

STEPHEN MINISTRY at Redeemer

by Rev. Ashley Davis

Dr. Kenneth Haugk, who was a minister and also a clinical psychiatrist, developed Stephen Ministry for training lay members in his church to help meet the needs of his congregation. He was overwhelmed by the needs of his congregation on top of his responsibilities of running the church, preparing sermons and Sunday worship. The ministry took shape when brainstorming with seminary students who wanted to intern at his parish. It worked so well that Dr. Haugk and his wife (a psychiatric nurse and clinical social worker) eventually founded a ministry in St. Louis in 1975 that later became known as Stephen Ministry.

It may seem that with so many clergy, Church of the Redeemer would not need a Stephen Ministry, but in reality, most of the pastoral care of the church is handled and delegated by Fr. Benjamin. These needs range from one on one care, food and transportation issues, marital issues, hospitalizations, and grief. With over 500 people affiliated with the church, Fr. Benjamin alongside volunteers like me cannot effectively manage and care for as many needs as our body has. Inevitably, some folks fall through the cracks and don't receive the care they need.

Sometimes people in the body need practical help to get by, like receiving meals through an illness, or being given groceries to get to the end of a particularly hard month. Often our friends can help us get through rough periods, but these are give-and-take relationships where we care for one another. Sometimes when we are struggling with a loss, we feel like we are burdening our friends too much and then isolate because of fear, shame, or insecurity about our neediness. Pastoral care focuses primarily on the spiritual needs behind a problem, like a need for confession and repentance or spiritual guidance. Others might need the help of a therapist to dig deep into rooted problems often formed over time that lead to the same disappointing outcomes—feelings of depression or anxiety, or the consequences of unhealthy decisions. As a method of care for the Body, Stephen Ministry specifically affords care to people who are hurting and going through a defined loss. They do not receive care indefinitely, but are offered it as long as the care receiver needs their presence. Though it is similar to the kinds of relationships mentioned above, it is just the Stephen minister caring for the care receiver, removing the element of mutual care as in a friendship. Because of the extensive training the ministers receive and the confidentiality of the relationship, a Stephen minister offers more care than a friend may be able to, and is then able to refer the care receiver to additional help from a mental health provider or priest if needed.



Stephen Ministry describes itself this way: “a proven and effective way to organize, equip, and supervise a team of congregation members—called Stephen ministers—to provide high-quality, one-to-one, Christ-centered care to people in the congregation and the community experiencing life difficulties.” Trained Stephen ministers offer a ministry of presence (being with someone) when they are hurting. Often when someone experiences a loss (of a job, separation, death of a loved one, miscarriage), they can benefit from a Stephen minister spending time with them once a week to listen and offer Christ’s love and peace. Many people feel a deeper connection both to the church community and to Jesus through the care of their Stephen minister during a difficult time when they often feel isolated and lonely. Anyone who is experiencing a loss (loss of employment, divorce, death in the family, infertility, miscarriage, relocation), can receive help from a Stephen minister. If you know of someone who you think needs this kind of one-on-one care, please contact Fr. Benjamin Wall or Rev. Ashley Davis. We would initiate contact with that person and interview him or her to determine if a Stephen minister would be appropriate, or if we need to refer that person for other assistance.

Stephen Ministry requires dedication and commitment. The initial training is 40 hours, with ongoing supervision groups and additional training that will continue every other week. Stephen ministers commit to serving for two years. Along with being dependable, they also need to be able to keep confidentiality, show compassion and empathy, and refrain from judging or being critical of care receivers. Since these ministers act as the hands and feet of Jesus, a close and consistent relationship with Christ is essential. Though the time commitment is significant, many of these individuals say that the training they received through this process helps them in their jobs and other relationships.

Right now Stephen Ministry at Redeemer is in need of both Stephen ministers and care receivers, as well as people willing to be on the leadership team. Perhaps you feel that your gifts don't lend themselves to being a Stephen minister, but you have gifts in teaching, administration, or communication that would be helpful in serving on the leadership team. Reach out to me (Rev. Ashley Davis) or Fr. Benjamin Wall if you are interested in finding out more information about this ministry or to learn how you might refer a friend or lend your own hand to this essential work.

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Simple Gifts (key of G) old Shaker hymn

'Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free; 'Tis the gift to come down where we ought to be; And when we find ourselves in the place just right, 'Twill be in the valley of love and delight. When true simplicity is gained, To bow and to bend we shan't be a-shamed To turn, turn will be our delight, 'Till by turning, turning we come round right.