

Breaking Barriers

everybody belongs everybody serves

ISSUE #84 WINTER 2010

△ A Ministry of Christian Reformed Disability Concerns

Growing in Relationships

Amie Spriensma, co-Regional Advocate for Classis Zeeland

Father God,
I come before you today, and I ask specifically for the extension and growth of our interpersonal relationships. Help us to really see those with whom we find ourselves sharing space and experience. We don't want to become so self-focused that we are looking past them rather than at them. In the rightful establishment of relationships, we need at least three things, so I ask for your guidance at work in all three areas.

I seek common ground in fledging relationships. Give me something beyond "Hi" to build upon. Help me at least to remember the person's name; help me not to ask how they are unless I am ready to hear their answer. Allow facts or details to stick in my head that will be important for upcoming conversations. Help me to



Amie Spriensma (right) with her sister-friend Dieula (Joo-la) Previlon, a member of her prayer-team whom Amie says, "God gave to me when we were students at Dallas Seminary."

pave the way for whatever lies ahead by appearing friendly and modestly approachable. My "yes face" doesn't belong in the closet gathering dust.

I seek open doors for founded relationships. Give me your leading in conversations. Help me know when to speak and how to support. Help me to make the transitions natural, not forced or phony. Enable me to follow-through and use the resources you have provided me in service to others. It doesn't have to be overly difficult if I sow what you have revealed to me and if I depend upon you to bring a harvest at your appointed hour. Give me wisdom, open eyes, open ears, an open heart to see where you

are at work and how I am to be your vessel through which your purpose and glory is revealed.

I seek your presence in each of my friendship relationships. Help me to remember that you are the architect and designer of all things great and small. I want to build in your kingdom by building your grace in other people's lives. I know that this business doesn't include gossip, slander, coarse joking, or manipulation of people to meet my own personal needs. Show me what these relationships do include even as you already have in your Son. Thank You for sharing your abundant grace and love with me so that I can shower others with these same gifts.

May I keep the imperative to be your ambassador ever in the forefront of my mind and life.

Thank you for the gift of life, present and eternal...

(Reprinted by permission from *The Rusk Crumbs* newsletter of Rusk CRC.)

theme

In this issue we focus on **hospitality**. Hospitality does more than offer a warm welcome; it creates an environment of grace in which each person can be himself or herself. Find additional articles and much more on our website: www.crcna.org/disability.





I wanted to reach out to you because I recently heard a wonderful comment about the CRC's involvement with individuals with developmental disabilities. I was interviewing today in order to become part of a CPE group this coming year at the Elizabeth M. Bogg's Center at UMDNJ [University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey]. Bill Gaventa, who mentioned your name, commented to the other interviewer that the CRC is a model of how all church communities should be reaching out to individuals with disabilities. I thought that in the midst of your ministry, where you probably often see what is lacking or what could be improved, that you might like to hear this compliment.

May God continue to bless you in your work!

In Christ,
Eric Fluit, Spiritual Director, Holland Christian Home
North Haledon, New Jersey

We are sorry to read that your magazine was available only online this summer. It leaves out those of us that do not do computer. I realize cost is a big factor! But we also like to know about people and places, success stories, and those who need our prayers especially. May we continue to work together in his service; may he give you much wisdom.

George and Aafke Ympa

This morning in church as I read the meditation, 'Sharing in His Suffering' on the last page of your newsletter [*Breaking Barriers*, Fall 2009], my heart stopped beating momentarily. I could not believe what I was reading. Had someone written about our life? My daughter was diagnosed as bipolar 18 months ago and both before and after that event we have lived a life of isolated pain and misunderstanding. I, too, have been handed parenting books and been told to keep being firm with my child. We have found support though as well, first from a family support group, and then, bit by bit as I have revealed pieces of our story to people who have handled the last bit of information with understanding. As well, my family has come around us, and managed to love and support my husband and I and our daughter despite the pain inflicted on us and the obvious disruption to the rest of our family. We are a pastor's family, and I want to tell you and anyone else who will listen, that there are times for sharing our pain, and God does provide people who will not gossip, who will pray, and who will love even when they don't understand. There are also times for silence, when the pain is too great to share, and no human can heal the hurts. I wanted to respond to that article to thank you for bringing mental health to the forefront in our churches. Pretending that mental illness is not there, writing off sick people as bad people, and keeping silent when people need help is wrong. Thank you so much.

Name withheld

Breaking Barriers received a few notes on hospitality that we include in this issue with the letters:

The use of PowerPoint in worship has a lot of issues. If you can't read it, you aren't included. That goes for people who are short or cannot stand up and people who have visual impairments. I heard from someone at a conference one time about how great the PowerPoint was for worship because it had a moving image behind the words. That moving image could make some people sick or cause sensory overstimulation. Bold text on a plain background sounds boring, but it welcomes the most people to join in worship.

Nella Uitvlugt
Executive Director, Friendship Ministries
Grand Rapids, Michigan

After my wife and I spoke in church about living with our disabilities, some people have soon forgotten our lives of difficulty in mobility and such, and have again not included us in any social function outside the church. We sure wish people would make an effort to include us or ask us how they could help us. But we know we can't force anyone to like us. It is God's doing and not ours. I have a simple suggestion for church courtesy, when people sit with us, remain sitting with us even when the others stand to sing and so on.

Name withheld

On about 26 November 2005 there was unprecedented heavy rains that resulted in water flooding several homes up to a height of about 18 feet not far from my residence, with water accumulation of nearly 18 inches in my compound. The floods resulted in the closing of many schools. Two of the schools are opposite my residence. This unfortunate situation presented an opportunity for many people to extend hospitality by way of food, clothing, and so forth to the students. Many people also volunteered to clean the homes that were clogged with rubbish washed in by the flood waters. Something similar took place in New Orleans where many people helped the affected residents. Here is our parish mission statement: "Strive to build a vibrant Christian community by strengthening the family, involving the youth in all parish projects, empowering the marginalized." This is written in large, bold letters and placed high up, adjacent to the altar. The purpose is to build bridges between community members so that no one feels isolated, rejected, or estranged.

Alvin Cordeiro
Mumbai, India





health corner

Created for Relationships

Elly Van Alten, RN, and Ann Kutudis-Kenien, Rehabilitation Counselor, ARNP

"Sometimes our light goes out but is blown into flame by another human being. Each of us owes deepest thanks to those who have rekindled this light." —Albert Schweitzer

God knew that it was not good for the man to be alone; therefore, he created woman from the man's rib. People need other people to stay healthy and happy. It is through our relationships with God and other people that we find meaning in our lives, which helps to keep us healthy mentally and physically.

The Scriptures mandate us to show hospitality. When we show hospitality, we have the opportunity to get to know others, to share in their joys, sorrows, and struggles, and to share the good news of the gospel. What better place for this welcoming love to be shared than in our churches? It is when we show hospitality to each other that we enjoy life as God wants it to be.

Imagine that I have a disability. As I enter the reception area of your church, please make gentle eye contact with me and smile. Please do not lean on my walker or pet my service animal. Don't speak loudly but allow me to see your lips. Some disabilities affect the ability to communicate. If I ramble or am inappropriate in any way, please keep in mind that I may have a traumatic brain injury. I may not know or be able to express an appropriate greeting. Please don't ignore me or be afraid of me. Break the barriers down that used to keep me at home. You and I will both benefit as we practice hospitality with one another. As author Jim Rohn once wrote, "Only by giving are you able to receive more than you already have."

A Psalm of Thanksgiving

Anna Hoekstra

I praise you, Lord, for your creativity in creation.
I praise you that you have created us in your image.
Each of us created with equal value in your eyes.

The world has often failed to see beauty and worth in persons with disabilities.

We have tried to kill, hide, and "treat" them.
But you, O Lord, see your children; your precious, loved ones.

To be honest Lord, I do not always see you in your children.
I get frustrated, impatient, and afraid.
I forget that I am working alongside a fellow "covenant partner."

But you, Lord, are forgiving, patient, and compassionate.
You open my eyes to the beauty in your creation.
I see your beauty and the gifts that you have given to persons with disabilities.

I praise you, Lord, for your creativity in creation,
That everything you have created brings you glory, and nothing is a mistake.
You are an amazing, great, and loving creator; to you be praise forever!



resources



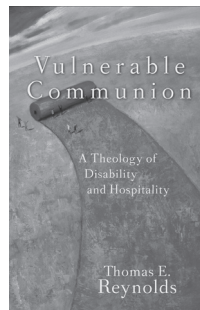
Website: www.carecalendar.org

Provides a simple way for a group to coordinate care for someone needing, say, meals or transportation.



Consultation: CLC Network, Church Services Division

The CLC Network Church Services Division assists churches as they build one body together in Christ. Their website (www.clcnetwork.org) lists the trainings, products, and services they offer to support churches in building inclusive and interdependent church communities.



Book: *Vulnerable Communion: A Theology of Disability and Hospitality* by Thomas Reynolds

Reynolds, professor of Systematic Theology at the University of Toronto, reflects theologically and personally on hospitality from the perspective of a theologian and a father. He argues that the "Christian story is one of strength coming from weakness, of wholeness emerging from brokenness, and of power in vulnerability." The Reynolds' son, Chris, lives with a variety of issues including Tourette's syndrome, Asperger's syndrome, bipolar disorder, and obsessive-compulsive disorder.



Organization: The National Association of Christians in Special Education (nacsped.com) was developed in recognition of

the fact that Christians in special education lacked their own professional organization. It is their desire to bring special educators together for encouragement and professional growth. Their vision: "The Church will be faithful to God's command to love, value, and serve one another through the full participation of individuals with disabilities in the Christian community." Their mission: "The mission of NACSPED is to facilitate the integration and participation of people with disabilities into the Christian community."

Museum: Disability History Museum at www.disabilitymuseum.org – a searchable, theme-based digital collection that exists only online – offers documents and images related to disability history in the United States, drawn from public and private collections around the country.



The Great Banquet

Ruth Stevenson, Pella, Iowa

Luke 14:15-24

Song of Solomon 2:4 "He has taken me to the banquet hall, and his banner over me is love."

Who does not enjoy a feast? The parable of Jesus in Luke 14 brought to my mind a neat event in the life of my son, Mark. When Mark completed the special education program in the local community school system, the staff hosted a graduation party. And throw a party they did! I was told we were invited to the classroom on the last Friday afternoon of school in May. Actually I was anticipating a small "cake and ice cream" party that would have been great in my estimation. But when I walked in the room, there was a spread of food the length of a Monroe table and then more! Finger foods, sweets, tasty sandwiches, punch, salads, decorated cake, you name it! It was there and done right! Color-coordinated decorations filled the room, and I had no part in all this preparation.

Then came the guests. Teacher Lori and her associates didn't overlook anyone associated with Mark in all the years in the school system. His classmates from the high school and middle school along with staff were present. Then to my surprise came his teachers, associates, and friends from elementary school! They walked in; they rolled in.

The therapists—speech, occupational, and physical—joined the group. In walked the school principal and handed Mark a card. Next came the school secretary and the custodian, even students whom I had no idea as to their connection to Mark.



Mark Stevenson

I asked one sweet girl as she was presenting a gift to Mark, "How do you know Mark?" "I was a peer helper to him," was her reply. Afterward I reflected on all these guests in attendance and thought how Christlike.

Mark's guests knew the implication of the parable of the great banquet. They didn't have excuses. They came one and all. Obviously, the school has a different function than the church, but perhaps the church can learn from the school too.

Hospitality Still Found

Cheryl Kroll

I am disabled and have needed to use a wheelchair since 1985. Throughout the years I have been the recipient of some big and small acts of hospitality. Nearly 25 years ago a woman in church organized a group of women to take turns coming on Friday nights to help with my exercises and my shower so that my parents could go out. That was when I was weaker and needed more help. It was time off for my mom, and it gave me an opportunity to have conversa-

tions with people besides my parents.

There have been nice experiences out in public as well. On a few occasions I have been allowed to go to the head of a line instead of the back. In stores, other shoppers have offered help, like getting things I can't reach. When my mom was living, and we would go out, from time to time people would ask if she needed help with getting the wheelchair in or out of the trunk. Regardless if help is needed or not, the offer shows care for others and is always appreciated.

The last few years my church has shown me hospitality in a big way. Because I do

not drive, I need transportation if there is anything I want to do. Most times I don't ask because I feel awkward doing so. In 2006, I was asked if I wanted to attend the weekly women's Bible Study, and they assured me that I would have a way to get there. I took a few days to think about it and eventually agreed to the offer. I have enjoyed getting out to every meeting since then. I appreciate their willingness to pick me up each week. When one woman can't, another one steps in.

Even though I don't dwell on the negatives, I have also experienced some of them too. In the early 1990s, I did the desktop publishing for a small

print shop. After I worked there three and one-half years, a new owner took over. He changed my job description so that I wasn't able to comply because of my disabilities. Then he fired me. Worse yet, a couple of organizations that I thought were supposed to help me didn't seem to care.

Thankfully the kind acts outnumber the unkind ones. In general people want to show hospitality toward others as we are instructed to do. In Romans 12:13 it says, "Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality." It really does give both the recipient and the provider a warm feeling.