



St. Joseph's Stephen Ministers -- A Quiet Support for Others

Stephen Ministers offer highly trained, lay support for people in all kinds of crises such as loss of employment, death, divorce, change of location, terminal illness, and other problems. They meet, either in person, by phone, or virtually, to walk along side, someone who is struggling. They give their Care Receivers the time and space with the Lord's help to figure out what is best for them. The pandemic has been a challenge, but the Stephen Ministers have seen miracles, watched their Care Receivers overcome great difficulties, and become closer to the Lord in the process. As a group they have given over 300 hours of service this last year.

As a Stephen Leader I have seen the ministers grow in their own faith walks as their prayers deepen, and they see how Christ, the Caregiver, touches lives. This ministry has also deepened my faith in the Lord's love for us all.

Because all Stephen Ministers maintain confidentiality, we will not identify them or the Care Receivers in any way, but below are their observations about this powerful ministry.

My care receiver has had a year of development. She went from being constantly depressed, feeling hopeless, angry at God, angry at circumstances, questioning her faith, unable to go through the day without crying to a person that is able to roll with the punches and adjust as needed to circumstances that are out of her control. **We did that together. We worked through the hard times, said extra prayers for the needed miracles, and found the ability to move through it together with God.**

The Holy Spirit called me to become a Stephen's minister. I thought it was so I could help people in need, and it was, but God changed the simple plan from helping to a deeper faith in Him. **My prayer life is stronger, more fulfilling, I have a better understanding of God's ability to grant miracles where none could be seen,** and a realization that life without Him is an empty shell.

I have seen my Care Receiver who was unable to go out of the house alone, or to drive, or to simply go on with life **evolve from crying while just talking about memories -- precious memories -- to someone who's at peace and understands that life is constantly changing even unto death.** Processing her inevitable grief has been a mental struggle, but strong faith has helped her go on one-day-at-a-time, and never without prayer. By God's grace she is now looking at "life" and saying "I can" "I should" "I will do that on my own". **I myself, have felt peace while growing in my faith, that, I must say, is a result of having been in my Care Receiver's path as she has experienced grief.** There is a kind of peace that is just felt, a feeling that "all is good", that's the feeling I have felt most

regularly, my life has been fulfilled as I/we have dealt with loss, sadness, and change together. I have sought God in all I do and have learned more about how prayer helps.

Listening is a big part of this ministry, and I assure you that I never knew it could be mastered (I'm not there yet) and **I try to keep it in mind always, whether I'm in the SM role, or as a wife, parent, friend and lately at work.** I am forever grateful for this training and the gifts it has brought to my life.

I have had the privilege to walk beside a very prayerful, faith-filled woman as she navigated the many life-altering challenges she faced. I was able to encourage her, cry with her, listen, ask questions and together ask God to be close to her on this journey. **Together we prayed, experienced miracles of so many prayers answered in the most amazing ways, and thanked God for this relationship.** I believe she enjoyed the companionship and listening ear of someone who was not family or friend. She could share without hesitation because it was confidential and she knew I wanted God's best for her. **She became more confident, more grateful, less stressed, able to laugh again and could see the future as hopeful, trusting in God's plan and God's time.**

I have had many positive changes to my spiritual journey by participating in this ministry. **I have learned to pray more specifically, constantly and selflessly.** I also am more compassionate from sharing another's burdens. I have learned to listen more and ask the Holy Spirit to guide my responses much more often. I have felt a closer connection to the Emmaus Story by journeying with a fellow parishioner. It has given me an avenue to share my gift of caring for another who is outside of my usual circle of friends, family and acquaintances.

Also on a more personal growth level, **I have experienced a rare community experience through the training and follow-up meetings.** The self awareness and spiritual growth that has resulted from the care and prayers of my fellow Stephen Ministers and Care Leader has helped me to become closer to God and be more able to navigate all my relationships.

The Lord has brought my care receiver to a realization that **she can make changes in her life. She's not helpless**, even if she feels like so many things are preventing her from making progress.

Meeting her for the first time I was nearly overwhelmed by fear and by the thought, "Who am I that this person is going to let me into their pain and sorrow? What can I possibly offer?" Over the months this fear has changed into gratitude. Entering the darkest moments of someone's life is deeply humbling. **And watching God work His healing in her life, in ways I could never have imagined, makes it clear that He is the Healer. What has being a Stephen's Minister taught me? That the important thing is to show up, to love, and to listen, and that is all God needs to do His work.**

St Teresa of Avila says *"Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body. Christ has no body now on earth but yours."*

The Stephen Ministers hope to train up more Ministers in Fall, 2021. Both men and women are welcome. Or if you would like to have a Stephen Minister, contact the parish staff or Sally Stuber 208-457-2234.