

A Stephen Minister Story

Real Ministry, Real Difference

Having served as a Stephen Minister myself, I always enjoy talking with other Stephen Ministers. When I met Steve Feith, I was moved by his story of discipleship, ministry, and transformation. So I got his permission to share it with you.

—Joel Bretscher | Program Director | Stephen Ministries St. Louis

Joel Tell me about your journey to becoming a Stephen Minister.

Steve I'm a retired naval officer in Fernandina Beach, Florida. I'm married, with two children and four grandchildren. I love to ride my motorcycle and play golf.

I was sitting in church one Sunday several years ago, and our Stephen Leaders announced they would be starting a new Stephen Minister training class in a few months and were inviting men and women to consider becoming part of this ministry. It sounded interesting, but my first thought was, *I don't know about this—I'm just not into emotional stuff.*

As a senior Navy officer, I constantly had people coming to me

with problems—all kinds of problems—and it was my job to fix them. So feelings often went into the bottom drawer of the dresser. My approach was always: Just tell me the facts so I can fix the problem and move on to the next one.

But after that worship service, I found myself stopping by the Stephen Ministry table and picking up information. I took it home, read it, and stuck it in a drawer. Then, for the next few months, the Holy Spirit just kept hitting me on the back of the head. And I kept saying, "Go away. I don't have time for this. It's not for me." But the Holy Spirit kept working on me.

So I finally got the Stephen Ministry information out of the drawer, took a deep breath, and filled out the



application. I answered every question truthfully, but I was thinking, *Here I am, a cigar-smoking, straight-talking motorcycle rider. They're not going to want me. I might be a little bit too rough for this.*

Well, I turned in the application, they asked me to meet with them, and we talked about Stephen Ministry. Later they called and said, "We think you'd make a great Stephen Minister. We'd like you to join our training." So I sort of looked up to God and said, "Okay, Lord, if you really think someone like me can do something like this, I'm yours. I'll give it a go."

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What happened next?

I dedicated myself to Stephen Minister training, and I learned a lot. I discovered that you can learn to listen, you can learn about feelings, and you can learn to be a better caregiver. I learned that God is the curegiver, not me. My job as a Stephen Minister is to listen and care—to really try to empathize and understand what the person is going through—and leave the fixing up to God.

That last part was tough for me because I've always been a fix-it kind of person. But I've found that it sure takes the pressure off to step back and let God do the fixing. It's also freeing, and it's helped me be more in tune with others. I no longer see people in terms of problems needing to be fixed. I see them as people who are going through a difficult time and need me to walk with them and reflect Christ to them.



"I've always been a fix-it kind of person," says Steve, who retired from the Navy with the rank of Commander. "But I've found that it sure takes the pressure off to step back and let God do the fixing."

How many care receivers have you had?

Since I became a Stephen Minister four years ago, I've had six care receivers—all men and one at a time, which is how Stephen Ministry works. My care receivers represented a wide range of ages and life situations, and two of them were men with a terminal illness.

You've really been doing some significant ministry. Without breaking confidentiality, can you tell me a little more about serving as a Stephen Minister to the two men who were dying?

I had never cared for anyone who was dying before, but with my training, with the Lord's presence, and with a lot of prayer, I found that I could. In each of these relationships, I would meet with my care receiver once a week, and I found that both of these men were very receptive to my ministry. They each needed someone to talk to, someone who



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I can't tell you what an honor and a privilege it is to walk with someone in their final days, to have them recount their life story to you, to see Jesus at work in their lives. Both men told me at various times how much my visits meant to them, so I know they benefited a lot. But I've benefited too. It's been very rewarding.

Men are sometimes reluctant to reach out for help or to accept help. Can you tell me more about how men could benefit from having a Stephen Minister?

I would encourage any man going through something difficult—divorce, loss of a job, death of a loved one, financial difficulties, a serious illness—to be open to having a Stephen Minister. Men are often conditioned to be strong and self-reliant, so we put a wall around ourselves and don't talk about what's going on inside. But talking with a Stephen

Minister really will help. I've seen the difference it can make.

Your Stephen Minister is going to respect you. He's not going to tell you what to do; he's not going to judge you. He's there to listen—to walk alongside, to help you talk things out and work things through. And it's totally confidential. No one will even know you have a Stephen Minister, and your Stephen Minister won't share anything you say.

And remember, it's not just the two of you in that caring relationship—the Lord's there too, and that's where the healing comes in. It's God who will help you take hold of what's buried deep inside and bring it out and kick it out the door.

So I would recommend Stephen Ministry to any man—or woman—during a difficult time.

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What would you say to encourage other men to become Stephen Ministers?

I'd say, if you think God's calling you to this ministry, if you even have an inkling that you might want to be a Stephen Minister, give it a shot! The training is fantastic. It took an old nub like me, rounded off the edges, and taught me how to relate in a more caring way. You're going to be very well trained, and you'll have the Lord right there shoulder to shoulder with you.

And if you're like me—and you're not a real touchy-feely person—you can *still* be a good Stephen Minister. You just need to be willing

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to listen with the heart of Jesus to someone who's going through a difficult time. Stephen Ministry is about one man supporting another in the name of the Lord.

It feels so good to be able to really help someone. The rewards you get from being a Stephen Minister, personally and spiritually—I just can't tell you how great they are. You have to experience it for yourself.

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How are you different now than you were before Stephen Ministry?

Well, for one thing, my wife no longer tells me I don't listen. So *she* appreciates my Stephen

Minister training too. You really do use these skills in all areas of life.

Five years ago I never would have told you I'd be capable of doing this kind of ministry, but the training gave me the tools and confidence I needed. It's shaped my faith too. I've learned to listen to the Holy Spirit and rely on God, I've grown in my ability to pray, and I can really feel Christ's presence when I'm with my care receivers.

Being a Stephen Minister has allowed me to serve the Lord in ways I never imagined I could. It's helped me to grow my heart to be more like Jesus, to become more patient, caring, and understanding. Stephen Ministry has helped me become a better person.



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Stephen Ministry

Stephen Ministry is a lay caring ministry being used by thousands of congregations to increase care and outreach to hurting people.

Through Stephen Ministry, congregations are able to equip and empower a team of laypeople—Stephen Ministers—who provide one-to-one, Christ-centered care to people experiencing grief, unemployment, hospitalization, divorce, financial stress, a terminal illness, or other life difficulties.

Visit www.stephenministries.org to learn more about Stephen Ministry and to watch online video stories about the difference Stephen Ministers are making in people's lives.