

Spring 2003

Extras



Friendship
MINISTRIES



FRIENDSHIP CLASS CELEBRATES 20 YEARS OF BLESSINGS

Twenty years ago a Friendship class was started in Muskegon, Michigan, at East Muskegon Christian Reformed Church. It was one of the very first Friendship classes.

Several years ago the church closed. But the director, Shirley Boes, was determined to make sure that the Friendship class did not fold. Shirley asked Hope Reformed Church in Muskegon if they would take the class under



their wing. They agreed. **And now the class is celebrating its twentieth year.** Some of the students have been in the group for the entire time, as has at least one mentor.

They began their celebrating this past fall with a dinner, which I was privileged to attend. After the dinner we went outside and released helium balloons. The balloons had little figures attached with the name Friendship Ministries and the address of the church so they could be sent back if found by someone.

This spring the class had an anniversary service at Hope Church. The entire class participated as worship leaders during the service. They sang, prayed, led the Lord's Prayer, and read Scripture. Many of the teachers from previous years came to celebrate with them.



John and Peggy De Hoog were two of the people who joined the celebration. They have begun a second Friendship class in Muskegon. Shirley had been praying for another class because she knew of many others who wanted to attend Friendship. About three years ago God answered her prayer when John and Peggy called to say they wanted to start another class. They now have a very active class at their church.

So, not only has the original class flourished for twenty years, but they have a sister class as well!

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

IT ALL STARTED WITH JUST ONE STEP

Julie first heard about Friendship Bible Studies a few years ago when Don Boden of Lutheran Disability Ministries (LDM) visited their church (see accompanying article about Don and LDM). Julie was touched, and she wanted Joanie, the daughter of a friend at work, to participate.

So Julie became a volunteer in the Friendship class starting at St. Andrews Lutheran Church, even though she wasn't a member there; and every week she brought Joanie with her. Julie and Joanie became close friends, and soon Julie wanted Joanie to also participate in other programs sponsored by LDM. They started attending monthly Friendship Saturdays, a respite program for families that are caregivers.

During the summer they attended HandyCamp, a week-long Bible camp where Joanie was paired up one-on-one with a volunteer. That experience provided another valuable opportunity for Joanie's parents to get much-needed respite and for Joanie to deepen her faith and form new friendships.

As Julie got more involved with LDM, she wanted her own church to have a Friendship group. In the fall of 2001, with the help of LDM, she began a new Friendship Bible Study in her church. Julie and Joanie enjoy the new friends they have made in this class.



Julie and Joanie

This past February Julie also started a Friendship Saturday group in her church. What God started as a bond between Julie and Joanie now bears fruit in the lives of everyone who participates in these programs.

LDM REACHES OUT

LDM, under the able leadership of Don Boden, was an independent ministry serving the Lutheran Church when it began. As the ministry continued, however, it became clear that their mission was much larger than any one denomination. LDM now helps any Christian congregation start programs for people who are mentally impaired. Its programs teach the basics of the

Christian faith—that we are saved by God's grace through Jesus Christ.

LDM's goal is to equip Christian congregations to minister with people who are mentally impaired and to transform the church through the combined gifts of people who are mentally impaired and those who fellowship with them.

LDM has established a model for ministry in Central Indiana that

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

REMEMBER

**our on-line newsletter.
For monthly updates
and tidbits, simply go to
our website
(www.friendship.org)
and click on
Extras online.**

families who care for their adult sons and daughters with mental impairments in their homes. They are a cross between Friendship Bible Studies and HandyCamp.

- Thursday's Hands. This program is dedicated to using the gifts of people who are mentally impaired. One day each week they have an opportunity to visit a church or Christian organization to offer their volunteer services.
- Love Notes. Volunteers send notes of encouragement, including cards at Christmas and Easter and birthdays, to all people who participate in Friendship and HandyCamp programs.

During one of our many meetings here in the office we talked about how we need Friendship classes to let other churches know about Friendship Ministries. We have bandied about the slogan "Each One Reach One." What do you think? Could this be done in your area?

connects people with mental impairments with the Church through relationships. There are five prongs to its model:

- Friendship Bible Studies. These studies are dedicated to building one-on-one Christian relationships and using the gifts of people with mental impairments. They currently serve more than 150 students in 11 different congregations, and are supported by many more.
- HandyCamp. During this five-day camp, each camper is matched with a volunteer companion on a one-on-one basis. The camp provides recreation and Bible study and changes the lives of all involved. They currently sponsor five camp sessions, serving up to 115 campers.
- Friendship Saturdays. These days are offered as a respite for

A LITTLE TEST

It may be the end of the season for your Friendship class and time for you to assess the year. In my reading of various publications, I recently came across an article in the National Apostolate for Inclusion Ministry Newsletter entitled "Evaluating Teaching." It included some tips that seem appropriate for evaluating Friendship classes as well. The author says a teacher should ask these questions:

- Am I treating every student as my friend?
- Do I perceive a growing awareness of God in the lives of my students, whether it is in word, gesture, smiles, or movement?
- Are my students happy to come to religious education class?
- Is there a spirit of joy among us?

She goes on to say: "Actually the spirit of joy is the most important ingredient of any special religious education class. Joy is a sign of God's presence. However we teachers may struggle to teach meaningful lessons, **the joy of the students is the test of successful teaching.** So, rather than mull over the question of whether or not they are 'getting it,' we can determine from their demeanor and joy whether we are giving some aspect of God's love to our students."

I like that little test. I hope you do too.



from the director

It is springtime, and many of us are thinking about the seeds we have planted in our Friendship class and wondering what kind of fruit they will produce. I would like to tell you about some young people who volunteer in my class and the seeds they have sown.

Sarah has been a volunteer for several years. She is taking photos of all the Friendship students and putting together a directory for our congregation. Not only is she making a difference in our class, but she is thinking about being a speech therapist for people with disabilities.

Marie is new this January. She is paired with a friend and is making a strong effort to really connect with her. Marie calls her regularly, remembered her birthday with a card and a gift—you should have

seen her friend walk proudly out of church a few weeks ago with her birthday present! What kind of seeds is Marie planting?

Andrew is a Special Education major at Calvin College. He is planning to come to the conference in Lisle. Andrew expressed the desire to learn more about disability ministries so he can take it back to New Mexico where his family lives. Talk about planting seeds!

Ruth, another college student, planted seeds with her friend, Susie. Susie was never much for speaking in class. Through Ruth's mentoring Susie has begun telling us that Jesus loves her. Susie is a plant that is beginning to bloom.

Amy has been involved in Friendship class since ninth grade. This year for her college special education class she did a project based on our Friendship class. She

made a wonderful photo album about spiritual gifts. It's a wonderful contribution to Friendship. We will be showing it as a PowerPoint presentation not only at our Friendship worship service this spring but also during the luncheon at the conference. Hopefully this presentation will motivate others to start a class or to volunteer.

Who knows what seeds will sprout in the future as a result of these young people participating in a Friendship class!

Nella Uitvlugt

REMEMBER
to order an
introductory kit
so that you can see
the brand-new
materials we're
so proud of!



Friendship
MINISTRIES

We would love to hear from you:

Nella Uitvlugt, Director
2850 Kalamazoo Avenue SE
Grand Rapids, MI 49560
Voice: 616-224-0842
Fax: 616-224-0834
E-mail: uitvlugn@friendship.org
Website: www.friendship.org
Toll-free: 1-800-333-8300