



**Sermons preached by Stephen Ministers
Scripture – 1 Corinthians 12:4-11
Sunday, February 17, 2019**

Opening Remarks by Jill Getty

Stephen Ministry is a national organization started in 1975 by Kenneth Haugk to train laypeople to be Christian caregivers. There are more than 13,000 congregations enrolled in Stephen Ministry which includes 180 denominations in all 50 states; 10 Canadian Provinces and 30 countries. Over 75,000 people have trained to be Stephen Leaders at the national level and over 600,000 people have trained to become Stephen Ministers in the local church.

This past week, our office staff researched to find out exactly when Stephen Ministry started at Westminster and found that in 1984, Associate Pastor, Jim Bennett, introduced Stephen Ministry to our church. For 35 years, our congregation has chosen to nurture this important behind the scenes, peer supervised, lay ministry that has brought countless volunteer hours of free, one on one, face to face, confidential, care, love and support to our congregation.

There have been many members who have taken the 50 hour Stephen Ministry training course in our congregation to become Stephen Ministers. And through the years, there have been several of our Stephen Ministers who trained at the National Level to become Stephen Leaders.

If you have ever been a Stephen Minister or Stephen Leader in our congregation – in the past – no matter how long ago – please stand. Presently we have 16 active Stephen Ministers in our congregation whose names are listed on the bookmarks you received at the door. Would all of our Active Stephen Ministers please stand.

Stephen Ministers are NOT professional counselors, psychologists or psychiatrists. Stephen Ministers are lay people trained in 50 hours of Christian caregiving and listening skills so that they can compassionately walk alongside someone going through a difficult crisis, a life transition, a stressful illness, or a time of grief and loss. This is best done in face to face meetings but we also use the phone, emails and text messages when needed.

Stephen Ministers keep names of Care Receivers and conversations with them confidential. It is a special relationship in which care receivers can share their personal concerns, fears, worries, griefs and hopes in a safe space. Let's listen as three of our Stephen Ministers, one of which is also a Stephen Leader, share some of their thoughts about this ministry with us today.

Stephen Ministry Sermon by Bill Nace

When I was asked to do a sermon about “What Being a Stephen Minister Means to Me”, I began to think about the individuals I’ve met over the years, those I prayed with, those I cried with and, yes, laughed with. Two key words came to my mind.

The first word is – OPPORTUNITIES. Most importantly, being a Stephen Minister presented me OPPORTUNITIES to experience God’s presence...to feel or find what some call a “thin-place”, that point when God feels especially close to us. Experiencing God’s presence occurred in a family room of an individual’s home, a living room of a local retirement facility, a small apartment with a great big dog, and rooms here at Westminster – all of these were “thin-places” where God’s presence became real. Certainly these moments did not happen every month or with everyone!...but for ME on occasion – IT HAPPENED!! Being a Stephen Minister put me in these ordinary spaces – during very special times...and gave me the OPPORTUNITY to feel blessed by God’s presence working within and between us.

The second word describing “What Stephen Ministry Means to Me” is CHALLENGES. When my Stephen Ministry experience started several years ago, I was feeling my spiritual foundation (those basic premises of what was in my gut) to be a little “shaky”. I had moved into the second decade of retirement...life was continuing to change.

Through the ensuing months, it became clearer to me that these quiet conversations with care receivers, the back and forth questions, the prayers...all were challenging me to think deeper...to dig down inside myself. How did I feel about death? Where is God? Close to me or up there someplace? What should I pray for when in a particular situation? I just could not sit there in a serious discussion and say...”Don’t know, hadn’t thought about it recently.” As Stephen Ministers, we are trained to be COMPASSIONATE LISTENERS...NOT ADVICE GIVERS. SHOULD is not a part of our vocabulary!!! However, when someone as special as your Care Receiver asks you a question, that deserves a thoughtful and personal response. RIGHT? The CHALLENGE hit me between the eyes. How should I respond? God started to whisper, new ideas came to mind, I started to think about issues not thought about in a long time...if ever. I’m still working through some of this...but I have made progress thanks to the very special, loving environment God creates during Stephen Ministry sessions. I’m convinced that I would not have recognized or considered these personal CHALLENGES if I had not become a Stephen Minister.

I believe my over-all Stephen Ministry experience presented me with both OPPORTUNITIES and CHALLENGES. God’s love and direction led me to experience new situations and encouraged me to think about new concepts I never would have imagined if I had not become a Stephen Minister. Are any of you good folks open to new OPPORTUNITIES...exciting CHALLENGES?? Think about joining us – the Stephen Ministry at Westminster. It will enrich and grow your spiritual life. Thank you!!!

Stephen Ministry Sermon by Melissa Stabler

For more than 30 years I have been a dietitian at the VA hospital. I enjoy helping people, so Stephen Ministry seemed like a natural fit.

My journey started as it should have, with an Act of Kindness of a fellow Deacon and unbeknown to me, a Stephen Minister. We were going out to serve Home Communion one Sunday shortly after my Father had passed away. The Deacon offered her condolences and offered me the Stephen Ministry Series of books called “Journeying through Grief”.

The 4 booklets are intended to be read at various times during the 1st year after a loss. The books described the emotions I was feeling and confirmed that everyone grieves differently. I found that comforting and have shared the booklets with many family and friends since.

I shared them with my mother, a kind and caring lady who had weathered a lot of storms in her day. She looked at the title and said that's ridiculous "Everyone knows how to grieve". Of course, that made me furious. I told her they are quick, easy reads and have nice quotes, and inspirations ... JUST DO IT.

She complied and her Aha moment came in the last book of the series, near the 1-year anniversary of my Dad's death.... My mom was a woman who loved quotes... Her favorite quote was from Henry Scott Holland "What is Death".

"I have only slipped away into the next room, I am I and you are you. Whatever we were to each other; that we still are" that was her comforting Peace.

Those books also had another impact on my [faith?] journey. I was so enamored by the books, I shared them with a co-worker at the VA, our Hospice /Palliative Care Nurse. I told her about the Stephen Ministry program and she was hooked. She wanted to become a Stephen Minister and encouraged me to do it with her. Our wonderful Jill Getty was recruiting for the next training class and was more than receptive to have my friend and members from her church, Brandywine Valley Baptist join us.

I was still hesitant about becoming a Stephen Minister ... Not comfortable with Public Prayers, as I am a quiet Christian. Jill and Ellie Fury quickly put those fears to rest.

As a Stephen Minister, I have seen my care receivers endure challenging situations. As a result, I have been privileged to see God's Grace in action and the amazing strength and faith of those who receive it.... That is one of the biggest Blessings for me.

I'd like to end with a quote that is really the mantra of Stephen Ministry. I guess I have my mom's love of quotes. This is from Christian Care Giving a Way of Life.

Christians are Responsible for Care (Planting & Watering)
God is Responsible for the Cure (Growth)

Stephen Ministry Sermon by Jerry Spilecki

I first heard the term "Stephen Minister" in the late 80's. My Mother-in-Law, Jane Kline, was a Stephen Minister at Westminster. Knowing her as someone who was typically doing something to help someone else, I surmised that the Stephen Ministry Program was all about helping people in need. Simple enough right?

But later I learned, first hand, what Stephen Ministers are and what they do, because I had one.

Early in 1997, following the death of our 18-year-old son Jay, I entered a dark forest. I had little personal experience with "grief". I did not know how to cope in a healthy way. I found myself lost emotionally trying to keep strong on the outside with my head up. Each member of our family was grieving, in their own unique ways. I had to be strong for them, I thought, so I tried to "be there" for them as best I could. And, I had a job to do. It carried great responsibility for others which took considerable energy and effort each day. I would say to myself at night while trying to fall asleep, "How long can I keep this up?" My physical, emotional, and spiritual sinking. Worst of all, though I was physically present at home, work, and in social settings my emotional presence was

absent. And I could not find God in those days. God was always there but I could not connect. And that connection is exactly what I needed.

Someone asked me to consider having a Stephen Minister. How could I spare the time for one more activity? Where and how could I begin to tell my story? I did not have to deliberate long as I knew inside that I was desperate so I agreed. I soon received a call and a man I had seen in church, but did not know, introduced himself. We arranged to meet, over lunch. I talked about Jay, the sports he loved, and other facts. My Stephen Minister was kind and he **listened** to my story. He listened intently, acknowledging my feelings and what I was going through without judgement. Very soon, I felt safe with him, not holding back in telling where I was at the time. Then he asked me if he could pray. I agreed and he prayed a simple, but reassuring prayer that God was with us. It was not very long before we prayed together at the end of each visit.

We met weekly for several months. As I was feeling “whole” again we met less frequently, though he was available whenever I needed him. With his help I was able to see the problems and conditions that were impairing my ability to return to the “mainstream” of life. I felt more connected with my family, my co-workers, and friends. When I faced a problem or setback, we talked about it. He did not impose what he felt was the best solution but rather helped me to see the approach that was right for me. As our caring relationship drew to a close, I knew I had made the right decision to accept a Stephen Minister.

There were difficult days. However, with my Stephen Minister’s presence, encouragement, and love, I found my connection with God again and was able to find my way out of that dark forest.

I chose to become a Stephen Minister because of my experience. With God’s help, and the help and encouragement of my fellow Stephen Ministers, I want to do the same for others who are needing help as I was.

Ending Remarks by Jill Getty

Over the years, Stephen Ministry has helped transform the internal caring and nurturing of our congregation. Imagine the compound effect that 35 years of lay people being trained in this type of ministry can have in a congregation.

Stephen Ministry gives support to the ministry of our pastoral staff as our Pastors in the past and in the present have all enhanced this ministry with their backing and undergirding as they realize that no pastor is able to do all the ministry of the church by himself or herself.

The scripture that was read today reminds us that there are varieties of gifts but the same Spirit. We praise God today that many people have answered the call to be Stephen Ministers in our church. And we praise God that many members have not had to walk their painful roads alone. All people go through times of difficulties and pain; no one escapes life without dealing with some sort of challenging situation. Our hope is that when we are suffering due to life circumstances that we would be willing to have a Stephen Minister walk with us during that crucial time. And our prayer for each caring relationship is that God would bring spiritual healing, peace and comfort for those in need. And we pray that the living water of the Holy Spirit will shower us in times of heartache to renew, regenerate, restore, mend, alleviate, repair and soothe our troubles.

If you would like to consider Stephen Ministry support in your life, please contact me (Jill Getty at 302-220-7081).

Stephen Ministers' Prayer
By Chris Waisanen

Dearest Lord, make us an instrument of Your peace.

Let us have peace in our hearts, serenity in our homes and peace throughout our world.

Please guide our Stephen Ministers to facilitate Your healing powers;

to listen, to see, to understand, to guide them onto the path You have chosen.

Where there is darkness, let there be light; where there is sorrow, let there be joy;

where there is pain, let it be eased; where there is change, may we find stability.

Give our Stephen Ministers the capacity to listen without judging;

to hear in total confidence; to share each care receiver's concerns with prayer and guidance from You.

In the name of our Savior, Who gave us this prayer in the Sermon on the Mount, praying together:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.