



A GUIDE FOR PASTORS AND CO-LEADERS TO TRAIN AND LEAD THE FRIENDSHIP MINISTRY TEAM

Stephen M. Saunders, Ph.D.
May 2026

Contents

INTRODUCTION

FRIENDSHIP MINISTRY STRUCTURE

- The Role of the Pastor
- The Role of the Co-Leader

SELECTING FRIENDSHIP MINISTERS

TEACHING TIPS

- Training Goals
- Training Structure
- Lectures and Discussions
- Role Playing

SUPERVISING FRIENDSHIP MINISTERS

- Providing Friendship Ministers with Guidance and Assurance
- Follow the Program
- Step In When Needed
- Individual Consultations

FRIENDSHIP MINISTRY TEAM MEETINGS

- Agenda
- Record Keeping

IDEAS FOR PROMOTING THE FRIENDSHIP MINISTRY

ROLE-PLAYING

- Suggestions
- Scenarios

INTRODUCTION

The Friendship Ministry is built upon a simple principle: many members can be equipped to provide compassionate, thoughtful, and effective care to others when they receive proper training and ongoing support. The Friendship Ministry Team exists to make this possible.

The Pastor and Co-Leader serve as the leaders of the Friendship Ministry Team. Their primary responsibility is not to provide every act of care personally, but to recruit, train, encourage, supervise, and support Friendship Ministers so that the ministry becomes a sustainable extension of the congregation's ministry of mercy. Although the Pastor maintains ultimate responsibility for the ministry within the congregation, the Pastor and Co-Leader work together as partners. Together they foster an environment in which Friendship Ministers can grow in confidence, competence, and faithfulness.

FRIENDSHIP MINISTRY STRUCTURE

Each congregation implements the Friendship Ministry through its Friendship Ministry Team. The FM Team consists of:

- Pastor
- Co-Leader
- Friendship Ministers

The Pastor initiates the Friendship Ministry and provides its overall leadership. The Co-Leader assists the Pastor in training, consultation and supervision, and the day-to-day operation of the ministry. Friendship Ministers meet individually with members seeking assistance by following the procedures taught and by participating in ongoing consultation with the FM Team.

A fundamental principle of the Friendship Ministry is that Friendship Ministers never minister independently. They always serve under the guidance and supervision of the FM Team, and ultimately under the authority and supervision of the Pastor.

- **The Role of the Pastor**

The Pastor provides the spiritual leadership for the Friendship Ministry and retains ultimate responsibility for all aspects of it. Although the Pastor works collaboratively with the Co-Leader and the Friendship Ministry Team, final responsibility for the ministry rests with the Pastor.

Primary responsibilities include:

- ⇒ Providing overall direction for the ministry
- ⇒ Ensuring that the ministry remains faithful to Scripture and the mission of the congregation
- ⇒ Recruiting and training Friendship Ministers, with the assistance of the Co-Leader
- ⇒ Consulting with, supervising, and encouraging Friendship Ministers
- ⇒ Being available for difficult situations, crises, or questions that exceed the scope of the Friendship Ministry
- ⇒ Determining when pastoral care, referral, or direct intervention is needed

The Pastor also continues to serve as the spiritual shepherd of the Friendship Ministers. These responsibilities complement, rather than compete with, the Friendship Ministry because the ministry itself is an expression of the Pastor's care for the congregation.

- **The Role of the Co-Leader**

The Co-Leader serves as the Pastor's principal assistant in implementing the Friendship Ministry. The Co-Leader works collaboratively with the Pastor while recognizing that the ministry operates under the Pastor's spiritual leadership and ecclesiastical oversight. Although it is not necessary that the Co-Leader be a member of the congregation, the Co-Leader should fully support the teachings and mission of the church and be comfortable serving under the Pastor's supervision.

Whenever possible, it is beneficial for the Co-Leader to have experience in healthcare, education, counseling, or another helping profession. Such experience can be especially valuable when assisting with

documentation, confidentiality, consultation, and supervision.

Co-Leaders should be willing to complete the Friendship Ministry training, become trainers themselves, and participate actively in the ongoing work of the Friendship Ministry Team.

Specific responsibilities are determined jointly by the Pastor and Co-Leader and may include:

- ⇒ Assisting the Pastor in recruiting and training Friendship Ministers
- ⇒ Assisting the Pastor in consulting with, supervising, and encouraging Friendship Ministers
- ⇒ Helping lead Friendship Ministry Team meetings
- ⇒ Monitoring adherence to the Friendship Ministry procedures
- ⇒ Reviewing documentation for completeness and accuracy
- ⇒ Helping identify situations requiring additional supervision or referral
- ⇒ Maintaining the confidentiality of all Friendship Ministry activities and records

SELECTING FRIENDSHIP MINISTERS

The Pastor will identify and recruit members to be Friendship Ministers. Selecting Friendship Ministers is very important for the success of the Friendship Ministry. Look for individuals who demonstrate:

- ⇒ Christian maturity
- ⇒ Compassion and empathy
- ⇒ Listening skills and patience
- ⇒ Emotional stability
- ⇒ Humility in serving others under the guidance and supervision of the Pastor and Co-Leader
- ⇒ Reliability and steadfastness
- ⇒ Respect for confidentiality
- ⇒ Willingness to follow the Friendship Ministry procedures

Not every willing member will necessarily be well suited for this ministry. Prayerful selection is one of the Pastor's and Co-Leader's most important responsibilities because the effectiveness of the Friendship Ministry depends largely upon the maturity, humility, and teachability of those who serve.

TEACHING FRIENDSHIP MINISTERS

- **Training Goals**

Training serves two primary purposes.

First, the Pastor and Co-Leader teach future Friendship Ministers the knowledge and skills necessary to serve effectively. This includes understanding the Friendship Ministry's model of mental health and emotional distress, developing active listening skills, and learning practical strategies for helping members think more accurately and act more effectively. Through instruction, discussion, role-playing, and supervised practice, Friendship Ministers develop both competence and confidence.

Second, training emphasizes that Friendship Ministers never serve alone. It is essential that Friendship Ministers always see themselves as members of the Friendship Ministry Team, working in ongoing consultation with the Pastor, Co-Leader, and fellow Friendship Ministers. While they are expected to follow the Friendship Ministry procedures faithfully, they are also taught to seek guidance whenever questions or difficult situations arise. In this way, the Friendship Ministry functions as a collaborative extension of the Pastor's ministry to the congregation rather than as an independent counseling program.

- **Training Structure**

- ⇒ Training of Friendship Ministers will likely take 8-10 hours, and it should be conducted over two or three days.
- ⇒ For all training, the *Procedure Manual for Friendship Ministers*, the *Meeting-by-Meeting Instructions*, and the worksheets should be used regularly so that Friendship Ministers learn how the materials work together.
- ⇒ Training should entail lectures on and discussion of the *Procedure Manual for Friendship*

Ministers, and it will ideally include role-playing.

- **Lectures and Discussions**

Lectures should cover each of the chapters of the *Procedure Manual for Friendship Ministers*. Use lecture-style presentations to explain the concepts in the chapter. Some chapters can be covered in a single lecture, but others (especially chapters 3, 4, and 5) will probably require two or three lectures.

After lecturing on a topic, trainers should lead discussion to encourage participants to think through the material together. Discussion promotes deeper understanding.

Be aware that some trainees might be hesitant to ask questions, thinking (incorrectly) that the material is easy to understand and that they are the only ones struggling.

Useful discussion prompts might be:

- ⇒ *What was the easiest part of that particular topic? What was more challenging to understand?*
- ⇒ *When I was learning this, at times I found parts of it confusing. But with time I feel more comfortable with it. Which parts would benefit from further explanation?*

- **Role-Playing**

Role-playing is a valuable teaching tool to demonstrate topics and strategies to the laypersons being trained as Friendship Ministers. Use role-playing frequently during training and also meetings of the FM Team.

Some tips for effective role-playing:

- ⇒ When first introducing a topic, the Pastor and/or Co-Leader can role-play as the Friendship Minister providing assistance.
- ⇒ As skills are learned, role-playing can build on itself, such as role-playing reflections then later reflections, questions, and summarizing.
- ⇒ Provide specific instructions for the person acting the member seeking help.
- ⇒ Initially, everyone can hear the details of the role being played, whereas later the role being played can be kept more secret.
- ⇒ Role-play should go no longer than about 15 minutes. Immediately discuss what was observed. Always be positive about the performance of the trainees during role-playing. First compliment, then make suggestions or observations, then end with a compliment.

Role-play to demonstrate the essential aspects of the initial three meetings, as detailed in the *Meeting-by-Meeting Instructions*. Role-play scenarios are provided on the last page.

SUPERVISING FRIENDSHIP MINISTERS

- **Assuring Friendship Ministers**

Offer encouragement frequently. Help the Friendship Ministers recognize what they are doing well while gently correcting areas needing improvement. Assure them that they are indeed helping, even when it seems that they are not. Remind them that simply having another person listen with kindness is, in itself, profoundly helpful. Encourage them to be confident and patient. Encourage them to recognize that they are acting as part of the Friendship Ministry Team, under the supervision of the Pastor.

- **Follow the Program**

The *Procedures Manual* and the *Meeting-by-Meeting Instructions* should always be available during FM Team meetings. The Pastor and Co-Leader should consult these documents regularly to ensure that the program is being followed. Encourage Friendship Ministers to follow the procedures. The program has been carefully designed to provide consistent, safe, and effective care.

- **Step In When Needed**

Occasionally situations might exceed the scope of the Friendship Minister's role. They should know that they are never expected to manage a crisis alone. Questions should always be welcomed.

The Pastor—or the Co-Leader in consultation with the Pastor—should become directly involved whenever:

- ⇒ Safety concerns arise
- ⇒ Severe mental illness is suspected
- ⇒ Significant theological or pastoral issues emerge
- ⇒ The Friendship Minister requests assistance

- **Individual Consultations**

Individual consultations with the Pastor or Co-Leader might be necessary to uphold privacy and confidentiality of certain members. In addition, periodic individual meetings provide opportunities to:

- ⇒ Review difficult cases
- ⇒ Reinforce effective practices
- ⇒ Provide encouragement
- ⇒ Provide pastoral care and guidance

FRIENDSHIP MINISTRY TEAM MEETINGS

Regular FM Team meetings strengthen the ministry and provide ongoing education. These meetings remind Friendship Ministers that they have an entire team supporting them.

- **Agenda**

A typical agenda might include:

1. Opening prayer, devotion, or Bible study (10 minutes)
2. Preview members to be discussed (3 minutes)
3. Initial consultations for new members (15 minutes per case)
4. Updates on ongoing members (10–15 minutes per case)
5. Discussion of Friendship Ministry protocol (10 minutes)
6. Closing prayer (1 minute)

- **Record Keeping**

Maintain simple, secure records of the activities of the Friendship Ministry, while always protecting the confidentiality of member information. Records might include:

- ⇒ attendance
- ⇒ supervision provided
- ⇒ referrals made
- ⇒ ministry activities as appropriate

IDEAS FOR PROMOTING THE FRIENDSHIP MINISTRY

A healthy Friendship Ministry becomes part of the life of the congregation. As members see faithful, compassionate care being provided within the congregation, confidence in the ministry naturally grows. Consider promoting the ministry through:

- ⇒ worship and Bible class announcements
- ⇒ newsletters
- ⇒ the church website
- ⇒ adult education
- ⇒ new member orientation

The Friendship Ministry is ultimately a ministry of Christian love. While Friendship Ministers provide practical assistance through careful listening, thoughtful guidance, and support, the Holy Spirit alone grants comfort, wisdom, and lasting change. As the Friendship Ministry Team serves under the Pastor's leadership, members experience not only compassionate care but also the love of Christ expressed through His Church.

ROLE-PLAYING

- **Suggestions**

Role-play is appropriate when reviewing the *Procedures Manual*, especially chapters 4 and 5. When role-playing, the *Meeting-by-Meeting Instructions* should be used, just as they will be used in the meetings.

Training should include role-play all of the aspects of the initial meeting, such as (1) introducing themselves and the Friendship Ministry; (2) reviewing issues of privacy and confidentiality, including the limits to confidentiality; (3) practicing active listening, including reflection, open- and closed-questions, gentle commands, and summarizing, and, (4) ending the meeting.

As well, role-play should include completing all three worksheets, including identifying a problem on which to focus, reviewing cognitions, and reviewing behaviors.

- **Scenarios**

Any imaginal situation can be used for role-playing. The following are some suggestions.

1. David, age 67, "Retirement has not been what I expected." David retired six months ago after working for the same company for 38 years. He expected retirement to be enjoyable but instead feels restless and discouraged. He misses the friendships at work and feels like he has lost his purpose. His wife enjoys retirement much more than he does, which makes him reluctant to talk about how he feels.
2. Tamara, age 54, "I'm worried about my mother." Tamara is caring for her 84-year-old mother, whose memory has been declining. She works full-time, helps her mother several evenings each week, and worries constantly about whether she is doing enough. Tamara feels guilty whenever she takes time for herself.
3. Mark, age 43, "I've been having some problems at work and with finances." Mark's work hours were reduced several months ago. Although the family can still pay the bills, money has become a frequent source of conflict with his wife. He lies awake worrying about the future and feels like he has failed his family.
4. Susan, age 61, "I've had some serious conflict with my adult daughter." Susan's adult daughter has stopped speaking to her following an argument several months ago. Susan thinks about it every day and wonders what she did wrong. She wants reconciliation but does not know whether reaching out again would make things worse.
5. Carol, age 30, "I'm new, and I don't quite feel like I fit in here." Carol has attended the congregation for almost a year at the invitation of some close friends. Those close friends moved away, and she feels increasingly lonely at church. She notices herself assuming that others are not interested in talking with her, and she often leaves immediately after worship.
6. Banda, age 36, "I've been having some stress at work." Banda has a new supervisor whose management style is more critical than his previous supervisor's. Banda constantly worries that he is making mistakes, even though his performance reviews have always been good. He finds it difficult to relax after work.
7. Rebeka, age 49, "I'm not sure what to do these days." Rebeka's youngest child recently left for college. Although she is happy for her, the house feels unusually quiet. Rebeka spends much of the day wondering what to do with herself and feels guilty feeling sad when others say she should enjoy her newfound freedom.
8. Roberto, age 58, "I got some scary news from my doctor." Roberto was recently diagnosed with high blood pressure and Type 2 diabetes. His physician recommended significant lifestyle changes, but he feels overwhelmed by everything he is supposed to do. Roberto worries about his future and has begun avoiding thinking about his health altogether.
9. Janet, age 65, "The last time I saw her, we had a brief disagreement. I feel so guilty." One of Janet's closest friends died unexpectedly four months ago. Although life has returned to normal for everyone else, Janet continues to feel the loss deeply. She wonders whether she should be "over it by now" and feels discouraged that she still becomes tearful unexpectedly.
10. Philip, age 45, "I need to give up something, but I don't know what." Philip works full-time, coaches his son's team, serves on two church committees, and helps care for his elderly father. He has become increasingly irritable with his family and feels like he is constantly rushing from one thing to another. He knows he cannot continue this way but does not know what to change.