

FRIENDSHIP NEWSLETTER

Faith. Friendships. Belonging

SECOND QUARTER 2017



A Publication of
Friendship Ministries





FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

It's Time

For more than 30 years, Friendship Ministries has provided resources that support faith formation and congregational inclusion with individuals who have intellectual disability. But contrary to what people who are new to this ministry might assume, the blessings of Friendship have never gone only from the “typically-abled” to the “disabled.” Friendship groups bring brothers and sisters of all abilities together, teaching all of us to recognize and celebrate all our gifts.

Friendship Ministries' unique mission to make the timeless message of the Gospel accessible to everyone has always been our foundation. But the goal has never been only to teach people Bible stories. Our materials are designed to enable people with and without intellectual disability to grow deeper in their relationship with God and with each other in community together. One of the benefits of our mission that has become so very evident over the years is the blessing of fellowship, understanding, mutual appreciation, and love for each other that blossoms as we study God's Word together.

Still, in many places, this blessing is too self-contained. Friendship groups often meet apart from the rest of the church, and many congregants aren't even aware of—much less experiencing—the joy and blessing that comes from forming relationships with people of different abilities. So we asked ourselves, where does some of the most vital growth in faith and friendship happen in the church?

The answer? Small groups.

Then we asked ourselves, what if we could develop a Bible study curriculum that would equip a “typical” adult small group to include someone with intellectual disability, or Alzheimer's, or who is an English language learner? What if we could present Bible passages and discussion questions in such a way that a person doesn't have to be able to read to participate, but so that people of typical abilities are still challenged to grow?

What if we could find a way to challenge tight-knit groups of friends to expand a bit, to include a new friend and reap the mutual blessings that will follow?

That's what TOGETHER is all about. Our new curriculum, with its innovative online format, incorporates a wide range of teaching techniques, including video clips, discussion questions, visual Bible passage presentations, and challenging and interactive exercises. This new approach provides an excellent set of tools to enable faith communities to think beyond the traditional “disability ministry” model and create opportunities for the full congregation to experience the beauty of sharing God's word with people of different abilities.

So my message is simple and clear: if you have not taken the opportunity to try out the TOGETHER curriculum series, it's time! Time to try something new and exciting in your Friendship group, but also time to challenge your congregation to find new ways to embrace and enfold people of all abilities in the Body of Christ.

In Him,
Tom VanWingerden

Tom VanWingerden
Executive Director, Friendship Ministries
tomvw@friendship.org
888.866.8966



NOTAS DE AMISTAD

News from Ministerio Amistad

It is a pleasure to share some activities from Ministerio Amistad:

- We appreciate the donation received from The Kitchener Friendship group from Canada. With this donation, we sent Amistad material to Cuba. Thank you so much and God bless you!
- We have a couple new Amistad groups in Cuba! They are:
 1. Fraternidad Bautista (Baptist Fraternity), Pastor Osmanys Denis Perez, director. Located in Sancti Spiritus, Cuba.
 2. Redes de Esperanza (Networks of Hope), Emilio Ercia Jáuregui, director, Located in Provincia Cienfuegos, Cuba.
- A conference for Bible School Teachers for Children was held from April 28 to May 1, 2017 in Mendoza Argentina.

The principal topic was “Moving Teachers from Theory to Action.” There was a workshop from Ministerio Amistad called “Preparing Teachers for Children with Disabilities.”

- Ministerio Amistad with Friendship Ministries attended the Religious Education Congress held in Los Angeles California, on February 2017.
- Please join our social media in Twitter @minamistad and Facebook.com/MinisterioAmistad.

We appreciate your prayers and your economic support.

May God Bless You,

Elizabeth Rodriguez
Ministerio Amistad
info@ministerioamistad.org
954.514.7960

TOGETHER

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.

Five Units of the **TOGETHER** series are now available for purchase on togethersmallgroups.org, including Jesus: Face to Face, Choose Courage, Walking Through Grief, and Unwrapping Your Gifts.

COMING SOON:





CANADIAN CORNER

“My Sister” by Heather DeBoer, Friendship Ministries Canada

Last year, Jesus called my sister Jessica home. My family and I are deeply saddened by this, but we are also buoyed by knowing that she is in a better place. Jessica lived with severe Cerebral Palsy and was never given the gift of walking or talking—but she was given the gift of communication! It was truly amazing to see her develop more and more ability to let us know what she was thinking without ever saying a word. Sometimes she would look up for ‘yes,’ and sometimes approval was met with laughter and an agreement would come in a soft ‘ah.’ Once I witnessed Jessica call for our mom...she heard our mom’s voice and definitely called out to her.

Why do I share this? Hear my plea and understand me! So many of our friends have no voice and communicate even less than Jessica did. But that doesn’t mean they’re not calling out! Are we taking the time to listen? To take a guess at what our friends want and need? Is the church listening? Of all the communities that surround us, certainly the church community should be the first to listen to and answer the call.

Many of us have heard the call and share God’s love with our friends. Now it’s time to encourage other churches and communities to do the same. Our friends **WANT** to belong, they **WANT** to be heard, even if their message is difficult to understand, even if we are uncomfortable in asking for clarity.

Will you help us? Send us pictures! Send us stories! Send us video clips! Send us your artwork! We’ll take these precious tidbits and use them to encourage more programs to start across this country of ours. Will you help us? Send your stories, no matter the format to:

canada@friendship.org

800.730.3490 x 4279



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.



Friendship Ministries Board of Directors

Back row:

Dirk Buursma
Michael Hoggatt
Mark Stephenson
Bernie de Jonge
Dan Baker

Front row:

Beth Swagman
Elizabeth Bajema
Shellie Power
Eric Uitvlugt
Minnie Herfst
Linda Aalderink

Not pictured:

Erik Carter
Anne Masters

BIG DREAMS

Thoughts from Elizabeth Bajema, Friendship Ministries Board Member

In Jeremiah 29:11 it says

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

When I was little they did not accept me in regular classes in school, because I had a disability, they think I couldn't handle the pressure. That young adults with special needs couldn't be included in activities in school life.

When I was in high school it was different the first 2 years it was good, they accepted me in regular classes. They nominated me on the homecoming court when I was a senior.

Late in life I realize I can make a difference by finding a job that I enjoy. That they were accepting a person with a disability to work at a retail store at New 2 You, it change my life.

I realize there is more important things in life by accepting people with various disabilities and special needs, to be encourage and loving and be there for each other that need help in different ways.

Try to be supportive.

I was involved in Friendship Ministries over 14 years as a participant, now I serve on the board for them! I see different special needs and disabilities, 3 times a week wherever I go to different programs that I attend to.

They have big dreams and hopes to spread the news around the world.

Elizabeth Bajema



UPCOMING EVENTS

Christian Reformed Church in North America - Synod

June 9-15, 2017
Palos Heights, IL

Friendship Ministries will be present at this year's Synod for the Christian Reformed Church in North America. Come find us!

Inspire 2017

August 3-5, 2017
Detroit, MI

Inspire 2017 is a conference to connect people from across our 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 crcna.org/events



Friendship Ministries Golf Outing 2017

August 14, 2017
Grand Rapids, MI

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

Friendship Festival

October 28, 2017
Oakville, Ontario CANADA

Don't miss our next Friendship Festival, to be held at ClearView Church in Oakville, Ontario, on Saturday, October 28, 2017, from 10:00am to 2:00pm. Join us for an enjoyable time of sharing God's love, singing and playing games. Lunch is provided. \$10 per person. For more information, contact Herb Goodhoofd at 905-469-9295.

Please register at www.weloveourfriends.com.
See you in October!



CHURCH PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

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

Sustaining

- First CRC of Artesia, CA
- Midland Park CRC of Midland Park, NJ
- Oakland CRC of Hamilton, MI
- Waterloo CRC of Waterloo, ON
- Willowdale CRC of North York, ON

Growing

- Anaheim CRC of Anaheim, CA
- Faith CRC of Burlington, ON
- Fellowship CRC of St Thomas, ON
- Goderich Friendship Group of Goderich, ON
- Heritage Fellowship CRC of Brampton, ON
- Immanuel CRC of Langley, BC
- Immanuel CRC of Ripon, CA
- Lombard CRC of Lombard, IL
- Riverside CRC of Wellandport, ON

Expanding

- Calvary CRC of Edina, MN
- Community CRC of Kitchener, ON
- First CRC of Hamilton, ON
- Meadowlands Fellowship CRC of Ancaster, ON
- Plymouth Heights CRC of Grand Rapids, MI
- Smithville CRC of Smithville, ON

WELCOME TO FRIENDSHIP MINISTRIES

Join us in welcoming the following groups:

- Anchor of Hamilton, ON
- Dream Ministries of Goshen, IN
- Faith Evangelical Free Church of Fort Collins, CO
- First Presbyterian Church of Lakeland, FL
- First United Methodist Church of Bowling Green, OH
- Longview Heights Baptist Church of Olive Branch, MS
- Trinity Life of Lutherville, MD

WE WOULD LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU:

- 888.866.8966
- friendship@friendship.org
- www.friendship.org
- www.friendship.org/blog
- facebook.com / friendmin
- @ 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/give-usa
- www.friendship.org/give-canada

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

We Are Grateful For The Gifts We Have Received:

In Honor of:

Mrs. Mary DeSmith

In Memory of:

Lisa Joy Remeur



Friendship Ministries
2215 29th Street SE, Suite B6
Grand Rapids, MI 49508

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FRIENDSHIP NEWSLETTER
Tips & Tools to Include Our Friends

