In-person Family Retreats are Back & Better Than Ever!

Anthony and Hudson had a blast at Family Retreat! Look inside for more Family Retreat joy!
But Jesus said, ‘Someone touched me, for I perceive that power has gone out from me.’
LUKE 8:46

O
casionally when Ken gives me a big hug, his embrace
nearly shocks me. “Wow, that sure feels good,” I’ll laugh.
And I mean it. At least 80% of my quadriplegic body is
not able to process the sensation of touch, and so I sometimes
feel sensory-deprived. (The awkward ‘distance’ my wheelchair
creates only makes it harder.) This is why physical touch means
everything to me, perhaps more so than it does for most people.

Just consider the thousands of people with disabilities for
whom physical isolation is a painful day-to-day reality. Whether
it’s the soft touch of someone’s hand, or a big bear hug around
the shoulders, kids and adults with disabilities crave the familiar
touch of human compassion. (And the long season of COVID only
aggravated the need.)

You can see why families living with disability were so thrilled
about this summer’s Family Retreats. No more isolation! This
summer, it was all about in-person ministry! Our classic Family
Retreats were in full swing and, oh, what a joy to be together
and see everyone face to face… and to even share bear hugs
when it’s safe!

At Family Retreats, we bend-over-backward to make sure
every family receives the loving touch of Jesus Christ. His touch
bridges the distance and brings healing to wounded hearts,
worried minds, and weary souls. God never intended for people
to suffer in isolation, separated from one another, and it’s why
he designed spiritual community as a place for Christ-centered
hope and healing!

Family Retreat is that powerful place of hope and healing. At
Retreat, hurting people find they are not alone in their struggles –
they discover faith-strengthening support from other families
who experience victory in Christ. At Retreat, people experience
the touch of Christ through prayer support, super-fun activities,
sessions in God’s Word, one-on-one counseling, and times of
energizing worship.

And it’s all made possible through you – your heartfelt
concern, intercessions, and financial support make Family
Retreats a reality. Because of that, I sure wish I could give
you a big bear hug! Thank you, dear friend, for showing your
Christian love for special needs families in such an up-close-
and-personal way!
Marie and her 21-year-old son Joshua couldn’t wait to get to Family Retreat! As a single mom caring for a young man with Down syndrome all by herself, Marie craves the rest and refreshment only Family Retreat provides.

“Family Retreat, we feel loved,” explains Marie. “Family Retreat is an amazing week of seeing God working through other people.”

“I feel safe here,” shares Joshua. “It feels like home. I enjoy going to Bible classes and dancing in the Talent Show.” And when we asked Joshua what he learned about Jesus at Family Retreat, he answered with confidence, “Jesus is God. He sees me right now. He’s right here.”

Marie agrees completely. “At Family Retreat, you learn that you’re not in this alone. Family Retreat brings me closer to Jesus!”

Angel and her two daughters encountered Christ at Family Retreat, too! Arlie is six years old and has cerebral palsy. She positively beamed when she explained, “My favorite part of Family Retreat is that people are so kind!” And her sister Ansley loves being able to spend time with friends her age without worrying about little Arlie.

“Family Retreat is our safe place,” explains Angel. “We feel loved and accepted, and when we’re here I know Arlie will not be wishing that some day she can walk so she can do the stuff everyone else is doing.” Because at Family Retreat, everything is wheelchair accessible!

“I love that I can do stuff!” Arlie declares. And Angel sums up her family’s experience beautifully when she says that at Family Retreat, “I see Jesus present everywhere!”

Joshua couldn’t contain his joy when he received a great big Family Retreat welcome even before he got out of the car!

Everything is accessible at Family Retreat, including the limbo dance!
Fifty years ago, Warren was the victim of a robbery. He received multiple gunshot wounds in his spinal cord resulting in paralysis and subsequent blood clots in his brain. After having a stroke, surgeons needed to cut Warren’s skull open in order to drain fluids and allow for healing.

“I get very frustrated and depressed,” shares Warren. “But here at Family Retreat, everything is accessible. God put the right people in my life to tell me about Joni and Friends, and all these experiences let me know God is real!” Warren embraced the truth of 1 Peter 2:9 at Family Retreat. “This brought me from dark into the light!” Warren declares. He lives in the city, and as he explains, “Family Retreat is the only place I can get out in nature. It’s so rejuvenating! It helps me forget about my injury and keeps me pushing forward. At Family Retreat, my injury doesn’t hold me back!”

Elora is one of seven people in the world who has an extremely rare disability on the autism spectrum that cannot be diagnosed. Her symptoms include minimal verbal skills, sleep and behavior challenges, and multiple gastrointestinal issues. Elora’s mother couldn’t handle the day-to-day demands of being a special needs parent. She left nine-year-old Elora to be raised by her dad, Eric, a single parent who also deals with the impact of having his left foot amputated due to complications with diabetes.

Eric was absolutely amazed at the beautiful ways Elora was accepted at Family Retreat. She has been known to run away from social situations, but our team made sure every safety measure was in place so that Elora was never in danger. Watching Elora smile, laugh, and participate in all aspects of Family Retreat brought Eric a new level of peace. He got choked up as he explained, “I saw God’s hand in all this!”

“God shows himself strong in special needs families’ lives at Family Retreat!”

You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

1 Peter 2:9
Hope, who has Angelman syndrome, felt God's presence alongside her buddy Katie.

Jaryn has epilepsy and an intellectual disability, but nothing stopped her from feeling God's pleasure at Family Retreat with her buddy Avaleann.

13-year-old Hayden, who has spina bifida, was all smiles with his buddy Morgan at Family Retreat!

Ryan, who has Down syndrome, became fast friends with his buddy Rodney!
God is Always in Control!

From Arizona

Spouses of Veterans are often overlooked and are rarely provided the opportunities they need to put words to their struggles. But Joni and Friends is dedicated to serving the entire family, and at our recent Arizona Warrior Getaway, we made sure that each Warrior’s wife was heard.

Working with professional songwriters, the wives of our disabled combat Veterans were finally able to voice their deep hurts and silent fears. One of the wives explained that these healing sessions were “raw, open, vulnerable. It was the first time I was able to speak these words out loud.”

Jesus strengthened the faith of these precious wives during our Warrior Getaway, and it was clearly evident in the song lyrics they created: “God can take the hardest thing and make it something great given time. He’s always in control.”

“I think this song is recognition of how deeply we love our husbands and how committed we are to their healing,” shared another Warrior wife. “If our song helps other wives hang in there when marriage is tough, well then there was purpose in our suffering.”

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Joe’s spinal cord was severed when a tree fell on his back leaving him paralyzed. His rehabilitation was a long, slow process that took its toll on both him and his wife, Judy. But God strengthened them and their marriage throughout the process, and he used Joe and Judy to encourage other families impacted by disability through Family Retreat.

“Joe and I both have learned so much from Joni and Friends,” explains Judy. “We have learned the joy of laughing together, sharing tears together, worshipping together, and experiencing the beauty of people regardless of their disability or ability! Parents and caregivers are heroes who give of themselves so selflessly, and our volunteers restore our belief that serving others and the Lord is alive and active today!”

Judy goes on to explain that God has used Joni and Friends throughout the journey she and Joe have traveled. Her message to other families impacted by disability is this: “You are not an island meant to do all things alone. Be kind to yourself, take care of yourself as your family needs you healthy and happy! God is faithful and will carry you through regardless of your situation.”

Joe echoes Judy’s heartfelt sentiment by saying, “You and your family matter!” While Joe never thought God would use disability to be such a blessing in his life, his involvement in Family Retreat and our Marriage Getaway has helped him and Judy see that Joe is living his best years now!

From Ohio

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I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.
PHILIPPIANS 4:13
When Scott and Elizabeth adopted Rebekah, who has severe brain damage and cerebral palsy, they knew they had many challenges ahead, but no one could prepare them for the reality of being special needs parents. “We were desperate for community and a place to belong,” shares Scott. “I searched endlessly for camps or programs that accepted the whole family but was unsuccessful. Finally, a friend shared some remarkable stories with us about Joni and Friends Family Retreats, and we eagerly registered that same day. It would be our first family outing since adopting Rebekah.”

They call to mind the day they arrived at Family Retreat as though it just happened this morning. “We all vividly remember hearing the joyful shouts and seeing the waving banners with our names,” Scott recalls. “We remember feeling loved and accepted for the first time by all those around us. We remember connecting with other families who were walking the same journey having a child with a disability.”

And with tears of gratitude flowing from her eyes, Elizabeth explains, “Our vision has changed because of Joni and Friends Family Retreat. We no longer keep our disability hidden, but go out into our communities and share the love of God wherever we go.”

Thank you for your faithful prayers and generous support! Jesus is doing miracles through you!

“You have turned my mourning into joyful dancing!”

PSALM 30:11

From Texas

Shawn and her husband Wilson have two beautiful children: ten-year-old Ana and her brother Rafa who is seven and has hydrocephalus, cerebral palsy, multiple behavior challenges, a visual impairment, autism and the need to be fed through a feeding tube. Rafa’s complex disabilities have left his parents feeling exhausted and often frustrated. But Shawn and Wilson were finally able to relax when they attended Family Retreat. They re-connected as a couple by simply spending time together hiking, horseback riding and even napping one day knowing that their children were well cared for by our Joni and Friends Texas team. They were, “truly the hands and feet of Christ,” shares Shawn. “I appreciated that it’s not just a love in tolerance for kids with special needs, but a real appreciation of each individual’s gifts. It was not ‘look what they can do despite their disability.’ They were seen and treated as people with true value and purpose.”

“We didn’t feel like the odd men out. Nobody cared that our son screamed or that we were using a tube to feed him. We got hugged and loved, and we had deep conversations about life with people who get it.”

There are lots of exciting events happening in your area, too!

In addition to Family Retreats and Wheels for the World outreaches, our Field teams are offering Respite Events, Support Groups, Church Trainings and all sorts of Family Fun gatherings.

Visit joniandfriends.org/events today and find out how you can get involved!
Joni’s Christmas Cards Available Now!
Two new designs featuring art by Joni Eareckson Tada.

Arise, Shine, for Christ Has Come!
Inspired by Luke 2:4, Joni recaptures Joseph and Mary’s travels in her painting Journey to Bethlehem. “It was 60 hard miles over rough terrain, and I think it’s amazing how God led them safely every step of the way. It’s just one more poignant sacrifice to celebrate in the Christmas story,” explains Joni.

With embossed mountain details that make the landscape literally jump off the front of these cards, your friends and family will surely be reminded of God’s great love during this glorious Christmas season!

Interior Message:
May the Light of Christ’s Love Be Aglow in your Heart and Home Throughout this Happy Season... And may your Christmas be Bright!

Product Details:
• 3¾” x 8½”
• 15 cards & 16 envelopes per box

God’s Peace Be With You
Joni designed this beautiful new Christmas card from her Mountain Church at Christmas painting. “I want the viewer to run toward the warmth of the church, finding inside the comfort and fellowship of Christ. It’s what Christmas is all about!” shares Joni.

The sparkling, iridescent snowflake details on this card evoke feelings of comfort and joy – inviting all who see it into the peaceful serenity of the true meaning of Christmas.

Interior Message:
May the Peaceful Serenity of this Season Fill your Heart and Home as we Celebrate Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace Enjoy a Blessed Christmas!

Product Details:
• 5” x 7”
• 15 cards & 16 envelopes per box

$12

100% of all sales go directly to support disability ministry!

TO ORDER: • Mail order form • Call toll-free: 800.736.4177
• Online: joniandfriends.org/store • Phone: Text ORDER to 818.707.5664