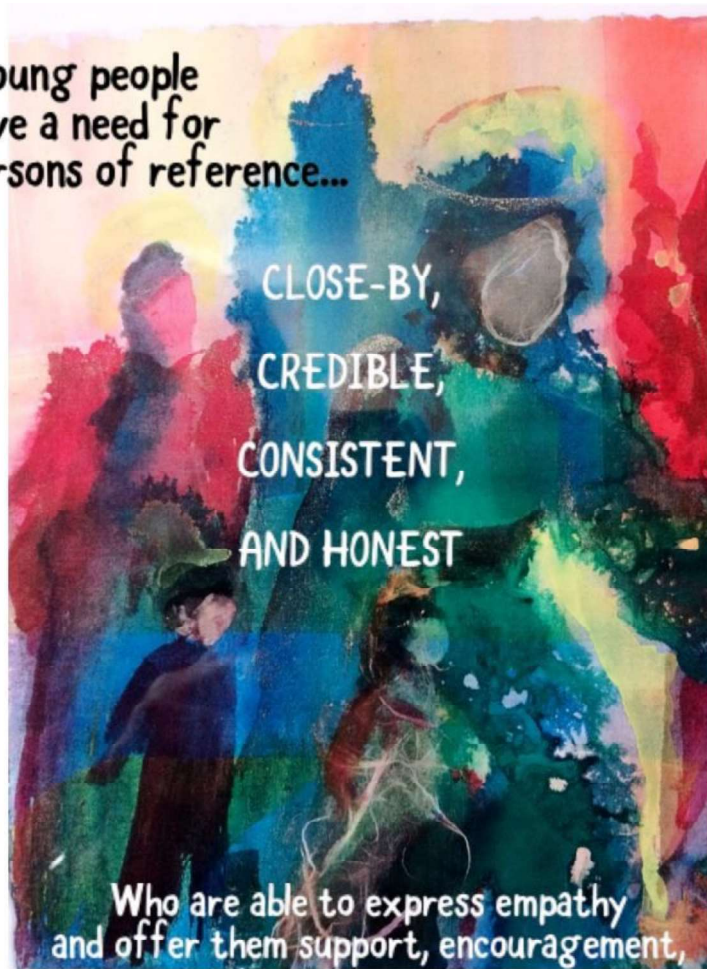


-Week 8-

*Persons of Reference: Faith Role Models in the Church*

"Young people  
have a need for  
persons of reference..."



CLOSE-BY,  
CREDIBLE,  
CONSISTENT,  
AND HONEST

Who are able to express empathy  
and offer them support, encouragement,  
and help in recognizing their limits,  
but without making them feel they are being judged."

The Synod of Bishops'  
"Young People, the Faith  
& Vocational Discernment"  
Preparatory Document



#SERVEANDDISCERN

## -Week 8-

### *Persons of Reference: Faith Role Models in the Church*

Last week, we explored “Interculturation of the Gospel: Listening for the Signs of the Times,” which invited each us to ponder how Gospel values inform decision making in our modern family, community, cultural, social, political, and economic spheres. It also invited us to reflect on the communities we belong to and how our contributions to them are ways of integrating personal and socio-cultural responses to call. Continuing into this eighth week of our Benedictine Volunteers 20-weeks Vocational Discernment Series inspired by the Synod of Bishops’ “Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment” Preparatory Document, we explore “Points of References: Faith Role Models in the Church.” Who are ‘persons of reference’ and why are they important? Who are the persons of reference in our own lives and how do they serve as examples of faith role models in the Church today?

The *Preparatory Document* describes persons of references as those around us who are “close-by, credible, consistent and honest,” who are able to empathize, support, encourage us in our journeys, and who give us constructive feedback without judging. Persons of references may be role models, mentors, and/or peers. In our Catholic history and tradition, we are blessed with many modern examples of role models and mentors. Through the lives of the saints, we find institutional role models who embody and live out values and virtues of the Gospels in their service to others. In our own families, our closest role models and mentors are parents and grandparents who model faith for their children through family relationships. In Jesus’ own life, we see examples of parents as role models. His father, Joseph, modeled for Jesus courage, loyalty, and hard work; his mother, Mary, modeled for Jesus trust, listening, and humility. These are all qualities Jesus absorbs through his observing and living with Joseph and Mary. Similarly in our own lives, we can look within our own families, communities, and Church for persons of reference who are role models and mentors to us to help guide and inspire our journeys.

In addition to role models and mentors, our peers are important in walking with us. We see peer communities explained in the Gospels in a variety of ways. In Luke 24:13-35, two disciples travelling down the road to Emmaus and encounter Jesus, who they do not initially recognize. Like these travelling disciples, our peers walk side-by-side with us in the daily rhythms of everyday life. Sometimes, like Cleopas and his friend, our peers can share in our blindness and confusion and other times, they help us to see things we had not seen before about ourselves or about situations around us. We see in Luke 24:1-12 very intimate scenes of peer community at Jesus’ tomb. Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James visit Jesus’ tomb. These women share a very powerful experience of transformation and witnessing resurrection together. Like these women, our peer communities share common life experiences and dialogue with us about them to discern meaning. In our times of grief and sadness, our peers empathize and cry with us. In our times of shock and wonder, our

peers comfort us. Sometimes, our peers are instructed by God to share important information with us like Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary are instructed by Jesus to share the news of his resurrection with the apostles.

The value of having persons of references—role models, mentors, and peers—is having people close to us inspire, guide, and walk with us on our journeys. Like Jesus, we each have our own unique life path and calling to respond to. However, we are not alone in doing so. The people around us can share with us their feedback and support in helping us understand all the unique ways God reaches out to us. Persons of reference are special people sent to us from God to help reflect back to us His tender love, wisdom, compassion, and friendship.

### *Questions for Reflection:*

- When you ponder the life of Jesus, who do you imagine were his ‘persons of reference’?
- Who in your life has been a role model or mentor to you? What qualities does this person carry? What knowledge and wisdom have I gleaned from this person?
- Who is your peer community? How has your peer community supported and encouraged you? How is this different and/or similar to role models and mentors in your life?