



THE BEFRIENDER

NEWSLETTER OF THE BEFRIENDER MINISTRY NATIONAL OFFICE
THE SAINT PAUL SEMINARY SCHOOL OF DIVINITY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS

Part 2 in Our Series on Ministry and Faith Reflection

Part 2 focuses on the “why” of ministry reflection, including why it is done in a group setting. Two articles in this issue address these “why” questions: the cover article, “A Commitment to Unity and Maturity,” and “Both-And.”

Why Do Ministry Reflection? A Commitment to Unity and Maturity

A call to ministry.

A call to discipleship.

Unique spiritual gifts.

All Christians have these three things in common. We are called to minister – to serve. We are called to be disciples – learners. And we are given unique spiritual gifts to carry out our baptismal call.

BeFrienders have been called and gifted, in particular, for pastoral care. By answering the call, BeFrienders make an intentional commitment – a covenant – not only to serve those in need but also to use their spiritual gift for “... building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.”¹ Ministry reflection provides one way to honor that commitment.

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul goes on to say, “... speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body’s growth in building itself up in love.”² Ministry reflection provides the opportunity to speak the truth about our faith and to build up the body in love.

Building Up the Body of Christ

Paul’s words make clear that ministry involves action: serve, speak, grow, promote, build. He points out that ministry also involves maturing in faith and knowledge, two reflective disciplines. Action and reflection. Service and learning. Doing ministry and being a minister. We can only do ministry if we are ministers – ministers who are also disciples.

Paul also says that those who have answered the call must join together to keep

the body in working order. His central theme is unity – of the Spirit, of faith, of knowledge. Unity is not something we can achieve alone. Unity requires community.

That's where ministry reflection comes in. It is a communal means to convert the actions of ministry, through reflection, into unifying faith and knowledge. It knits BeFrienders together in a community of love. Ministry reflection accomplishes unity in four ways:³

- Skill practice
- Learning
- Accountability
- Self-directed growth

Skill Practice

Many of us have heard the old joke about how to get to Carnegie Hall ... practice, practice, practice. Musicians, no matter how talented, don't wait until they are on the concert stage to play a piece of music for the first time. Tennis prodigies don't just show up at the U.S. Open one day to take their first swing with a racket. Gifted individuals practice the skills that allow their gifts to flourish.

Ministry reflection uses the same set of skills that are used in a BeFriender relationship. Ministry reflection offers a safe, facilitated setting for practicing the skills so that BeFrienders can become more at ease with them and keep them honed and ready for use in befriending. The more these skills are utilized, the more they become part of who BeFrienders are as ministers.

Active listening and the "I feel ... when I ... because I ..." stem are basic communication skills for living out mutuality in both befriending and in ministry reflection. Ministry reflection gives BeFrienders the chance to lead prayer, which they are often called upon to do in a BeFriender relationship. Stage 3 of the reflection process – silence – provides a time to increase BeFrienders' comfort level with being silent, which is not always easy in a noisy and fast-paced world. The silence of Stage 3 also gives each BeFriender the chance to practice listening to his or her own inner wisdom.

Ministry reflection also employs the same dynamics that are created in the BeFriender relationship. The BeFriender enters into the relationship as a companion, not as a rescuer or a fixer or a problem-solver. The same mindset is important for participants in ministry reflection, who come together as companions on a journey of faith. The reflection process is a time to practice unlearning what is learned so thoroughly in other settings – to be right, to have all the answers, to win, to be the go-to person. Those of us who are accustomed to voting, rating, polling and evaluating need practice in withholding judgment, as well.

BeFrienders honor the sacredness of the encounters with the people they befriend by opening themselves to what they can learn in those encounters. In doing so, they acknowledge the presence of God in each moment and actively seek the meaning and message of the encounters. Ministry reflection is an equally sacred time, which allows BeFrienders to learn from the ministry of others in their community. It takes practice to be learners in a society that demands experts. It takes practice to become comfortable with the vulnerability that comes with not knowing it all.

Even "being present" requires practice. When offering a listening presence, we're often wading upstream against some powerful and well-ingrained thoughts and behaviors. Our minds wander. We are distracted by the next activity scheduled on our

calendars. Our to-do lists beckon. We're tempted to offer advice – especially if the solution seems obvious to us – or to succumb to worry about whether we'll be helpful enough. We get caught up in planning what we'll say in response. We jump ahead and wonder how things will turn out for this person. To counteract these conditioned responses, we need to practice being present. We must practice mindfulness – complete attention to what is happening in the moment. We must learn, through practice, to let go of our own agendas. Knowing that the person we befriend might expect us to provide answers can make it more difficult to be truly present ... which makes it even more important to practice being present. Once again, ministry reflection serves as a place to practice emptying our cups.

Learning

BeFriends provide a listening presence, not solutions, to those they befriend. The same is true for participants in ministry reflection. It is not a time for fixing the person who was befriended. It is not a time for critiquing the presenter. In fact, the presenter becomes the “teacher” to this group of disciples (learners) by offering the verbatim as a parable through which others can examine its meaning in their own lives. The presenter's story is held up as a mirror for others to see what they can learn about their own ministry, their own skills, their own faith. The learning occurs in listening, not in being told.

The verbatim is the catalyst for each BeFriender to explore and verbalize reactions and interpretations from his or her own assumptive world. Looking in the mirror of the presenter's story gives BeFriends the chance to ask themselves many questions. How would I have responded in that situation? How would I have felt? How do I feel hearing about it now? How would it have been for me to respond in the same way as the presenter did? Which of my past experiences am I reminded of by this story? Why? How was God's presence manifested in the story of BeFriender and befriended? Where do I feel God's presence in this time of community reflection? Each story will evoke different questions for each person hearing it.

Asking and answering questions like these in ministry reflection leads to learning. By reflecting on their own and others' assumptive worlds, BeFriends can discover new approaches to their own ministry and make choices about broadening or deepening their current approach to ministry. Ministry reflection also gives participants, including the presenter, the chance to say to themselves, “In this case, my approach serves my ministry well.”

Accountability

Supervision is an important part of any ministry, including BeFriender Ministry. Supervision holds the minister accountable to the community of believers on whose behalf it is done. Since ministry is service in the name of the faith community, it carries with it a responsibility that the ministry be “worthy of the calling” and an “effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”⁴

Supervision in BeFriender Ministry has three facets: supervision by the coordinator, peer supervision and self-supervision. Coordinators periodically meet with each BeFriender one-on-one to address individual needs and concerns. If supervision were limited to these one-on-one meetings, however, it would be a series of supervisory events rather than a process of maturing and unifying. If supervision is limited to a once- or twice-a-year review, it can seem irrelevant, confusing or even counter-productive, because it lacks both context and immediacy.

Maturity and unity are journeys, not destinations. Peer supervision and self-

supervision that occur in regular, ongoing ministry reflection reinforce the concept of “journey.” Ministry reflection honors the spiritual gift of each BeFriender by allowing the BeFriender to be both learner and teacher – to supervise both self and others by listening to and sharing experiences and feelings.

Peer supervision not only holds us accountable to each other as members of the faith community, it also provides a support system. Individual gifts are complemented by the gifts of others in the group. When we act in the name of the community, it becomes our support system and a source of renewal. We are truly in this together.

Self-Directed Growth

Self-directed growth is both a goal and an offshoot of skill practice, learning and accountability. Practicing skills allows us to pinpoint the ones which need still more practice. Learning often leads to greater awareness of what else we want and need to learn – in other words, the more we know, the more we realize how much we don’t know. The processes of supervision can help BeFrienders name specific areas for spiritual, emotional and intellectual growth. Even opportunities to grow in a physical sense may be identified, since the well-being of our physical selves can have an impact on ministry.

Regardless of the source of insights about the possible growth areas – self, peers or the coordinator – BeFrienders’ growth remains self-directed. Ultimately, no one can actually cause anyone else to change. Each of us takes in information about others’ perceptions, views them in light of our own and makes choices about what we can and will change.

More important, though, is the fact that self-directed growth for BeFrienders is consistent with the approach to befriending those in need. In BeFriender relationships, we serve as companions to allow people to find their own inner, Spirit-led wisdom for change and growth. Coordinators and peers are likewise companions to BeFrienders on their own journeys.

Why Ministry Reflection?

We do ministry reflection because we still have things to learn and because God continues to have new things to say to us. We do ministry reflection because, although God is ever-present, we don’t always slow down long enough to recognize that presence. We do ministry reflection to honor and nourish the gift of pastoral care.

Kenneth Pohly says, “Our action (ministry) is informed by what others believe, but it also raises new and different questions not yet considered or fully explained. These we bring under critical reflective thought ... as a way of figuring out answers for ourselves that make sense out of things.”⁵ We act; we reflect. What we learn in reflection, we incorporate into our actions in the future. ■

1. Ephesians 4:12-13 (NRSV)
2. Ephesians 4:15-16 (NRSV)
3. BeFriender Ministry Coordinator Manual III.5
4. Ephesians 4: 1, 3 (NRSV)
5. Pohly, Kenneth H., *Transforming the Rough Places: The Ministry of Supervision*, Providence House Publishers, © 2001, p. 128.

Why We Do Ministry Reflection in a Group Setting Both-And

Can ministry reflection be done individually and privately? Is it necessary to do ministry reflection as a group?

Yes and yes.

Choosing personal reflection and group reflection is a case of both-and, not either-or. Each has its purpose, and each is important.

Setting aside personal reflection time is crucial for ministers. Prayer and meditation provide timely means to reflect on thoughts and feelings about ministry experiences and what can be learned from them. Spending time in personal reflection soon after talking with the befriended person anchors each experience in memory so that it becomes a piece of the unfolding pattern of ministry. A particular BeFriender encounter or relationship might seem insignificant, even mundane, at first glance. It can take weeks or months to recognize its meaning – but only if we remember it and have made it part of our own story. On the other hand, a BeFriender relationship might have an immediate and profound impact, and we might think that we'll never forget it. Yet "information overload" quickly dissipates even the fondest memories if we don't reflect on them immediately.

In ministry, group reflection is more than an add-on to personal reflection. Group reflection is a necessary component of the service-learning process; without it, personal reflection is incomplete.

Self-Revelation

One reason for group reflection is the self-revelatory nature of sharing your story. "Christianity is not a private religion," says Robert Kinast, "and making faith-sense [Kinast's term for theological reflection] is not supposed to be a solitary exercise ... a special dynamic occurs when you tell another person your experience. You often hear it and feel it differently when you communicate it out loud."¹

Ministry Identity

Group reflection helps strengthen BeFrienders' identity as ministers. Kenneth Pohly, director emeritus of the Center for Supervision and Leadership Formation at United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio, says, "To be accepted as a peer, as a colleague, as one who is trusted and loved and appreciated *as we are* [author's emphasis] is an exhilarating, redemptive experience ... It is a coming together of persons who seek to be fully known and understood, and who discover in the knowing and understanding that we do not need to be afraid of one another, that the Christ in each of us reaches out to the other in encouragement and healing. At its best and in its intent [it] is a paradigm of the relationship of Jesus with his disciples ..."²

Link to Community

We reflect in community because we are linked to the Christian community of history, to the worship community to which we belong and to the community of BeFrienders who serve in the name of their faith community.³ "Community" implies relationships. Being a BeFriender is about relationships: to the befriended, to God, to other BeFrienders, to those who have commissioned us – indeed to all Christians, both

our ancestors and our contemporaries. Because relationships are the key to ministry, we draw on all of these important relationships to supplement and strengthen the reflection process.

The Future of the Church

Group ministry reflection is important because our real-life stories and our growing understanding of our faith will be part of the Christian tradition and heritage of the future. The Christian tradition didn't reach full maturity at some specific point on history's timeline. Theology hasn't stopped evolving. Patricia O'Connor Killen and John de Beer say that, "... faced with personal, social, geopolitical and environmental choices and challenges not even imagined thirty years ago ... the consequences of our reflection on questions of meaning and value are momentous. The choices we make about how to live have significant impact not only for ourselves but for future generations." They continue, "Because so much is at stake, we need to pay attention to the character and quality of our reflective processes."⁴ With this awesome responsibility as Christians, joining together in reflection seems critical to understanding the meaning of ministry.

Care for One Another

Ministry reflection is done in a group setting because, frankly, we need each other. In the opening verses of Ephesians 4, Paul says we are to respond to the call to ministry "with all humility." Our own spiritual gifts are amazing, yet not enough on their own; we need to join our gifts with the gifts of others. Later in Ephesians 4, as well as in 1 Corinthians 12, Paul uses the metaphor of the physical body to talk about the need for unity and the value of individual uniqueness. In Corinthians, he points out why all parts of the body are necessary when he asks, for example, "If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be?" Paul states that God has arranged the members of the body so that "... there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it."⁵

Group reflection allows us to suffer together and rejoice together. It allows us to learn and grow together. Group reflection helps us honor our covenant of ministry.

Both-And

Individual and group reflection are interdependent, and both are necessary. Private reflection anchors the experience in our hearts and minds and allows us to see its meaning through our own lens. Group reflection honors the experience by making it part of the community's faith story and by allowing us to see its meaning in the panorama of shared ministry. ■

1. Kinast, Robert L., *Making Faith-Sense: Theological Reflection in Everyday Life*. The Liturgical Press, © 1999, p. 2.
2. Pohly, Kenneth H., *Transforming the Rough Places: The Ministry of Supervision*, Providence House Publishers, © 2001, p. 146
3. Krisak, Anthony F., "Theological Reflection: Unfolding the Mystery," *Handbook of Spirituality for Ministers: Volume 1* (Robert J. Wicks, ed.). Paulist Press © 1995, p. 315.
4. Killen, Patricia O'Connor, and John de Beer, *The Art of Theological Reflection*. The Crossroad Publishing Company, © 1994, p. 2.
5. 1 Corinthians 12:25-26 (NRSV)

A BeFriender's Story

Reflections on a Coordinator

Thank you to Bernadette Dunn, a BeFriender Ministry regional convener in Crookston, Minn., and to Sister Leona Ulewicz, CDP, a BeFriender coordinator from East Grand Forks, Minn., who jointly submitted the following article in recognition of Romelle Thielman, a coordinator from Grand Forks, N. Dak.

Overcoming Obstacles

I want to tell you about a special lady, a BeFriender coordinator and a BeFriender to her staff of BeFrienders. Romelle Thielman, or Rom as most of us know her, had been working as a parish pastoral worker for many years before attending BeFriender coordinator training in the summer of 1996. I had the good fortune to be trained with Rom and then teamed up with her as she offered the first BeFriender training in her parish.

With seven willing candidates we planned our 35 hours of training over the winter and spring of 1996-97. Training through the winter was difficult at times as we had one of those cold and snowy Minnesota winters. As we came to the end of the training, Rom planned the commissioning of the new BeFrienders for March 1997.

In April 1997 the Red River Valley of the North experienced its worst flooding in over 500 years. Thousands of homes were affected with everything from a few inches of water in basements to being completely under water. Rom and her seven newly commissioned BeFrienders were among those affected by the flood.

Being true to the spirit of BeFrienders, Rom and her staff continued to minister to the flood victims while they worked on reclaiming their own homes from the flood waters. A spirit of camaraderie continued to build among the BeFrienders and their coordinator. They survived the flood together with only one of their original group relocating to a new area because of the flood. Throughout it all, with Rom guiding the way, they continued to meet. They allowed their experience to hone their listening skills, to teach them ways to identify what was in their cups and ways to set it aside. They established a BeFriender ministry in their parish that continues to thrive and now has eight commissioned members.

In 2000, Rom was diagnosed with macular degeneration. She lost central vision in one eye within a few months of the discovery. Her doctors held high hope that they could save the sight in her second eye, but that didn't happen. Struggling with the loss of her central vision, Rom took a deep spiritual look at what was in her cup. In the spring of 2001, accepting her degenerating eyesight, Rom decided to reduce her hours to half time, but kept BeFriender Ministry as one of her primary responsibilities. She continues to visit parishioners in the hospital, to volunteer at the senior citizen center and to coordinate her BeFrienders. For that little community, Rom has become the BeFriender to the BeFrienders and continues to make time to visit with each one individually. They in turn seek her wisdom, insight and comfort.

And now Rom faces yet another challenge, the letting go of one of the original BeFrienders who has lived and struggled with cancer for many years. Her friend will soon complete the journey home to our God and Father, and Rom will have to guide her BeFrienders through their grieving process. In the midst of her tears, she shares

her faith and trust that God is present in all these events and will not give up on His children. She offers strength and hope to her community of BeFrienders.

Rom reminds me of the Timex® commercial, “She takes a lickin’, but keeps on tickin’.” My life is richly blessed because I have the privilege of knowing Rom and calling her “friend.” ■

- Bernadette Dunn

Persevering

I joined the parish staff after the flood, in the fall of 1998. I also considered it a great privilege to be working with Rom, who in many ways provided informal orientation to the area, as I had come quite a distance to minister there.

After some time, Rom asked if I’d be interested in taking the BeFriender coordinator training. The question was asked in her usual positive way – inviting and encouraging, never forceful or threatening. Soon I headed to the University of St. Thomas for two weekends to complete the course.

As I heard questions and comments from other participants, I became aware that Rom’s BeFrienders were involved in the complete program. They visited with those in need, met regularly and had ministry reflection and input sessions for ongoing ministry formation. They even tell each other how they have grown through ministry reflection! I attribute this to Rom’s dynamic, gentle direction. In a word, they have formed community.

Toward the end of 2000, Rom asked if I would be her partner in training a new group of BeFrienders. In the meantime, her vision got worse. Feeling that she was not able to do the training, she looked for someone else to help. Having only mentioned it to a few of us, we persuaded her that her experience and what was in her heart would come through, even though her reading ability was limited.

Registration was taken, and we completed 35 hours of preparation for a brand new ecumenical group of BeFrienders, coming from Sacred Heart Catholic Church and Our Savior’s Lutheran Church.

If we’re citing commercials, I’d say that Rom is like the Energizer® bunny; she “keeps going and going and going.” Most of all, however, Rom is like the faithful disciple who clings to the words of the Master and listens at His feet. ■

- Sister Leona Ulewicz, CDP

Jesus and Theological Reflection

The Woman at the Well

John 4 offers an example of Jesus engaging in theological reflection with a disciple. He stops at Jacob's well to quench his thirst and finds a woman there drawing water. Jesus asks her for a drink. She expresses her surprise at his request. It is unusual for a Jew to speak to a Samaritan and for a man to speak to a woman, especially in a public place. It was thought of as unclean, according to ceremonial laws, for a Jew to share a cup with a Samaritan. Jesus replies that if she knew the gift of God and knew who was asking her for a drink, she herself could receive living water. Her surprise increases, because Jesus has no bucket and the well is deep. It appears at first that she has understood "water" literally. She asks Jesus if he thinks he is greater than their ancestor Jacob, at whose well they stood.

As their dialogue progresses, the woman becomes aware of Jesus' meaning for "living water" and realizes who Jesus is. Their conversation follows the typical arc of theological reflection. Everyday experiences are examined (the drawing of water). She tests those experiences against her own beliefs, religious ancestry and tradition (the hostility between the Jews and Samaritans, Jacob's authority). Through further dialogue, she opens herself to a new meaning for "living water" and to understanding the real identity of the stranger at the well. ■

Source: Coll, Regina. Supervision of Ministry Students, Liturgical Press, © 1992.

Hear Our Prayer

This original prayer was used by Tom Wright, a family therapist, teacher and writer, to open his BeFriender Day presentation, "The Faces of Depression," on April 6, 2002, in St. Paul, Minn.

Teach us, O God, that ...

- When we're one with each other, our joy is full to overflowing,
- When we bear one another's burdens, every hardship is manageable,
- When we offer each other peace, all spirits find serenity,
- When we join in song, our voices bring harmony,
- When we do justice and love mercy, we become wise,
- When we pull together, all loads move quickly,
- When we listen to one another's stories, we become compassionate,
- When we touch one another's pain, miracles of healing abound,
- When we challenge each other, our spirits soar,
- When we lift one another up, no one ever falls alone,
- When we love as Christ loved us, we bear light to those in darkness,
- When we live as Christ lived among us, our testimonies ring with power.

In the name of the risen Christ, who shows us the more perfect way of love. Amen.

"Hear Our Prayer" is an occasional feature of The BeFriender. Readers are invited to share your prayers and thoughts on prayer for publication.

BeFriender Interactive: Q&A

This question comes from coordinators in Richmond, Va., and Saginaw, Mich. The suggestions listed come from seasoned coordinators in the same cities.

QUESTION

How can we recruit more men in our BeFriender Ministry?

ANSWER

Experienced coordinators and regional conveners had several practical suggestions on how to recruit more men to participate in your BeFriender program. For additional ideas, coordinators may want to refer back to the Coordinator Manual, pages I.16 to I.19.

Visible Roles

Include men in visible roles as you publicize your ministry. Men are more likely to respond to this ministry if they see that men are already a part of it. Whether you use pulpit announcements, newsletter stories, information meetings or other methods for publicity and recruitment, ensure that men have a visible role in the process. Perhaps you could host an information meeting just for men, led by men who are experienced BeFrienders in order to recruit new BeFriender candidates.

Define Need

Make men in your congregation aware of the need for male BeFrienders. In BeFriender Ministry, we recommend that men befriend men and that women befriend women. Besides needing male BeFrienders to befriend men, some churches assign a male and a female BeFriender to work individually with a couple that is experiencing a transition, such as when one partner of a married couple has a terminal or chronic illness and the other partner needs support.

Consider Availability

Consider when and how men are available to participate in BeFriender Ministry. One coordinator said that her group moved its meetings to Saturday mornings, which allowed more men to participate. Others have noted that newly retired men may now have time for this ministry, and they approach those men as they recruit new BeFriender candidates. Still others have invited the husbands of active women BeFrienders since this is a ministry that they can participate in as a couple.

Recruit According to Gifts

Observe individual men's gifts and recruit them personally. One coordinator said she had success in observing men at church and seeing how they used their gifts. When she noticed a man who seemed to practice some of the gifts that we value in BeFriender Ministry – such as nonjudgmental listening, attentiveness to others, tolerance, or generosity – she would approach him one-on-one and say, “I have seen these gifts in you. Would you consider becoming a BeFriender?” You may want to refer to the list of “Qualities of a BeFriender” on page I.57 in the Coordinator Manual as a way to spark your thinking. Show this list to others and ask them to brainstorm the names of men with some of these qualities and then personally invite them to consider becoming a BeFriender.

Men as Leaders

Cultivate male leadership. It may seem strange to think that male leaders need to be nurtured, but because this particular ministry draws more women than men, it may be necessary and desirable to actively cultivate male leaders. Perhaps you do not need a coordinator now, but who will step in when one of your current coordinators retires or moves away? Perhaps you know a male BeFriender who would be interested in attending Foundations training. ■