

Ten Reasons to Become a Stephen Minister:

Reason #10: *You will learn to turn danger into opportunity*

The Chinese word for crisis is made from a combination of two other characters: danger and opportunity. Every crisis, whether it is a divorce, the loss of a spouse, sudden unemployment, or even a much-desired pregnancy provides both an opportunity for growth as well as a danger of choosing destructive solutions. The care of a dedicated, trained, Christ-centered Stephen Minister can help a person in crisis find equilibrium and wholeness.

Reason #9: *Stephen Ministers are skilled caregivers*

Stephen Ministers receive 50 hours of training before they are commissioned and assigned to care receivers. They learn skills such as listening, identifying and expressing feelings, setting boundaries, and being assertive. They also learn about specific challenges such as hospitalization, divorce, grief, and depression. Stephen Ministers feel well prepared to walk alongside people in crisis, whether it is with an assigned care receiver, or in their own relationships with family, friends, and coworkers.

Reason #8: *Stephen Ministers experience the joy of fellowship with one another*

Stephen Ministers meet about an hour a week with their care-receivers, but they also meet twice a month in small groups with other Stephen Ministers. Here, in a confidential manner, they share the joys and challenges of their caring relationships, pray for one another, offer encouragement and practical help, and relate to one another in a deep and spiritual way. The bonds of friendship and commitment are strong and positive.

Reason #7: *Stephen Ministers learn to listen*

Most people think of listening as a simple, natural, and passive activity, but it is actually a powerful caregiving tool. Using Jesus as our model, Stephen Ministers learn the skill of active listening, which involves commitment, patience, and attention to body

language. Stephen Ministers learn to listen for more than just words. They seek true understanding and empathy.

Reason #6: Stephen Ministers are assertive caregivers

Stephen Ministers are trained to "speak the truth in love." Christian assertiveness is a positive and constructive way of relating that respects others and ourselves. Stephen Ministers learn to recognize and avoid aggressive behaviors such as belittling and manipulation, and to avoid passive behaviors such as withdrawing and relinquishing rights. By learning to behave assertively, Stephen Ministers become more aware of God's will for their lives and more aware of the needs of others.

Reason #5: Stephen Ministers are caregivers, not curegivers

Stephen Ministers are not therapists or problem solvers; they are caregivers. Only God can bring about healing, forgiveness, and hope. Stephen Ministers are trained to listen and pray, to be reliable and nonjudgmental, and to help care receivers express their feelings. Focusing on caring and not on curing means Stephen Ministers never pressure a care receiver to "get better." Stephen Ministers are there for as long as the process takes, and trust that God works in God's own time to provide wholeness.

Reason #4: Stephen Ministers feel needed (because they are!)

Stephen Ministry was created by a minister named Kenneth Haugk who realized that there are not enough pastors available to provide patient, long-term care to people in crisis. By training lay ministers in his congregation, he was able to ensure that the newly widowed, those going through divorce, people with chronic or terminal illness, and many, many others were able to meet regularly with a compassionate listener. Stephen Ministry benefits our pastors, our congregation, and our community.

Reason #3: Stephen Ministry skills apply in other relationships

Stephen Ministers are trained to listen, to recognize, accept and express feelings, to behave assertively, and to depend on God for healing and change. They often find themselves using these skills in dealing with spouses, children, coworkers, clients, and in-laws. Imagine how a work place could be transformed by a single person who has learned to listen without judgment!

Reason #2: Stephen Ministry is a life changing Experience

Have you ever avoided approaching a person who was hurting because you "didn't know what to say?" We all have. But Stephen Ministers know what to say and how to act. They are trained to respond compassionately and respectfully when others need them, and they feel confident in their care giving skills. Stephen Ministers are the first to respond when neighbors, family members, and coworkers need someone to talk to.

Reason #1: Jesus commanded it

"My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you." We are called to "bear one another's burdens," and to "accept one another." Jesus wanted us to be doers of the Word, not just hearers. Stephen Ministers are in the trenches every day, caring for those who are hurting, bringing warmth and kindness to those who feel alone, creating an atmosphere where trust and respect can lead to wholeness. Stephen Ministers answer the call of Jesus.

Written by B. Franco
First Presbyterian Church
Oceanside, California

We are all called to care! Stephen Ministry classes are held periodically.

Contact Jan Mullinix at jlm.jan3@verizon.net for more information. Applications are located in the narthex and the annex.