

February Friends
UU Church of Charlotte
2016

Our program used to be called Secret Valentines but concerns over the idea of "secrets" resulted in changing the name to February Friends in 2011.

We were also hoping that the move away from the love theme of Valentines might encourage more boys to participate. Nope. It is still 85-90% girls and women.

How it works:

- Registration takes place in January. It is now available on-line and by paper copies. There is a form for Adults/Teens and one for Children. Each form includes information to help me make the matches. For safety purposes: children must be registered in the CYRE program; adults must be members; I must personally know the teens if they are not active in our youth program.
- We average a total of 30-46 people.
- In early February, we match everyone based on what we know about them and information provided in their registration form. We match young children (ages 4 yrs to 5th grade) with teens or adults. "Teens" can be as young as 6th grade so we try to match them with our youngest participants.
- We then send each participant an email message that provides them with 1) their identity as half of a famous couple, 2) an invitation to leave their Feb Friend a note on our special bulletin board, and 3) the food item assigned to them to bring to the Great Reveal party. As an example, couples this year included Dog and Squirrel, Rain and Rainbow, Sun and Moon, Kermit and Miss Piggy, and Spaghetti and Meatball.
- Dinner is potluck. The week of the party, my assistant sends participants an invite with requests to list their potluck item AND to volunteer.
- After three Sundays of leaving notes for each other (using only their secret paired names), they arrive at the party dressed in costume, carrying their assigned food item. They find their partner based on costume and the same food item. Those food items, btw, are then donated to our food bank or another non-profit organization.

The schedule for the party is below:

- 4pm Volunteers decorate and set up Freeman Hall
- 5pm Participants arrive, find partners, go to a table together and complete the commonalities sheet. This sheet asks questions like Favorite Season?, Dog or Cat?, Beach or Mts for Vacation?, etc. These are turned in and the pair with the most answers in common gets recognized. During this time, participants can also work on the "group story" or the social justice project. Both are described below.
- 5:30 The group is divided in half, with half the pairs playing a couple of organized games while the others participate in a scavenger hunt. 20-30 minutes later, the groups flip.
- 6:15 Dinner Time. Followed by an All Group Game, prizes for best costumes and potluck dish, and reading the completed group story.
- 7pm Final clean up
- o Outreach Project - This year, participants filled lunch bags with the food items they were assigned to bring. These snack bags went to homeless children in our public schools.
- o Group Story - The first line is written out on a poster board and each pair adds a sentence.

It is a fun, fun evening. We always have 5-10 adults without children in the CYRE program who participate in some role and a bunch of teens.

The negatives:

- Some people forget / neglect to leave messages on the bulletin board the three Sundays before the party. So we have children who eagerly leave their message each Sunday but who never hear from their adult. Rarely, it is the other way around but I can deal with disappointed adults – not crying kids. I personally contact the adults who fail to leave messages which USUALLY results in a card at least emailed to their partner before the party.
- Despite writing in huge letters on the registration forms and on the email confirmation and on the invite that the party is mandatory, we almost always get at least a couple of people who either back out at the last minute or are no shows. If they provide notice, we can usually make it work by matching them with extra parents or teens I recruit. If the adult in the pair fails to show, the child joins another pair. If a child fails to show, the adult helps with the party.

Kathleen Carpenter
Director of Religious Education