Jose, CA
- Centre Street Church of Calgary, AB
- Glad Tidings Church of Muncie, IN
- Graham Presbyterian Church of Graham, NC
- Immanuel Christian School of Lethbridge, AB
- Lake Preston Ministerial Association of Lake Preston, SD
- Liberty Bible Church of Chesterton, IN
- Middleburg Free Grace Reformed Church of Orange City, IA
- Neland Avenue CRC of Grand Rapids, MI
- Newburgh Free Methodist Church of Newburgh, IN
- Northgate Free Methodist Church of Batavia, NY
- Peace Reformed Church of Middleville, MI
- Second Reformed Presbyterian Church of Indianapolis, IN
- The Joy Place of Oxford, England
- White River Christian Church of Noblesville, IN
- Zion Lutheran Church of Bay City, MI

Be in touch!

What's happening in your part of the Friendship family?

By phone: 888.866.8966, or email: friendship@friendship.org

TRY THIS!

5 TIPS TO ENHANCE YOUR WORSHIP

Friends love worship. And worship is an integral part of the Friendship program. Here are a few ideas to encourage and support you in your Friendship worship:

1 WAVE WORSHIP FLAGS

Friendship groups often utilize tambourines, drums, bells, and other instruments to heighten worship during their meetings, but why not try worship flags as well? Worship flags can easily be made by attaching ribbons, hemmed material, or other fabrics – via fish toggles – to the end of wooden sticks. Friends enjoy expressing themselves through movement, and worship flags are an excellent way to engage. Worship flags may also be used by friends who are sensitive to loud noises.

2 INVITE STAFF FROM GROUP HOMES

It can be hard for staff members at group homes to commit to bringing friends to Friendship every week. So why not invite them to attend as well? Friendship meetings allow us to minister beside friends who have intellectual disabilities, but they also allow us to minister beside guests who may be visiting us.

3 USE A SOUND SYSTEM

The benefits of using a sound system at Friendship are invaluable. Sound systems ensure all friends and mentors are able to hear clearly – and are clearly heard. While taking prayer requests, consider allowing friends to

speaking into a microphone to share their requests. This indicates to friends that their requests are important.

4 INCLUDE EVERYONE

Friendship groups often act out Biblical stories to better understand the ideas within text. Make sure you include all of your group members – including those that may be in wheelchairs or who may not be able to talk – in these skits. Mentors can play the role with a friend, if necessary, to make sure the drama plays out well.

5 PLAY SIMON SAYS

Simon Says is an excellent way for friends to relax and have fun on any given night. If your Friendship group needs a break from a traditional craft time, consider playing Simon Says instead. ■



•• Friends and mentors worship together using a sound system.



FROM THE DIRECTOR

Ministry of Presence

Part 1
of 2 part
series

We're hard-wired to crave feedback.

We want to be assured.

We want to be affirmed.

We want to know what we're doing is worthwhile and important.

So what happens when we don't receive feedback? How do we know we're making a difference?

Friendship programs across the country are made up of a diverse group of people, and each friend has unique abilities and disabilities. Some can speak, but others can't. Some make eye contact, while others turn away. Some can drive, and others can barely walk.

How do we know we're making a difference to each of these friends, regardless of their abilities?

I have spent a lot of time thinking about this question, as I have worked to support Friendship mentors throughout the country and the world. Too often mentors become frustrated when we do not receive the feedback that assures and encourages us. We think we're failing. We think we aren't good enough.

It's time to relax our expectations and to be content in our ministry of presence. **What does that mean?**

For a year and a half I have been working with John, a young man with autism who doesn't speak. Every Tuesday night I show up and I see John. I speak to him.

I'm not doing anything special. I'm not doing anything substantial. But by simply being there – by simply giving of myself and my time – I am ministering with John.

Do you know how I know that?

I recently invited John to the front of our group to sing. I handed him a microphone knowing full well he would not utter a word, but I wanted him to feel loved, accepted, and affirmed in his ministry with us.

Guess what happened? John sang. "Oooooooo," he sang. "Oooooooo." I was taken aback. I was blessed.

Ministry of presence is about living the gospel as reflected in our actions and our deeds. It's about spreading the gospel message simply by being in relationship with those around us.

God uses our ministry of presence. John is proof of that. And though John' "feedback" isn't the type of feedback we're so hard-wired to crave, or the assurance and affirmation we so desperately seek, we know that what we're doing with John is both worthwhile and important.

How do you minister with your presence? What are your ministries of presence moments? Share them with us on Facebook! ■

Sincerely,
Nella Uitvlugt



CHURCH PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

Heartfelt thanks to all **95** of members of our **Church Partnership Program!** And a special thanks to these new and renewing members:

Sustaining Partners

(\$250 per year):

- Clinton CRC of Clinton, ON
- First CRC of Highland, IN
- First CRC of Munster, IN
- First CRC of Taber, AB
- Friendship Group of Peterborough, ON
- Ingersoll CRC of Ingersoll, ON
- Luctor CRC of Prairie View, KS
- Mountain View CRC of Lynden, WA
- Racine CRC of Racine, WI
- Seymour CRC of Grand Rapids, MI
- Stratford CRC of Stratford, ON
- Woodlawn CRC of Grand Rapids, MI

Growing Partners

(\$500 per year):

- Calvin CRC of Sheboygan, WI
- East Strathroy CRC of Strathroy, ON
- First CRC of Kingston, ON
- First CRC of Sioux Center, IA
- Fruitland CRC of Stoney Creek, ON
- Graafschap CRC of Holland, MI
- Grace CRC Friendship Club of Brampton, ON
- Sussex CRC of Sussex, NJ
- Westmount CRC of Strathroy, ON
- Westwood CRC of Kalamazoo, MI

Expanding Partners

(\$1,000 per year):

- Ancaster CRC of Ancaster, ON
- Emmanuel CRC of Calgary, AB
- First CRC of Hanford, CA

Global Outreach Partner

(\$2,000 per year):

- Providence Baptist Church of Cleveland, OH

To learn more about the Church Partnership Program, contact LaVonne at 888.866.8966 ext. 3 or admin@friendship.org



20% Off The Christmas Book



Looking for ways to celebrate and share the Christmas story with your friends?

Friendship Ministries' The Christmas Book includes session plans that can be used for Bible studies, songs, dramas, worship, and more than 160 pages of ideas for your group celebrations.

Order online by www.friendship.org

USE PROMO CODE: CHRISTMAS2013

Sale runs now through December 31st. Don't miss out!

Discounts on Friendship curriculum are available through

E-News

- Want access to our latest news and promotions?
- Sign up for our e-news by emailing contact@friendship.org

2013 Friendship Challenge

A 2 Mile Walk for Friendship Ministries

- ▶ Thursday, May 9, at 5:30 PM
- ▶ Christian Reformed Rec Center in Grand Rapids, MI

For more information or to register, visit: www.friendship.org/friendship-challenge

Register now to claim your free t-shirt



FRIENDSHIP CHALLENGE

Not in West Michigan?

Host your own Friendship Challenge! Email contact@friendship.org for more information.



We would love to hear from you:

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IN HONOR OF:

- Sarah DeVries
- Ralph & Carol Honderd
- Lambert & Grace Hunse's 80th Birthdays
- George Waldron, Jr.

IN MEMORY OF:

- Al Crandle
- B. DeJonge
- Joyce Dykstra
- Mary Louters
- Craig Spidell

