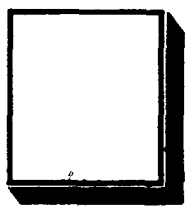


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## Faith Today



### Friendship's reach

the love of others who wear our "human skins."

Most of us cannot expect to experience God's love in isolation. We need to give and to receive human friendship if we are to accept God's invitation to friendship.

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The call to friendship is at the heart of Christianity's two great commandments, Ms. Ripple said in a recent interview. A faculty member of the Notre Dame Institute for Clergy Education in Indiana, Ms. Ripple has done extensive work in the area of relationships and human growth.

Jesus asks us to love God and to love our neighbors as ourselves. This is a threefold relationship that tells us love for God, for others and for ourselves cannot be separated or compartmentalized, she said.

While friendship eludes precise definition, some of its qualities can be described.

Ms. Ripple said friendship can be looked upon as "a relationship between two people which nourishes the life of each person at the expense of neither."

It is not a "blending" of two people, nor a "giving away" of oneself, she said. Crucial to healthy friendships are people who have a strong sense of their own self-worth, who recognize some of the gifts they possess.

"If I don't know who I am and what my gifts are, I don't have anything to give in friendship," she said.

But through friendship, the knowledge we have of ourselves is deepened, expanded or challenged. A friend "frees the best in us and confirms our own beliefs about what is best in us," Ms. Ripple said.

It is like a child learning to play the piano. She may sense she possesses good musical talents. But she will need affirmation, encouragement and nurture by others to fully appreciate her gift and cultivate it.

Sometimes a friend is able to see good "qualities in us we have not yet seen in ourselves," Ms. Ripple said. Similarly, a friend can help us recognize and break from destructive or oppressive patterns in our lives.

A friend will not allow us "to settle for less in ourselves" than we are or can become, she said. For her, the lyrics of a song in the

movie "Evergreen" reveal friendship's transforming power: "When you look at me I'm all and more than I ever dreamed I'd be."

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Friendship's course is not always easy. One myth about friendship is the "dreamy notion" that it has nothing to do with conflict, anger or hurt, Ms. Ripple said.

"The only relationships that are easy are new ones" because at that point people haven't had time to experience each other's strengths or limitations, both of which can cause suffering, Ms. Ripple said.

Another element of friendship not to be overlooked is playfulness — the ability to have fun with and really enjoy another. People shouldn't take a relationship so seriously "that it becomes grim," she said.

Ultimately, friendship becomes a force beyond the two people involved. Ms. Ripple believes the love and strength people experience in friendship spill over into all their other relationships or encounters with people.

"Love is diffusive — it scatters itself," Ms. Ripple said.

(Ms. Liebhart is media reporter for NC News Service.)

By Cindy Liebhart  
NC News Service

A mother and father were trying to get their 3-year-old son Eric into bed one evening. But going to bed was the last thing Eric wanted to do. So he put forth his best efforts to stall, stretching out conversation with his parents.

It was a familiar tactic — one Eric's mother quickly recognized. Gently she explained that it was time to turn out the lights and that he should go to sleep.

"But I'm afraid in the dark," Eric said.

"There is nothing to be afraid of," his mother responded. "God is here with you."

Looking up at his parents, Eric replied, "I know that God is here, but I want someone in here with skin on."

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Paula Ripple relates that amusing anecdote in her book "Called to Be Friends" (Ave Maria Press, 1980).

Eric's desire for a flesh-and-blood presence in the darkness, a comforting touch reassuring him he is not alone, speaks simply but powerfully of a profound truth about human existence. God's presence can come alive through

Friendship is the basis for the two great Christian commandments of loving God and loving each other, says educator Paula Ripple. Interviewed by Cindy Liebhart, Ms. Ripple indicates that while friendship isn't always easy, it is life-giving.