

FRIENDSHIP NEWSLETTER

Tips & Tools to Include Our Friends

FIRST QUARTER 2016



A Publication of
Friendship Ministries





FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends,

Many of you will remember my first letter in the fall of 2014 as the new Executive Director of Friendship Ministries. I wrote about my good friend Paul Buursma and how we first became friends, and then colleagues when he joined the Board at Friendship Ministries. It is with great sorrow that I must pass on the news that Paul Buursma has gone to be with the Lord, and is now in the loving arms of his Savior.

Paul's health was already beginning to decline when he agreed to serve on the board, but his love for this ministry was so strong and evident in his prayers and his actions. He always made attending the board meetings a priority, even when he had very little energy. His contributions were always humble, insightful and valuable. At the most recent meeting, the board got a "sneak peek" at some of our new curriculum. Paul's enthusiastic participation in the demonstration lesson was such an encouragement. Not that he was known as a harsh critic, but we figured if he liked it, we must be doing something right.

Over the years I have often expressed how unworthy I felt of Paul's time, affection, and love. What did I do to deserve this close bond of friendship with Paul? Why me? Why did he choose to spend time with me, to get to know me, to pray with and for me, to share lunches and dinners together talking about God, our families, and friends? I don't know! Yet I do know that God brought Paul and me together as friends and mentors for each other at the right place and in the right time in each of our lives. Paul's love for me and his friendship was unsolicited, underserved and unconditional.

This image of undeserved, unsolicited and unconditional love was made so very clear to me through Paul's life, his friendship with me, and how he lived each day. Paul was Christ's image bearer. I, like so many of you who knew Paul, have seen Jesus in him

day-in and day-out. Paul's life was marked by the glory and fruitfulness of Christ. He truly loved and he truly cared. When he said he was going to pray for you, he did. God used Paul to help us see in a tangible, here-on-earth sort of way, a picture of what God's love looks like...undeserved, often unsolicited, and most certainly unconditional.

What a privilege it is to have called Paul "brother." What a heartache it is to know that his time on this earth is finished. What a hope it is to know that "soon and very soon," we will all worship together again.

To God be all glory, honor and praise.

Tom VanWingerden

Executive Director, Friendship Ministries

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NEWS FROM MINISTERIO AMISTAD

Notas de Amistad Friendship Ministries in Cuba

Many Blessings!

I am very glad to introduce the following new Amistad groups:

Bolivia:

- Iglesia Cristiana Evangélica Comunidad de Fe, (Evangelical Christian Church Faith Community), located in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia. Carla Jiménez Nuñez is the director of Amistad group with 5 friends
- Centro de Educación Especial, (Special Education School), located in Sucre, Bolivia. Elías Alaka Robles is the director of Amistad group with 7 friends

Colombia:

- Comunidad Cristiana de Fé (Christian Faith Community), located in Floridablanca, Santander, Colombia. Olga Lucía Valbuena Sarmiento is the director of Amistad group with 5 friends

USA:

- Iglesia Bautista Rey de Reyes, (King of Kings Baptist Church), located in Selma, NC. USA. Martha Macías is the director of Amistad group with 4 friends

México:

- Iglesia Cristiana Elienai Adulamas (Elienai Adulamas Christian Church), located in Tultitlán, Estado de México, México. Laura Lavariega Durán is the director of Amistad group with 3 friends

Cuba:

Special thanks to Plymouth Heights Christian Reformed Church, for visiting and donating Amistad materials to the following churches in Cuba:

- Iglesia Metodista (Methodist Church), Esther de Morón, Ciego de Ávila, Cuba
- Iglesia Monte de Sion (Mount Zion Church), Pastor Elio Batista G. Calimete, Matanzas
- Iglesia Bautista (Baptist Church), Leidys Durán Rodríguez, Santiago de Cuba
- Iglesia Bautista Emanuel (Emanuel Baptist Church), Rev. Noel Fernández Collot, Ciego de Ávila

May God bless you,

Elizabeth Rodriguez
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TOGETHER

Late last fall our team introduced you to *Choose Courage*, the first unit in our new, progressive curriculum.

Our new curriculum has two parallel tracks of study. The first looks a lot like our current materials, which is appropriate for most of our currently active groups. The second is designed to support the formation of small groups that include adults with and without disabilities. The topics are relevant to both populations and will contain appropriate supports to enable the full participation of all.

Choose Courage is the first unit in a series of Bible studies that will make up our Together curriculum.

Why Together? And why this new curriculum?

Because the tenor of disability ministry is changing.

Disability awareness, advocacy, and inclusion begins with a respect for human equality, equity, and diversity. It ends with full, equal, and meaningful participation of both children and adults with disability in all spheres of society.

In the past, inclusion has meant developing organizations and programs that gather individuals with disabilities independently, apart. This is a good, valuable method, a method that works well for many people and many organizations. But what if we took this method a step further? What if there was less emphasis on apart and more emphasis on together?

Friendship Ministries believes that everyone, regardless of ability or disability, is created in God's image and is deserving of love and justice. Friendship Ministries also believes redemption is a gift to all. It is a free gift. It is not dependent on a certain level of intelligence. Finally, Friendship Ministries believes the church is only complete when it includes all of God's children.

This is what Together is.

It is an innovative, inclusive Bible study that enables us to better approach a more collaborative community where all can participate fully as part of the body of Christ.

Take a sneak peek at our Together curriculum at togethersmallgroups.org and stay tuned for more information coming soon.

“For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us.”

Romans 12:5-6

Together: a new, unique, and inclusive curriculum.

Coming this fall



CHURCH PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

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

Growing

Community CRC of Brinston, ON
Emmanuel CRC of Calgary, AB
Exeter CRC of Exeter, ON
Goshen CRC of Goshen, NY
Luctor CRC of Prairie View, KS
Mountainview CRC of Grimsby, ON

Expanding

Bethel CRC of Acton, ON
Crosspoint CRC of Brampton, ON

Global Outreach

Community CRC of Demotte, IN

Sustaining

First CRC of Artesia, CA
Hagersville Community CRC of Hagersville, ON
North Street CRC of Zeeland, MI
Prince George CRC of Prince George, BC
Westmount CRC of Strathroy, ON

WELCOME TO FRIENDSHIP MINISTRIES

Join us in welcoming the following groups.

Bethesda Lutheran Communities of Indianapolis, IN
Calvary Church of St Peters, MO
Centennial Presbyterian Church of Calgary, AB
Covenant Church of West Lafayette, IN
First Baptist Church of Kingsville, OH
First Nazarene Church of Sterling, IL
First Presbyterian Church of Aurora, IL
Genesis United Methodist Church of Grand Rapids, MI
Grace Covenant Church of Iron River, MI
Living Faith Assembly of God of Kingman, AZ
Owensboro Christian Church of Owensboro, KY
Temple Baptist Church of Sarnia, ON
The Moody Church of Chicago, IL



CANADIAN CORNER

January, 2016

I'm amazed at my Friendship group, especially during the winter months. On a frigid Monday night, I would like nothing better than to hunker down beside a fire with a blanket, a book, or my television set. But the friends at ClearView Christian Reformed Church in Oakville, Ontario? They show up on a frigid Monday night bright and cheery and eager to gather together. I so admire the group home staff that brave the cold to bring these friends of ours to Friendship every week. It warms my heart.

Hopefully this winter you get to try something new or different in your Friendship class. Maybe try a "Share and Tell" night? Or a talent or game night? Or maybe even a puzzle night? Our group hosted a puzzle night last fall, and we were amazed with the

wonderful chatter that occurred. So many mentors and friends deepening their relationships. That's what it's all about.

Maybe something new or different will give a little "spice" to your program on a cold, winter day. Maybe mentors will become more engaged. Maybe friends will get a kick out of it. Maybe both mentors and friends will engage with each other in a different – but really good – way. And maybe that will keep the "winter blues" ways.

Praying good things for you and your friends in this New Year,

Heather DeBoer

UPCOMING EVENTS

Religious Education Congress

February 26, 2016, Anaheim, California

RECongress is the largest annual gathering of its kind in the world. Friendship Ministries and Ministerio Amistad will be hosting a bilingual exhibit. Come visit us!

Golf Outing 2016

August 8, 2016, Railside Golf Club, Byron Center, Michigan

12:30pm **Lunch & Registration**

1:45pm **Opening Remarks**

2:00pm **Shotgun Start**

Friendship Festival

May 14, 2016, Oakville, Ontario

Don't miss our next Friendship Festival, to be held at ClearView Church in Oakville, Ontario. Join us for a time of sharing God's love, singing, and playing games. Lunch is provided. \$10 per person. Please register at www.weloveourfriends.com.

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



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**

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www.friendship.org/give

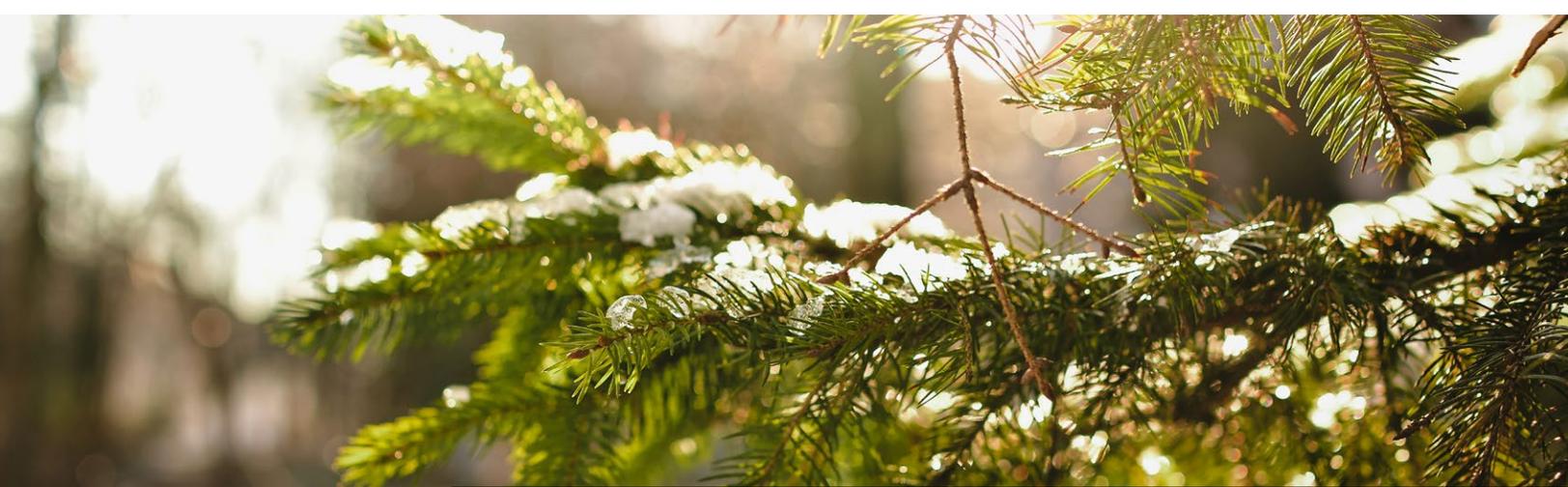
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IN MEMORIAM

**Paul Buursma
Duane Denhof
Mary Louters
Lynette Rosendal**

**Nella Uitvlugt
Sharon Van Kalker
John Woltjer**



**FRIENDSHIP STORIES ARE POSTED
REGULARLY ON OUR BLOG!**

Friendship.org/blog



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