

STEPHEN MINISTRY

Listening, Caring, & Helping to Heal

Begun in 1975, Stephen Ministry is a one-to-one distinctively Christian lay caring ministry. University began its Stephen Ministry in the late 1990s. Eight new Stephen Ministers will soon be commissioned, joining 15 current Stephen Ministers and four leaders. We sat down with Nancy Andres (Director of Care and Wellness) and Rev. Dr. Paul Parks (Pastor of Care and Wellness) to find out more. We also asked some current Stephen Ministers about their experience.

By Laura Bray

Why do we have Stephen Ministry?

PP: God continuously calls upon his people to be sensitive to and care for persons in need. While this is an expectation for all of God's people it is also the primary focus for persons called to an intentional ministry of presence, listening and prayer during especially trying or challenging times in the life of an individual or family. Stephen Ministry is one of the most effective, time proven ways of enabling a congregation to create, sustain and provide a life changing ministry of caring.

What is Stephen Ministry?

PP: It is a formalized way of identifying and training persons with heart, a call and aptitude for a healing ministry of



presence, listening and prayer. Stephen Ministers are not counselors or therapists, but the work they do is very therapeutic. The ministry supports and encourages people on their journey of healing and renewed wellness.

PP: People! People from every walk of life, age, occupation or circumstance. Often in times of loss, people can become isolated and lose hope for the present, let alone the future. Their faith may be shaken as they face new realities.



Nancy Andres, Director of Care & Wellness

NA: Stephen Ministers are called care givers, and those we serve are called care receivers, but we know Jesus Christ is the cure giver. We keep our trust in Christ at the center of all caring relationships. Through worship, prayer, trust and scripture we depend on God to provide the hope for a prosperous future.

Who does the Stephen Ministry assist?

NA: We serve people whose lives have hit a speed bump, like death, illness, and divorce or job loss. People can benefit from someone to talk to in confidence, who is not in the middle of their forest. We tell people, “You don’t have to hurt alone”.

They may wonder, “How can the God that made all these promises and created everything seem to be so powerless or uncaring in what I am facing?” At such times having the caring, non-judgmental, prayerful presence of another can be life sustaining and transformational. Stephen Ministers are trained to be those people.

Who makes a good Stephen Minister?

NA: A person who has been in the congregation for at least two years, who loves the Lord and loves others. A person of high integrity, good character, and with the capacity to become a great listener.

PP: A person who has a heart for peo-

ple, a heart for God, and wants to be an expression of the body of Christ. A life-long learner who is appropriately curious about themselves and interested in others. One who believes they have been called by God to a ministry

es and ideas can be shared that help the Stephen Minister grow and inform the process of the caring relationship.

PP: Stephen Ministers are trained to listen. Listening is a skill that must be learned and continually developed.



Rev. Dr. Paul Parks, Pastor of Care and Wellness

of caring and have opened themselves and committed themselves to an ongoing process of learning and supervision in order to best serve others while continuing their own personal growth.

What type of training do Stephen Ministers receive?

NA: The training involves 65 hours of classroom interaction in addition to weekly reading assignments. The training is divided into modules that cover topics such as feelings, listening, and how to assist someone through serious illness or even death. After training, Stephen Ministers participate in continuing education and, twice a month, confidential peer group supervision where challeng-

Many people have never experienced being truly listened to, and when it occurs it can be profoundly helpful and, at times, transformative. They are trained to understand at a deeper level the dynamics that often accompany life's challenges and how to be helpful a helpful presence with others. They are trained to use, while maintaining confidentiality, the richness of knowledge and mutual support found in ongoing supervision.

What feedback do you receive

from care recipients?

NA: They're incredibly grateful. They become very close to their Stephen Ministers. They work together one hour,

once a week until the care receiver is strong enough to walk alone again. This may last as long as 12-15 months or as short as 90 days.

PP: Appreciation and often a sense of awe that a person of their church would care about them and would commit time and energy to their well-being. Sometimes several years pass and the person cared for recognizes and shares how important the ministry of caring was in their lives.

Why is Stephen Ministry

important at University?

NA: We have many people here at University; we are the size of a large town! Therefore, we must have trained people to care for all kinds of needs. Galatians 6 tells us, "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers." One example: a woman lost her husband of 30+ years and now doesn't know who she is. He has taken care of her for over 30 years, and she doesn't know how to go forward in public, how to go out to dinner alone, how to return to Sunday School. A Stephen Minister reaffirmed her strengths.

Bob Russo (current Stephen Minister): Stephen Ministry helps a church member to fulfill our church mission statement: helping people to look to Jesus and to look like Jesus. It also helps the congregation see how their gifts can be used in a caring ministry.

Bill Weiss (current Stephen Minister): I have witnessed God helping numerous people regain their joy again, begin "healing" from their emotional wounds, and taking positive steps towards engaging life again.

How do Stephen Ministers benefit

from the relationship?

Bill Weiss: My personal relationship with God has grown since becoming a Stephen Minister. Also, I am a more confident Christian in public.

Vickie Phelps: (current Stephen Ministry candidate) I feel I am becoming more of the person God is calling me to be. I am learning that words count! They can help or hurt, heal or wound a relationship. I am learning to listen and to see others as God sees them.

How does one become a Stephen Minister?

NA: Persons interested in becoming Stephen Ministers fill out an application, are interviewed twice, agree to a background check, and complete a spiritual gifts inventory before being accepted into the candidacy. One must then successfully complete the 65 hour training program and agree to the Stephen Minister's covenant.

PP: Many people who become Stephen Ministers have thought about doing so for many years. Some wait because the timing is not right. Others continue to discern if this is what God is really calling them to do. Many wonder if they're adequate for the task. Adequacy comes from training and ongoing supervision. /LB

To find out more about Stephen Ministry or to sign up to be a care giver or care recipient, contact Nancy Andres at the church office. A new class for care givers begins on September 19.

Watch the entire interview on our website at www.uchurch.tv