



# THE BEFRIENDER

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

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## **Autumn Into Winter**

**by The Rev. Mary I. Farr, M.A.T.**

*Rev. Mary Farr, from St. Paul, Minn., was the presenter for "Healing Hearts in a Broken World," the Fall 2001 BeFriender Day in St. Paul on the topic of self-care, providing pastoral care and finding hope in the aftermath of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.*

Driving home from Wisconsin a couple of months ago I remembered, once again, what a dazzling corner of the world I live in. October with its clear skies and radiant color certainly demonstrates this beauty. October might be called nature's last hurrah.

Yet shorter days and falling temperatures also stir a sense of the tragic about this season. Beyond the color and clarity hides an edge of sadness for the passing season, sadness for the condition of our fragile earth. The leaves have reached the height of brilliance just before they fall to the ground. The earth has given up her harvest and now turns silently inward. In October we meet the ebb and flow, the rise and fall of life.

Autumn reveals both our limits and our limitlessness. It gives us color to store in our memory as we face the winter darkness, but it also reveals some of the boundaries and truths of our lives. In October we celebrate Halloween, which, according to ancient mythology, marked the beginning of the sacred season when the gods came closer and walked upon the earth.

Theologian Martin Marty in his book *Winter of the Heart* uses winter as a metaphor for wilderness, a time and place where God feels the most absent but, in fact, might be most present in our lives. In other words, God's presence can become even more compelling during long winter silences. If autumn moves us toward persistent human questions concerning the flow of time and the human search for that which endures, winter calls us to listen for God's reply.

In our quest for things of value, the Christian gospel gives us many ideas, particularly about the way we treat others. Yet, faith does not remake the human condition. Nor does it undo human cruelty or disregard for life. Faith, like its partner, hope, does not reshape the natural forces around us. Whether or not we believe, time continues to flow. Nature moves through her cycles. Faith changes nothing in the external world of fact but transforms everything in the inner world of the spirit. Faith enables us to see our lives within a larger landscape. Faith is life viewed from the vantage point of love.

We live in a world that longs for new resurrection. We long for it in our society, our communities and throughout the world. Faith enables us to coexist with fear and ambiguity without demanding all the answers. It fosters in us a posture of hope that we can share through our ministry of presence or "soul care." Soul care encompasses a process of shepherding the inner life of another as she or he walks

through “winter.” Soul care involves creating a safe space in which another can walk toward wholeness in responsiveness to God.

Caring of souls is a ministry that involves personal conversation focused on the well being of another. Healing anticipates integration and reconciliation with what has happened, particularly as it relates to loss. Caring of souls also involves praying, anointing, blessing, inviting people to remember with gratitude, and storytelling. Yet, as pastoral ministers, we don’t so much fill a role as we do represent a perspective – a perspective based on concern and attentiveness to the whole person. We encourage others to look at life in the context of a greater story or larger world-view.

Thomas Aquinas once said, “The truly reasonable is the truly good.” Our call to engage in servant ministry is both reasonable and good. We live in anxious times. Who we are and what impact we have on our world depends largely on personal courage. Do we have the courage to place ourselves in the midst of human suffering? There is certainly no shortage of it. This is the place where, in the words of Carl Jung, “Invited, even not invited, God is present.” These are awesome situations in which we represent a God-presence to those who may have no hope. And isn’t it hope that we are ultimately called to bring to others? ■

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*She has published several books, including Christians Seeking Peace in a Violent World (Augsburg Fortress Publishing, 1995); The Heart of Health: Embracing Life with Your Mind and Spirit (John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2000); and If I Could Mend Your Heart (Bookpeddlers, 2001).*

## **A Note From the Interim Director In Friendship**

*Being a BeFriender goes beyond one-on-one ministry. Befriending is also an experience of community.*

Recently, I had the chance to meet with a group of BeFrienders and BeFriender coordinators in central Minnesota. Our informal conversation covered many practical topics, such as how to help new BeFrienders gain confidence with ministry reflection and how to recruit BeFrienders.

### **Being Community**

Partly in response to that last question, I asked the participants to say what drew them to BeFriender Ministry. Their comments were varied, but several people spoke of the sense of community they witnessed among the BeFrienders in their church. One person said, “I saw the camaraderie between the BeFrienders. I wanted to join in.” Another said, “I loved how they related to each other.”

When they discussed the rewards of being a BeFriender, the sense of community appeared again in their comments. “One of my rewards is the friendships I have formed with the other BeFrienders.” “This was a whole new faith community for me.”

Even more, they spoke of the sense of community they experienced with the people they befriended. “I have received so much from the people I befriend. Is that selfish?” (“No!” came the resounding reply from the group.) “I feel privileged to participate in and witness someone’s spiritual growth.” “Since becoming a BeFriender, I’ve learned how to live, how to die, and how to move forward one day at a time.”

## **True Community**

These comments mirror my experience of my BeFriender group, where we offer each other quiet, patient support. Rawness and uncertainty are not only accepted, but received openly. This kind of connection with others is called “community.” In *The Different Drum: Community Making and Peace* (1987), writer M. Scott Peck describes some of the characteristics of true community, such as inclusion, shared leadership, safety to be oneself and a balance between work and contemplation. In a later interview, Peck said the two prerequisites of community were a commitment of time and a willingness to be vulnerable to each other (Alan Atkisson, “The Joy of Community,” In *Context Quarterly*, Vol. 29, 1991). As BeFrienders meet for ministry reflection, for continuing education, for prayer and for fun, we give ourselves time and open ourselves to being vulnerable. We are thus giving ourselves the possibility of experiencing true community. I believe that this is what some of the people in central Minnesota were describing: “I saw the camaraderie between the BeFrienders. I wanted to join in.” “This was a whole new faith community for me.”

## **Seeking Community**

Many writers have noted the influx of people coming to our churches since the Sept. 11 attacks on New York and Washington D.C. Perhaps you have witnessed this at your own services and liturgies. I imagine that one thing they are seeking may be something you already know: a connection with community, a place and a way to borrow faith when yours is shaky; a place and a way to shed fear by sharing it with others.

An acquaintance who lives in New York described people in the city after the attacks as “tender and tentative” with each other. Perhaps these new visitors to our churches are feeling tender and tentative, as well. If they are seeking community, that is something we BeFrienders have experienced, and it is something we are prepared to share through our befriending relationships.

And so, in this tender and tentative time, I wish blessings on you in your ministry. As we move through Advent into the light of the Christmas season, I pray that your light will shine on those who seek community with you, whether as fellow BeFrienders or as people you will befriend. ■

- Gail Dekker

## **A BeFriender’s Story**

*Thank you to Elaine Schuster Allee, a BeFriender coordinator from Raytown, Mo., who provided the following story.*

It was 11:03 p.m. when the phone rang. I know the time because, as the mother of two sons with cars, the ringing startled me. Surprisingly, I was even awake – very

unusual at this hour, even for a Saturday night.

When I answered, it was my “befriended” Mary. “You do not need to come tomorrow,” she said. “My husband took me to Mass this evening. It was good to be there. It seemed really special. It has been so long. After that we met some friends, went to the casino. It was a good day! So pretty out. Mass was the best part. Next Sunday I will plan on you coming to see me.”

I was a bit relieved that I did not need to stop and see Mary after Mass. I had house guests, and we had plans for early afternoon.

My son and I went to early Mass since I would not be stopping in to see Mary. I started visiting Mary five months ago when she came from the hospital with no hair and a diagnosis of lung cancer.

She was usually very upbeat and positive. Occasionally, she would talk through some of her concerns or pains. On our last visit she spoke of her fear of being alone. Being new to BeFrienders, I was having difficulty shifting my paradigm. As a mother, teacher, big sister, caregiver, I always felt that assisting in solving or correcting the problem was my role. As a BeFriender, that is certainly not my task, and, of course, I was not capable of curing Mary’s cancer.

I was still uneasy thinking of myself as a “minister,” yet I understood that my listening to her was ministry. I worried about my ability to do the “right thing” for Mary. I was fearful I would not be able to “walk this walk” with her. In my personal relationships, I have not been associated with anyone with terminal illness. I was not sure what the fear, pain, anger, etc., might look or feel like on Mary’s part or mine.

We were celebrating the Mass; when the lector said, “Pray for the repose of the soul of Mary.” “What?” I thought. “Somebody has really made a mistake! Good grief! She is to be on the prayer list because she is ill. What a dreadful error to confuse those lists!” I was very distracted through the remainder of mass. I met the priest at the door of the gathering space as he left the altar. “Father, they made a terrible mistake! I just spoke with Mary late last night.” The priest put his arms around my shoulders. “Elaine, you were the last to speak with her. She died within a few minutes of speaking with you.”

I couldn’t believe it! Then I realized the glory of God! Mary had had a beautiful day ... certainly much better than the journey I feared she would have. At the funeral Mass our pastor said, “Mary had been to her favorite places her last day – her church and the casino.” And that was true! In the company of her husband of 52 years and loved ones, Mary had celebrated a beautiful day, her last on earth.

Mary’s telephone call affirmed for me the importance of this ministry, as well as God’s power. God is in control of everything; the ministry in this case was my frame of reference for seeing that. Part of the paradigm shift is realizing that I am only the instrument and that, with God’s help, I can give up being frightened and trying to “fix.”

I am so blessed to have walked this short walk with Mary and to have a “befriended” in heaven to watch over me and my ministry – God’s ministry. Thank you, God, for allowing me that late-night call from Mary so that I could share in her beautiful final day and be reminded of your goodness. ■

## **FIRST IN A SERIES: WHAT ARE MINISTRY AND FAITH REFLECTION? Betty and Barb Go To the Movies**

*This is the first in a series of articles on ministry and faith reflection. In future newsletters, we will address questions that you or others in your group may have, offer new ways to engage your group in the reflection process, and provide information to deepen individual and group understanding of the concepts and process.*

Two friends – we'll call them Betty and Barb – have just seen the movie “Monsters, Inc.” (an animated film about the “monsters” in a child’s closet whom she discovers are more scared of her than she is of them). Imagine the following conversation as they leave the theater:

*Betty: What a great movie for kids! Do you think it’s strange for two grown women to go to a kids’ movie without any kids along?*

*Barb: (laughs) Maybe, but I was just in the mood for something light-hearted today. I have to admit, I forgot all about it being a children’s movie. I thought it was pretty funny for adults, too.*

*Betty: Not just the humor, either. It kept reminding me of all the times I’ve held back from doing things because I was scared. I usually end up wondering what I’ve missed.*

*Barb: Me, too. It cracked me up when the little girl found out that the monsters made their living by scaring children. I’ve dealt with a few hairy monsters in my life whose motivation I wish I’d understood!*

*Betty: I know what you mean. I can’t tell you how many times I’ve wanted to have a conversation with this woman who volunteers with me at the retirement home so I could try to figure her out. She scares me, because I always think she’s angry with me, and she seems so bossy, even though she’s not in charge of anything. She doesn’t talk to the residents much, but she spends a lot of time ordering around the volunteers: “Move the chairs! Set the tables. Keep on schedule!” Meanwhile, I’d rather sit with the residents and hear them reminisce. They really love to have someone to talk to. I think of us like Mary and Martha – one of us fussing over details and the other listening to stories. I guess I’ve always thought that my approach is better, but maybe it’s not.*

*I suppose she volunteers because she has a good heart and there’s probably a really good reason why she’s so bossy with the volunteers. Maybe she really is angry with me about something. You know what? I’m finally going to talk with her and try to get to know her.*



### **Telling Stories, Finding Meaning, Taking Action**

Have you ever had a similar exchange with a friend after some ordinary event like going to the movies? If so ... congratulations! You’re a theologian, and you’ve been doing theological reflection.

What is theological reflection? Simply put, it means telling our stories,

finding meaning in them and taking action as a result, all in the context of our faith. In this action-reflection-action process, we have the opportunity to consciously examine our life experience (tell our story) in order to gain insight and understanding from a faith perspective (find meaning) and to use that insight to determine what we will do next (take action).

For the two moviegoing friends, the plot of the movie – as silly as it may seem – was the story on which they reflected and which sparked Betty to tell her own story. In theological reflection, we draw on a wide variety of life experiences for reflection. In ministry reflection with our BeFriender groups, it is a specific life experience – the presenter’s ministry to another person – that sets the stage for reflection.

As people of faith, we engage in theological reflection all the time, perhaps even on a daily basis. Take, for example, the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks in America. When you think about those events, what meaning have you discovered in them for your own life as a person of faith? What have you done differently as a result? That’s theological reflection. Through this process, we grow in our understanding of God and how we are to engage in the world.

## **The Parables of Our Lives**

When we ask, “How can people commit such evil acts in the name of religion?” we are seeking understanding as faithful Christians. Theology is just that: “faith seeking understanding.”<sup>1</sup> In that sense, we are all theologians. In their book, *The Art of Theological Reflection*, Patrick O’Connell Killen and John deBeer talk about the human drive for meaning. They write:

[Our life experiences are] “... remembered and embodied and are available to be explored for fuller meaning. The events of our lives, when nondefensively approached in reflection, can be parables for us, like the parables of Jesus. Parables are rich resources of insight and invitations to transformation. In theological reflection our lives become the same.”<sup>2</sup>

Think for a moment about one of the parables of Jesus – the prodigal son. When we reflect on that parable, we might find ourselves identifying with or trying to understand one or more of the characters. We might wonder what we would do under similar or analogous circumstances. But what don’t we do when we hear the story? We don’t say, “Well, Jesus should have told us more about the sons’ mother. Their relationship with her might have explained a lot.” We don’t ask Jesus the storyteller, “Did you find out why the father was willing to give up his estate while he was still alive? I can’t make sense of the story without that information.” We don’t say, “Jesus, I’m disappointed that you didn’t get the father to talk about how he felt when the younger son squandered his inheritance.”

Instead, we take the story, just as Jesus told it to us, and use it to search our own hearts and minds. We look for what the parable has to teach us about how we live our lives. We allow the parable of the prodigal son to shed new light on our own reactions and responses to situations. We might say, “When I hear the story, I feel embarrassed because I keep getting distracted by why the father gave up his estate.” If we use Betty’s story about her fellow volunteer as a parable, an initial reflection might be, “I feel surprised when I think about Betty’s story, because I realize how quickly I decided Betty wasn’t carrying her own weight as a volunteer and was just letting the other volunteer do all the work.”

Pastoral theologian Robert Kinast says, “In Jesus’ parables, answers were

never self-evident; they demanded honest reflection and personal decision.” He goes on to say that critical thinking, which he defines as an honest search for the truth, “... does not mean looking for reasons to justify a course of action you have already decided to take; it means examining a situation carefully in order to determine the course of action you should take.”<sup>3</sup> What we learn from the parables reignites hope, because we know we can make different and better choices as a result of an enriched understanding of God’s love.

## **Stories of Our Ministry**

In ministry reflection, the presenter’s story is the “parable” on which the BeFriender group members will reflect. As with a biblical parable, the story is told, and each listener then looks for ways to weave meaningful threads of that story in the tapestry of his or her own life story.

The ministry reflection process is not a forum to evaluate the presenter or the presenter’s story. It’s not our role as listeners to say, “It would have been a better story if ...” Rather, it is to be a safe and supportive process – a discipline – in which each person in the group has a chance to learn from the story that has been told. Many of us cringe at the word “discipline.” That’s not surprising; it’s a word laden with negative connotations. If we trace back the the origin of the word, however, we are reminded that its Greek root, *disciplina*, means “instructions given to a disciple.” And a disciple? Its Latin root, *discipulus*, means “learner.” As disciples, then, we are by definition learners, and the “discipline” of ministry reflection simply provides us with the guidelines – instructions – for learning.

## **Faith Reflection**

Every life experience has multiple meanings, including faith meaning. In the BeFriender Ministry model for ministry reflection, faith reflection is the fifth stage of the process. In this stage, we make conscious connections between the stories we’ve told in the first four stages (the presenter’s story and group members’ subsequent reflections or “mini-stories”) and our own faith. We each bring to faith reflection a certain faith context – how we worship, how we pray, how we understand scripture, and so on. Going back to our moviegoer Betty, in her spontaneous faith reflection she started to re-examine her understanding of the Mary-Martha story. She had always cast herself as Mary and her “bossy” volunteer colleague as Martha. Based on her interpretation of scripture, she had decided that she (Betty) was right and “Martha” was wrong. A brief conversation with her friend Barb after the movie moved her to open her heart to the possibility that there might be a different way to understand “Martha.”

## **An Invitation to Transformation**

Killen and deBeer said that in theological reflection our lives become invitations to transformation. If theological reflection were a car, we could put on it the bumper sticker, “Be patient – God isn’t finished with me yet!” Theological reflection requires patience, since it is the act of deliberately slowing down our usual, and often inadequate, processes of interpreting our lives. And we are unfinished in that we are constantly changing and being transformed – sometimes in tiny, barely perceptible ways, sometimes by great leaps and bounds. Theological reflection allows us to change in ways that help us to remain faithful in the real world and in our relationship with God.

How many times do we fret and complain about our fast-paced and activity-filled lives, “I don’t even have time to stop and think!” Ministry reflection with our BeFriender group is our opportunity to stop and think about how God is continually

revealed to us in our day-to-day human experiences, including ministry, and how each revelation is truly an invitation to be transformed. ■

1. Howard W. Stone and James O. Duke, *How to Think Theologically*, Fortress Press, 1996.
2. Patricia O'Connell Killen and John deBeer, *The Art of Theological Reflection*, Crossroad/Herder & Herder, 1994.
3. Robert L. Kinast, *Making Faith-Sense: Theological Reflection in Everyday Life*, The Liturgical Press, 1999, xi-xiii.

## Next in the Series

Theological reflection can be done privately by individuals or in a group. In BeFriender Ministry, our model of theological reflection, which we refer to as ministry and faith reflection, is done in a group. In our March 2002 issue, we will examine why ministry reflection is an integral part of BeFriender Ministry and why it is a group model. Future issues will also include such topics as:

- Learning and understanding the process for ministry and faith reflection
- Awareness of obstacles to the process
- The role of assumptive world and mutuality in ministry reflection
- Vulnerability and truth in ministry reflection
- Skills used in the ministry and faith reflection process: "The Stem," paraphrasing, writing verbatims and case studies
- Roles in ministry reflection: facilitator, presenter, group member
- Accountability and supervision in ministry and faith reflection

## BeFriender Interactive: Q&A

### QUESTION

What can I do to make the concepts of "focus" and "overall thoughts and feelings" in ministry reflection more clear? It seems we often get the two confused.

### ANSWER

We've discovered that the term "focus" itself is confusing to many people. It can be misinterpreted to mean that it should be the focus of everything that follows in the ministry reflection process, when it is only intended to help the presenter identify and name something that feels unfinished.

### A Change in Terminology

One simple change that seems to help clarify the concept is to use the term "Presenter's Question for Reflection (PQR)" instead of the term "focus." That makes it more clear that this is just another facet of the presenter's story. The whole presenter's story, not only the PQR, serves as a jumping-off place for the others in the group to offer "I feel ... when ... because I ..." statements during stage two of ministry reflection. The PQR does not need to be answered, although the presenter's learnings

from hearing others' reflections may help the presenter discover his or her own answers. Group members, of course, will have the opportunity to learn from the reflections, as well.

A statement of "overall thoughts and feelings" precedes the PQR. Said another way, the PQR is a logical outgrowth of the presenter's overall thoughts and feelings. So, before we say more about the PQR, let's look at "overall thoughts and feelings."

## **Overall Thoughts and Feelings**

"Overall thoughts and feelings" is a statement by the presenter concerning how they feel about the visit and why. This statement is only a couple of sentences long. Like the PQR, it is just another aspect of the presenter's story.

One good way to begin developing the statement is to pay attention to your "self-talk" immediately after the visit. We all do that naturally, so the "trick" is being mindful of it and then boiling it down into a couple of sentences.

Overall thoughts and feelings are about you, the presenter, not the person visited. Using "I" statements will help keep the presenter in that mode and prevent slipping into analysis or critique, which is not the intention of the overall thoughts and feelings. In the coordinator manual on page III.6, there is an example of a statement of overall thoughts and feelings based on the Hal visit:

*I feel confused about this visit. On the one hand, I want to celebrate with Hal, but on the other I wonder if encouraging those good feelings is appropriate since melanoma is such a serious disease.*

Notice that the presenter is addressing his or her own feelings. A statement like "Hal should get more realistic about his disease" is not appropriate, because it is about what the presenter has decided Hal should do ... and beware of those "shoulds!" They're often a warning sign that we're looking outward instead of inward.

When someone is first learning to develop a statement of overall thoughts and feelings, the stem ("I feel ... when ... because I ...") is a useful tool because it helps keep the presenter looking at his or her own thoughts and feelings.

## **Guidelines for the PQR**

Once the presenter has the overall thoughts and feelings defined, the PQR can arise naturally out of it. Developing the PQR gives the presenter the opportunity to consciously focus on the visit and, by forming a question, create a space for his or her own learning. Keep in mind the three guidelines regarding the PQR:

- It is about you, the presenter, not about the person visited.
- It is about your ministry.
- It is something that feels unfinished for you.

In your "overall thoughts and feelings" you might notice statements that begin with "I wish I had ..." or "Why didn't I ..." or something similar. Those "wondering" types of statements are often fodder for developing the PQR. Using the overall thoughts and feelings statement that we looked at from the Hal visit, a possible PQR might be "How do I celebrate with Hal his good news when deep down I'm worried about the reality of his disease?" Helpful lead-ins to the PQR can be found on page III.6 of the coordinator manual (TM II.4).

If, while trying to write the PQR, the presenter decides that nothing feels

unfinished for that visit, the presenter may consider asking, “Why do I think I have nothing to learn from this visit?” or “What can I learn from this visit?”

One of the roles of the facilitator during ministry reflection is to ensure that the presenter has met the three guidelines for a PQR. If the presenter hasn't met the guidelines, the facilitator can guide the presenter in reframing it. If the PQR offered was “I need to get Hal to face the realities of his disease,” the facilitator could redirect with affirmation – in other words, affirm two of the three guidelines that were met and then ask a question that allows the presenter to take another look at the third guideline. For instance the facilitator might say, “That’s about you and about your ministry. Is there something, though, that still feels unfinished to you?” The presenter might say, “Yes. I’m wondering why it’s so important to me to have Hal face the realities of his disease,” or maybe there is something else unfinished that a little encouragement from the facilitator will elicit.

What other questions have been raised for you as a result of reading more about “overall thoughts and feelings” and the “presenter’s question for reflection?” Let us know, and we’ll answer your questions in future issues of the newsletter. ■