



I was trained as a Befriender by Director Barb Schwery in the Fall of 2022 with some fellow parishioners. I believe God gives us just what we need at the right time, and the Befriender training was a perfect example. Our 3 boys had all moved out and were off to school. I was feeling the blue effects of empty nesting and when Pastor James announced the training and I immediately felt drawn to it.

I have always enjoyed talking with people and for some reason they often tell me very private information. One time, my wife Angie and I went to a neighborhood party and on our walk home she said she had some nice conversations with a lot of different neighbors. I told her I spent the whole party with one neighbor while she went into detail about the sadness she was going through after her husband left her. My wife said "I think you have an invisible cleric collar on" 😊.

Three big take homes for me from the training were listening skills, understanding grief and the connection I have with my fellow Befriender Trainees.

Listening skills- I found it relieving to learn that I can listen but not feel responsible to "fix" the problem or even give my opinion. This was and continues to be a very new concept to me. My gift for other people through God is in the listening.

Understanding grief- I have always connected grief with the death of a loved one. The training opened my eyes to the many types of grief that so many people are suffering from. As Barb was going through the types of grief and we were visiting as a group, she pointed out that my boys leaving home and emptiness I was feeling was a form of grief. It was a very powerful and tearful moment. Realizing this has allowed me to give more grace to the people that I come in contact with and the training has taught me that it is not what I say that matters, it is about being present.

Connection- I cherish the connection I have with my fellow Befrienders. We meet once a month to share our stories and support each other.

Barb Schwery was a wonderful and caring teacher of the Befriender Ministry. I am so happy I was able to take the course with her and I truly believe that if this course could be taught to everyone our world would be a much better place.

Tom