



THE BEFRIENDER

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

Depression Can Be Treated

by Thomas Wright

Thomas Wright was the presenter for the Spring 2002 BeFriender Day in St. Paul, Minn., on the topic of depression. He is a family therapist, teacher and writer. Wright holds a degree in theology from Southern Methodist University, is on the faculty of the Alfred Adler Graduate School of Minnesota and is a clinical member of the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapists.

You may know someone who's depressed. You may have experienced depression at one time in your own life. According to researchers, nearly 10 per cent of adults in America experience some form of depression in a given year.

Depression is a serious illness. It is the leading cause of disability in the United States as well as the world. It's not as simple as having a bad day, being in a bad mood or getting discouraged. You can't just tell yourself to snap out of it and expect your depression to disappear any more than someone with diabetes can be expected to snap out of it.

Types of Depression

Depression is very complex. It is a brain disorder that affects your thoughts, moods, feelings, behavior and physical health. There are three main types of depression. Major depression is characterized by a mood disturbance lasting more than two weeks. The second type is called dysthymia. Dysthymia is a less severe but more continuous form of depression. It may last for two to five years. The third type is bipolar disorder, also known as manic-depressive disorder. Those suffering from bipolar experience extreme mood swings that cycle from deep despair to soaring periods of elation.

Each of these forms of depression can be treated with a combination of medicine and psychotherapy. One of the ongoing tragedies is that so many people suffering from depression are going undiagnosed and untreated. This is especially true of elderly people. While depression is no more common in elderly than in the rest of the adult population, it is much more likely to go undiagnosed. All too often, family members as well as physicians assume that the symptoms they are seeing are natural results of aging.

Far too many people, as well as their families and co-workers, are suffering needlessly. Depression touches the lives of all who are close to the sufferer.

Brain Chemistry and Depression

When we are depressed, subtle changes take place in our brain chemistry.

Current imaging technology allows brain scientists to measure these changes. It would be easy to assume that, since there are biological changes in the depressed brain, the treatment would be a straightforward biological or medical treatment. This assumption is wrong. We can alter our brain chemistry by changing our thoughts and attitudes as well as by taking a pill.

While new drugs have been developed, bringing dramatic relief to many depression sufferers, not all depression responds to medication alone. The best results are found in using a combination of drugs and psychotherapy. Drugs are usually effective in brightening depressed moods, but they cannot solve or eliminate the trauma of important personal losses or other situational events that may have produced the depression.

Contributing Factors

While there's no single cause for depression, we do know some of the factors that often contribute to it. Because depression often runs in families, experts believe a genetic vulnerability exists for it. There are many environmental factors, such as stress, a loss or threatened loss, physical illnesses, marital discord or financial worries. Other factors that can contribute to depression include certain medications; alcohol, nicotine and drug abuse; deficiencies in folate and vitamin B-12; and an underactive thyroid. People with chronic illnesses – such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes, cancer and Alzheimer's disease – are at high risk for developing depression.

We also know that certain personality traits – such as having low self-esteem and being overly dependent, self-critical, pessimistic and easily overwhelmed by stress – can make you more vulnerable to depression. Depression is a serious distortion in self-perception in which you minimize your own beauty and your gifts and magnify your faults and shortcomings to the degree that you come to believe that you have no worth, no redeeming value in this world.

The way you have learned to cope with your emotions and feelings can also lead to depression. Depression is sometimes referred to as “silent rage” because many depressed persons find it very difficult to express their angry feelings in words. By stuffing their angry, hostile feelings and putting on the false face of nobility and cheerfulness, these people unwittingly set themselves up for depression. Hot-headed, verbally expressive people rarely get depressed.

Recognizing Depression

How can you tell if you or someone you know is depressed? There are two major signs of depression and several minor signs. The major signs are a lack of interest in normal daily activities and a depressed mood. When things that normally bring you happiness, joy or pleasure – including sex – no longer interest you, you may have one of the major signs of depression. If you find yourself crying for no apparent reason, feeling sad, helpless and hopeless much of the time, you may have one of the major signs of depression. Other indicators are sleep disturbance, changes in appetite – including noticeable gain or loss in weight – fatigue, thoughts of death, impaired thinking, difficulty concentrating or difficulty remembering simple things.

Take Action

If you or someone you know is experiencing these symptoms, use every means you have available to you to take immediate action. If it is you, make an appointment with a health care professional. If it is someone you know and care about, share your

concern and offer to help them make arrangements for a checkup. It is far better to risk offending your friend or loved one than to watch them suffer needlessly when help is available.

“When unmourned experiences of helplessness and disavowed desires turn into passive fatalism, people stop hoping for the best and fear the worst, despairing that the real world has anything good to offer.”¹ ■

1. Shabad, Peter C., *Psychotherapy as Delayed Mourning: Disillusionment and the Regeneration of Hope*. Jason Aronson Publishers, 2001.

A Co-Conspiracy: Shame and Depression

by Judith Becker

Judith E. Becker was a panelist for “The Faces of Depression,” the Spring 2002 BeFriender Day in St. Paul, Minn.

At the end of Mary Oliver’s beautiful poem “Wild Geese” (from *Dream Work*, Atlantic Monthly Press, 1986) she says: “Whoever you are, no matter how lonely, the world offers itself to your imagination ... over and over announcing your place in the family of things.”

It is just this – knowing your place in the family of things – that struck me about this poem. That is what is so easily lost in depression – knowing you belong in the family somewhere. And when that knowing is lost, you no longer belong anywhere. You are lost.

How to talk about my depression and my shame – for they go hand in hand for me – without spiraling back into them is a challenge. My depression was born of a long family history of depression, abuse, neglect and alcoholism. If you ask me to talk about the abuse or the neglect or even the repercussions of alcoholism on my life, I could do that more easily than I can talk about depression and shame. To ask me about my depression is to ask me to share the most intimate part of me with you. It strikes at the spirit of who I am and who I wish to be.

A Long Struggle

I have struggled with depression off and on throughout my life. Even as a child it was ever-present. I spent years as an adolescent in a suicidal fog, drugging myself into oblivion, self-mutilating to dull the emotional pain and striving always to appear “normal,” although I desperately wished someone, anyone, would notice my cries for help and rescue me from the prison of my own mind.

My depression took on different forms through the years. At times it was despondent and full of heavy fatigue; at times it was manic and didn’t let me sleep for days on end. There was a time when I only slept for three hours a night, twice a week. Always my depression was there to let me know that I was nobody and worthless and nothing but a bother to those around me. It served for many years to shield me from my rage and pain about the abuse I suffered as a child in an alcoholic home.

Shame

I cannot talk about my depression without naming shame as co-conspirator. I have cared deeply about what others think of me and, knowing myself worthless in my heart of hearts, erected an elaborate facade so that you would never know me. That in turn fed my depression, for how could anyone ever know who I really was? The humiliation and shame of not being genuine and of not being capable of being genuine fed on itself. When it finally came down to my ability to parent my own children with love and compassion and forgiveness, I finally had to face myself and my fears, my rage and my shame and find a way to overcome the debilitating effects of my illness.

I could share with you the things that drove me further inside myself and those things that – in a long slow burst of grace – finally released me. Much of that grace-filled journey is still a mystery to me, but I thank God every day for leading me into the light and the life I now have. I have learned to walk gently with myself.

A Gross Imbalance

Depression is a gross imbalance of self-perception. It is the dichotomy of knowing yourself worthless while simultaneously attributing great power to every little act that you do or don't do. Everything left undone becomes a strike against you, but everything you do manage to accomplish is minimized into insignificance. It is an evil imbalance that eats away your soul.

I came to see my depression and my shame as a soul killers, my soul killers. They locked me inside myself and isolated me from every living thing and every healing thing. I cannot say I ever "befriended" either my depression or my shame, but I came to a place where I could name it and acknowledge its presence and its devastation in my life. I came to see every interaction I had as either a soul enhancer or a soul killer. Soul killers kept me locked in my prison of self-isolation. Soul enhancers reminded me of my humanity and helped me see through the pain to others outside myself.

Soul Killers

Soul killers were often well intentioned or not strong enough to truly cope with my illness. There were times when I would try to talk about my pain, and I would be told that my feelings were wrong. As if feelings could ever be wrong! Sometimes people would tell me to stop being so dramatic, effectively telling me I had no problems or that I was exaggerating my pain. Their hugs of pity, even if couched as compassion, only stifled and overwhelmed me.

Other soul killers were also well meaning but equally destructive. They say, "I know how you feel," and then proceed to tell you their story, never listening to the one you are trying to tell them. If we are to heal from our depression, the silence must be broken, and we must be freed to talk openly about our pain without fear of judgment or isolation. I know I am no fun to be around when my depression comes calling, but stick with me and I can heal from it. Close me down and I will surely retreat deeper into my depths than ever before.

Soul Enhancers

Soul enhancers, on the other hand, never needed me to take care of them. They listened to my story or my struggles without judgment and without trying to make

themselves more comfortable with my distress. They stood with me in my pain and confusion and held me by the hand. They simply listened and reflected back to me that which they heard me say, often reading between the lines but not projecting. It was that active listening in a nonjudgmental fashion that let me know I was still human and still worth the time and energy it took to be with me. Holding my hand reminded me I was still touchable, still lovable.

Depression as Guide

When I can feel depression lapping at my edges, I use it as a guide that tells me my life is no longer in balance, and I look, right away, to see what needs tending to again. How did I get to that place where depression can be a useful guide? With a strong and powerful love of those who stood with me in my pain and never tried to fix or share the pain, but were willing to just be with me in it.

Stand with me in my pain, hold out your hand and let me feel your pulse beating with mine and I will know that I am not lost forever. ■

Scripture for Depression

David Allen Sorensen and Barbara DeGrote-Sorensen, authors of the book When You Are Depressed (Augsburg Fortress, Sept. 2002), generously suggested these scripture readings for prayer and devotion when someone is depressed.

Naming the Hurts

Psalm 130. "Out of the depths." De Profundis in Latin. Very profoundly true.

Psalm 88. An edgy lament, but it keeps the conversation with God going.

Psalm 38. When you're under the weight of sin (then see I John 1: 8-9).

Psalm 40:11-13. When you feel hemmed in.

Psalm 56. When you've been hurt by others. (Also Psalms 17 and 35.)

Psalm 4. When you are in distress, anger or poverty.

Psalm 55. When you fear death.

Psalm 22. Even Jesus used this lament. (Note how the mood changes at verse 22.)

I Corinthians 10:13. God "will not let you be tested beyond your strength." A promise of help with a way out.

Matthew 7:24-28. Build your life on the Word of God.

God is Near

Psalm 30. From mourning and cries to dancing and praise.

Psalm 73:21-26. Anger toward God makes us bitter, but God is still there.

Psalm 34:18-19. "The Lord is near to the brokenhearted, and saves the crushed in spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord rescues them from them all."

Psalms 85:6-13. "Wilt thou not revive us again ... ?"

Isaiah 53:4-12, 61:1-3. Meet our Lord Jesus even in the Old Testament.

1 Thessalonians 5:11-22. "... give thanks in all circumstances"

Words of Hope

Psalms 27. Waiting is sometimes necessary.

Psalms 32 and 51. The great Psalms of confession and forgiveness.

Psalms 42. Has there ever been a more exquisite expression of longing?

Psalms 28:6-9. The Lord hears our prayers.

Psalms 71:14-24. Laments almost always end in hope; this one soars!

Romans 8:26-27. For when you have trouble praying.

Romans 8:28. This follows the previous verses but deserves to be read on its own.

James 5:13-15. "Is any one among you suffering?"

2 Corinthians 1:2-4, 12:9-10. "My grace is sufficient for you for my power is made perfect in weakness."

Jeremiah 31:31-34. "... I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more."

Philippians 4:4-13. Wow. Simply wow.

Romans 12:15. A word for loved ones of someone who is depressed.

Matthew 11:28-30. You'll want to memorize this one!

Blessings

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24. "May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this."

Romans 15:13. "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

2 Thessalonians 3:16. "Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in all ways. The Lord be with all of you." ■

Lamenting Depression Hear Our Prayer

When she was depressed, writer Marcy Heidish found herself instinctively reaching out to spiritual resources. A pattern emerged in her spiritual response, until she realized she was keeping a vigil of depression. The vigil then became intentional. It supported her and ultimately helped her emerge from the "locked room" of her depression. "The vigil form was consistently helpful, even a saving grace" for her, although in the beginning she understood the form only intuitively. In her book *A*

Candle at Midnight she writes, “We cry out to God in depression; we may cry out silently most of the day. When we cry out to God in prayer, no matter how pained we feel, we are joining a long and honored tradition.

“Vigils of lament are rooted in real life, raw emotion, and in those great wails of prayer, the psalms. How well we understand this form if we have depression. A friend of mine found the psalms very important to her in a depressive episode. She, like many of us, may have kept ‘vigils of lament’ without naming them. Anyone in depression knows lament in a negative way.

“The psalmists see it differently, paradoxically, perhaps, once again. In the psalms, emotional distress is never scorned as an unworthy offering. Quite the opposite. We are invited to *bring our full range of emotions* to God (author’s emphasis), excluding neither anguish nor gratitude.

““The psalmists understand that nothing human is foreign to God, and that nothing under heaven is off limits to the prayer of God’s people,” writes Michael Jenkins in his superb book *In the House of the Lord*. ‘The psalms of lament ... refuse to allow us to rush to a happy ending. They insist that we give expression to our human sorrows and sufferings and present all of them to God.’”¹ ■

1. Excerpted from *A Candle at Midnight: Keeping Vigil as a Path Through Depression* by Marcy Heidish. Copyright 2001 by Ave Maria Press, P.O. Box 428, Notre Dame, IN 46556. Used with permission of the publisher.

Resources on Depression

***When You Are Depressed.* David Allen Sorensen and Barbara DeGrote-Sorensen. Augsburg Fortress, September 2002.**

When You Are Depressed, to be released this fall (\$4.99), is a new addition to Augsburg Books’ Difficult Times Series. BeFriender coordinators and BeFrienders will benefit from insights of the husband-and-wife team of authors. The book packs a lot into a few pages. It effectively describes the symptoms and causes of depression and offers resources, including spiritual resources, for dealing with depression.

David Sorensen graciously shares his own struggles with depression, and Barbara DeGrote-Sorensen offers her perspective on David’s depressive episodes. They take an honest look at faith, depression and where the two intersect. In the chapter “A Family Perspective,” they underscore the value of a “ministry of presence” that family members and others can provide, even when that presence is shared in silence. The final chapter provides questions that gently, yet incisively, encourage someone who is depressed to take steps to move beyond depression.

***Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation.* Parker J. Palmer, Jossey-Bass Inc., 2000.**

Writer and educator Parker Palmer’s book *Let Your Life Speak* is a compilation of essays that originally appeared in other publications. That he has pulled them together in a cohesive and moving book about his vocational journey is a marvel. That he describes the role of depression in that journey is an unexpected gift.

Chapter IV, “All the Way Down,” first appeared in a special issue of the journal *Weavings* (September-October 1998) in memory of Henri Nouwen on the theme of the “wounded healer.” In this chapter, Palmer offers an absorbing look at the pain of clinical depression – what he calls “a total eclipse of light and hope” – and at the importance of that dark passage in his “pilgrimage toward self-hood and vocation.” His ability to articulate the pain, his eventual emergence from depression and his understanding of this period as pivotal in his life make this chapter an ultimately hopeful one. ■

Part 3 in Our Series on Ministry and Faith Reflection

Part 3 focuses on preparation for teaching and learning the BeFriender Ministry model for ministry and faith reflection.

Teaching and Learning Ministry Reflection Ready, Set, Go

How do you teach someone to reflect? In some ways, it seems like something that people just naturally do – like breathing. We don't have training sessions on how to breathe, so why have training sessions on how to reflect?

Most people are fortunate enough to get through each day without thinking much about breathing. We don't think about it, that is, until we learn to swim and discover the usual way of breathing doesn't quite fill the bill. Or we take singing lessons and find out that the breathing we've been doing all these years isn't as efficient as it could be. First-time mothers and fathers attend Lamaze classes and find out there that breathing differently than normal can be very helpful, if not easy, for the right occasion.

Ministry reflection in a group calls for a type of reflection that may be quite different than any one person's style of self-reflection. Ministry reflection also requires different dynamics than are usually present when a group of people interacts. Most often, when people get together to talk about a subject, they enter into discussion. Interestingly, the word “discuss” literally means “tear apart.” Not many people would want to examine their ministry experience if the purpose were to tear it apart! What we are seeking in ministry reflection is dialogue. In literal terms, dialogue is “thinking together.” We hear and participate in lots of discussion, debate and argument – tearing apart – in politics, at work, sometimes even in our homes and churches. Thinking together seems much less common.

That's why we teach a common way of reflecting: to allow dialogue and to preclude discussion. Our goal is to strengthen the ministry of individuals and of the group by thinking together without tearing apart. Through dialogue, a safe space for learning can be created.

Ready

So where do you begin teaching ministry reflection? The truth is, you start teaching it before you start teaching it! As illogical as that sounds, it's important to realize that every lesson taught prior to the ministry reflection lessons sets the stage

and builds toward ministry reflection. As you prepare your training plan for a new group of candidates, notice the suggested sequence of the lessons (Coordinator Manual, V.3). The recommended 13 lessons have a deliberate and logical progression and exemplify an action-reflection model (see Figure 1, Page 11).

The first two lessons define ministry and help develop BeFriender candidates' identities as ministers. These two lessons are a great place to plant the seed about growing as ministers by giving candidates the chance to articulate why they chose to become involved in BeFriender Ministry. It might have been simpler to just visit fellow parishioners on their own, so what brings them to BeFriender Ministry? Listen for their individual ways of expressing a desire to learn and grow. If they do express that desire, paraphrase it back to them.

The "Empty Cup" lesson then teaches the first skill of pastoral care – the practice of being fully present to another. As a group, the first three lessons are geared toward reflection.

"Overview of a Visit" and "Confidentiality" move the training from a reflective mode to action. These two lessons create the framework for acting as a minister. The listening and mutuality lessons continue the focus on action and are the "how to" of befriending. They bring the framework to life. Before you start to teach the process for ministry reflection, BeFrienders need to feel reasonably comfortable with and confident in the concept of mutuality and in the listening skills used to live out mutuality. (See "Begin with the Fundamentals" on Page 12.)

Spend as much time as you need to on the two "Art of Listening" lessons and the mutuality lesson before going on to the ministry reflection lessons. Because ministry reflection uses the same active listening skills as befriending, it will help BeFrienders focus on the larger purpose and process of ministry reflection if they already understand those listening skills before learning the process of ministry reflection. Listening is the heart of ministry, so the active listening skills, including paraphrasing and "I feel ... when ... because ...," deserve a lot of attention before moving on in the training plan.

The last five lessons return the training to a reflective focus. The ministry reflection lessons teach the process that ultimately helps the ministry thrive. As many people have observed, "If you're not growing, you're dying." Ministry reflection attends to spiritual growth, continued growth in the skills of ministry and growing together as a community of faith. The loss and aging lessons examine two issues that BeFrienders are likely to encounter in their ministry. They provide concrete examples of subject matter that is fodder for reflection.

In your very first training session with BeFriender candidates, it can be helpful to give them this overview of how the thirteen training lessons are structured. For instance, you might want to put the table in Figure 1 on an overhead transparency, handout or flip chart. If you and BeFriender candidates are clear about the building blocks of the training, you will be in a better position to enter into the lessons on ministry reflection. Candidates will be able to see how everything fits together and will have the step-by-step plan for getting from start to finish.

Set

Once you've completed the first eight lessons in the plan, you will be set to teach the ministry reflection lessons. In order for learning to be effective, the BeFriender candidates need to be set to learn, too. How can you be sure they are as set

to learn as you are to teach? One way is to give the candidates the chance to do a simple self-evaluation. For example, you could list the key active listening skills and ask them to rate their comfort level with each skill on a scale of one to five. If ratings are consistently low on a skill, you can ask what kind of refresher would be helpful to them or what additional practice they would like. You can also ask questions about the two levels of mutuality. Can they readily give examples of Level II?

Self-evaluation ties into a key principle of adult learning: self-direction. It gives the candidates the chance to identify what they need and how they would like to go about learning it. Be prepared, however, for some people to be anxious to move forward while others feel a need to go back and review. You'll need to decide how much review will be beneficial to the whole group and when too much review could become a frustration. Perhaps some one-on-one work with a candidate will be appropriate to get him or her over a particular skill hurdle.

Ministry reflection is likely to be a new concept to at least some of the candidates. Another thing you can do to help them "get set" is to preface the lessons with a brief exercise. Ask them to offer an "I feel ... when ... because ..." response to the question "How do you feel when learning something new?" After each person has had a chance to respond, post the levels of learning a new skill (Figure 2, Page 12) on a flip chart. After you've read through the five levels, ask the participants for a couple of examples of something that they have already learned and how it looked at each level. The five levels are an excellent guidepost to occasionally refer to in training. Each time, let candidates identify where they are in their learning and allow them to observe that different people are at different places at different times.

A third thing you can do to help candidates get set for ministry reflection is to decide what pre-work would be helpful for them to complete prior to the lessons. While you certainly don't want to overburden them with homework, it might be useful, for instance, to have them read one or both of the first two articles in this newsletter series on ministry and faith reflection.

Go

Now you're ready and set to "go!" When you begin the ministry reflection lessons, paint the big picture first. Learners need context to apply their learning. A useful way to paint that picture is with the traditional reporter's questions: who, what, when, where, why and how.

What. Start with the definition of ministry reflection. It is a group dialogue (rather than a discussion) process that uses individuals' ministry experiences as a basis for improving understanding and skills as ministers and for growing in faith. As you introduce the process for the first time, offer it in its simplest form of the five stages: 1) telling the story, 2) reflecting on the story, 3) silence, 4) sharing what's been learned and 5) faith reflection.

You can mention that everyone has her or his own style of personal reflection, and that the five-stage process is more structured than personal reflection might be so that everyone is working in harmony. This is also the opportunity to talk more about ministry reflection as a form of supervision and how it differs from our usual concept of supervision. As one way of describing the difference, one BeFriender coordinator suggests to the BeFrienders in her group that ministry reflection can be thought of and approached as a form of prayer.

Who. Briefly describe the three roles in ministry reflection: the presenter, the

facilitator and the group members. The presenter is the one who tells the story of their ministry experience, offering the story as a parable for others to hear. The facilitator guides the process. The group members listen to the story for the purpose of their own learning.

Where. Ministry reflection takes place in a circle – chairs only, no table. The circle creates a sense of peers learning together. There is no “head of the table” nor is there a table to hide behind. In a circle, everyone is the same distance from the center, so everyone has equal access to the center. The “center” of ministry reflection is learning and growth.

When. Remind the participants how often you plan to meet for ministry reflection once training is completed.

Why. It is important for adult learners to find meaning in what they are learning and to understand how it applies in a practical sense. While you can shed light on the practical applications, people really need to establish meaning for themselves. Rather than telling them what ministry reflection will mean to them or, worse, “selling” ministry reflection, encourage them to begin discovering for themselves what meaning and benefits it might hold for them. Ask a question such as “In what ways do you think your ministry might benefit from regular ministry reflection?” Since they are just beginning to learn the process, the answers probably won’t be fast and furious at this point. Supplement their responses with key points of your own. Come back to the question periodically during the lessons so they can offer the insights they develop along the way.

And Now ... How

The stage has now been set to teach Session 2 of ministry reflection (Coordinator Manual, III.5). The sixth reporter’s question – how – can now be answered and expanded upon. In the next installment on ministry and faith reflection, we will offer tips on how to teach the five stages of the reflection process. ■

FIGURE 1

Lesson	Purpose	Action-Reflection
1. Our Sense of Call	Definition of ministry; identity as ministers Preparation for ministry	Reflection: Being a Minister
2. A Theology of Ministry		
3. Empty Cup		
4. Overview of the Visit	Framework for ministry	Action: Doing Ministry
5. Confidentiality		
6. Art of Listening I	Skills of ministry	
7. Mutuality		
8. Art of Listening II		
9. Ministry Reflection	Process for growth and learning (with loss and aging lessons as examples)	Reflection: Growing as a Ministry
10. Loss: Basic		
11. Loss: Kinds		
12. Ministry Reflection		
13. Aging		

FIGURE 2

Learning a New Skill	
Level 1=	Skill is new to me; I cannot do it.
Level 2=	I understand it; I cannot perform it.
Level 3=	I can begin to do it, but not naturally.
Level 4=	I can do it naturally in many situations.
Level 5=	I can do it well; I can teach others to do it.

Adapted from "Levels of Competency," *Transforming Leadership* (2nd ed.) by Terry D. Anderson, Ph.D., CRC Press, 1997, Page 14.

Teaching the Ministry Reflection Process Begin With the Fundamentals

Childhood music lessons are a nearly universal experience. Two-octave scales, fingering exercises and endless repetitions of "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star" usually don't bring back fond memories. The metronome on the teacher's desk cramped our style. Counting out whole notes, half notes and quarter notes was boring at best and just plain silly at worst. We felt confined by the pieces in our workbooks, because we wanted to play "real" music. Mothers and fathers spent at least part of each day goading reluctant musicians into "just" 15 minutes of practice. It might as well have been 15 years! Then there were the recitals, easily the most unnatural events ever devised from a child's viewpoint.

No one likes feeling cramped, bored, silly or unnatural. For almost every skill we learn, though, it's the same story. If it's needlework, we "knit one, purl two" until every member of our extended family has the eight-foot winter scarf they didn't need. Only later do we graduate to cable-patterned, multi-colored sweaters. If it's baseball, it's hours and hours of the fundamentals – hitting, fielding, throwing and pitching – until we go into a practice game, all still leading up to the "real" game.

If we stop our music lessons when still learning the skills, we'll forever define playing an instrument as unnatural. The payoff only comes if we keep going. Once we've mastered the basic skills, we find nuances in the music we hadn't noticed before. We hear the intricate interplay of a Mozart composition that had previously seemed like a random string of unrelated notes. When we've become proficient, we have a new appreciation for those boring, repetitive exercises and return to them to

keep our skills finely honed. Concert violinists still practice for hours a day. Major league ballplayers practice the fundamentals throughout their careers.

The process for ministry reflection utilizes several specific skills. Paraphrasing, active listening, forming an “I feel ... when I ... because I ...” statement and writing verbatims are the scales and fingering exercises of ministry reflection. Before jumping into teaching and learning the process for ministry reflection, it’s helpful to have the fundamentals down pat. Before teaching the ministry reflection lessons, spend as much time as you need to teaching and learning the skills that will be used. If people become comfortable with those skills before applying them in ministry reflection, they’ll be better able to see the “whole” of the ministry reflection process.

Self-esteem and self-confidence are important factors in adult learning. Confidence builds on itself. If BeFriender candidates become somewhat adept in using the skills of befriending – at least Level 3 in the levels of learning a new skill (“Ready, Set, Go,” Figure 2, Page 12) – they will be more confident when they start to learn how to apply those skills to the process of ministry reflection. ■

A Note from the Interim Director In Friendship

In May, nine regional representatives from five states came to St. Paul, Minn., for a gathering of BeFriender Ministry regional conveners. Their ongoing contributions have made this a shared ministry across the nation.

What are regional conveners? They are volunteers who support BeFriender Ministry in a metropolitan area or a wider region. They often work for a judicatory body (such as a diocese, synod or presbytery) or for an organization such as a hospital system. They may be pastoral care directors, family life ministers, chaplains or administrators. They often become regional conveners because they see BeFriender Ministry as a valuable program, one that is in line with the ministry they are called to lead. In their role as regional conveners, they are often aided by co-workers or volunteers who are active in local BeFriender programs.

Shared Ministry

Regional conveners offer a number of services on behalf of BeFriender Ministry. They answer local requests for information about BeFriender Ministry. They publicize and host “Foundations for BeFriender Ministry” workshops in their respective regions. They offer continuing education events for BeFrienders and BeFriender coordinators. They arrange for or lead coordinator skills development groups, where coordinators practice peer supervision through ministry reflection. The current regional conveners’ names and locations are found in every newsletter in the calendar section (page 9 in this issue).

Regional conveners were instrumental partners in helping BeFriender Ministry create its strategic plan in 1999. It was at this time that BeFriender Ministry created its current mission statement (found on the front page of each newsletter), values and goals.

Partnership

At the May meeting in St. Paul, regional representatives participated in a number of discussions on the nature of our national-regional partnership. We learned of several new models for organizing a region, for offering BeFriender candidate training and for publicizing the ministry. Here are a few examples:

- Kay Morrissey of Sioux City, Iowa, visits churches when there is a transition in leadership. Judy Scharf of Lansing, Mich., invites the parishes in her dioceses that do not have a BeFriender Ministry to meet with her so she can tell them about the ministry in the Lansing Diocese.
- Several regions have active advisory councils that meet to coordinate the work of BeFriender Ministry in a region. Betty Devota formed an advisory council in Saginaw, Mich., and Margaret Johnson has done likewise in Richmond, Va. These advisory councils often aid the regional convener with publicity, handle logistics and arrangements for local “Foundations” workshops and choose continuing education topics for the program year.
- In Colorado Springs, regional convener Mary Jo Bay offers BeFriender candidate training every fall for churches in the region. Coordinators from the churches participate in leading the candidate training. Because local coordinators share in this effort, rather than having to undertake the training in each parish, Mary Jo finds that coordinators also volunteer for other regional tasks. Local parishes can count on this training every fall and do not have to worry about having enough candidates in their own church to train.

Moving Into the Future

The regional representatives had a number of good ideas about how to enhance communication, support, publicity and training. As BeFriender Ministry moves into the future, we look forward to implementing these ideas within a structure that strengthens local BeFriender Ministry programs and one that meets the needs of the regions and the national office.

The activities and support of BeFriender Ministry regional conveners, as well as the efforts of the volunteers who work with them, have been valuable in making this ministry as accessible as it has been. We in the national office want to express our thanks for their efforts over many years! ■

– Gail Dekker

BeFriender Interactive: Q&A

Question

Is there a format other than the verbatim for presenting a story for ministry reflection?

Answer

An alternative format is the case study. On pages III.31-35 (section IX) of the Coordinator Manual, you will find information about using a case study for ministry reflection. The case study process is meant to be used as a supplement to the verbatim process rather than as a regular substitute for it.

The case study format might be useful when a situation or relationship has continued for an extended time or when it involves more than one person. Other appropriate occasions for using a case study are listed in the manual on page III.31.

The BeFriender Ministry focus course “The Model for Ministry Reflection” gives coordinators the chance to gain additional understanding of and experience with the case study method. Dates and locations for this course will be announced later this year.

You can also watch for an article about verbatims and case studies in a future issue of the newsletter. That upcoming article will be an installment in our series on ministry and faith reflection (see Page 8 for the third article in the series). ■