



# How Stephen Ministry Benefits Pastors

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*Here are 16 ways pastors have told us that Stephen Ministry has helped them personally and professionally.*

## 1 Shared Ministry

Pastors no longer bear alone the responsibility for providing care to the entire congregation. They have a team of caregivers—well organized, well trained, highly motivated and committed, and well supervised—to assist with providing pastoral care. One pastor said, “For the first time in 37 years I am surrounded by a team of people who are as committed to pastoral care of the congregation as I am.”

## 2 High-Quality Lay Leadership

Pastors can rely on well-trained laypeople to carry out many of the day-to-day operations of Stephen Ministry. The Leader’s Training Course (LTC) equips laypeople to function at a very high level of leadership (as Stephen Leaders) so the main workload for this ministry doesn’t end up on the pastor’s shoulders.

Lay Stephen Leaders do a high-quality job because they are well trained, have extensive resources (in their *Leader’s Manual*), receive ongoing support (from the consultation staff at Stephen Ministries and a special section of our website), and are highly motivated, knowing they can make a significant contribution to their church’s ministry.

## 3 Frees the Pastor to Focus on What Only the Pastor Can Do

Stephen Ministers will never replace the ordained clergy because there are certain tasks, duties, and responsibilities that an ordained clergy person is uniquely trained, qualified, and called to perform. However, caring ministry is one area of ministry that pastors can delegate to or share with laypeople who have the right gifts, training, and commitment. Pastors who let Stephen Ministers help shoulder the caregiving load find they have more time to spend on the key duties or specific caregiving situations that only pastors are uniquely equipped or called to perform.

## 4 Multiplies Ministry

Pastors can only be in one place at a time, but they can multiply their reach through a team of well-trained and organized lay caregivers. The pastor at one smaller congregation with Stephen Ministry kept careful records and reported that for every hour of time he invested in Stephen Ministry, seven hours of caregiving resulted. He considered his involvement in Stephen Ministry to be one of the best and most highly leveraged uses of his time.

## **5 Reassurance That People Are Receiving Quality Care**

Pastors know of many more people with needs for care than they can minister to by themselves. Sometimes pastors feel guilty that they aren't providing more care, or they burn themselves out trying to meet the overwhelming needs. Stephen Ministry provides pastors the reassurance that people who need care are receiving it.

As one Stephen Series pastor put it, "Since we began Stephen Ministry 15 years ago, I sleep better at night. Right now, for example, I know there are 23 people receiving care—very high-quality care—on a weekly basis from our Stephen Ministers. As a pastor, I simply don't have another 23 hours a week to provide that care myself. So it's a joy and comfort to know that people in need are receiving that care from our Stephen Ministers."

## **6 Moves Members beyond the "It's the Pastor's Job" Mindset**

Sometimes people fall into the mindset that all ministry is the pastor's job. Stephen Ministry is a great way to help congregation members recognize that God calls all his people—not just the ordained clergy—to be involved in ministry. One Stephen Ministry pastor said, "Stephen Ministry transforms a congregation from a consumer group that employs a pastor into a community mobilized for ministry."

## **7 Clergy Health**

When pastors are overworked and stretched too thin, their personal health suffers. They put in too many hours, they don't get adequate rest or recreation, and their immune systems, undermined by the overload, are more susceptible to illness. Because congregation members expect and need pastoral care in a crisis, pastors find it hard to say "no" or reduce their hours of pastoral care.

When Stephen Ministers come alongside pastors to help provide pastoral care, pastors know that people in need are receiving high-quality Christian care. This means that pastors can reduce the number of hours they spend in this area, focusing on those people whose needs truly require the pastor's attention. Stephen Ministers thus help pastors balance their lives more successfully and allow them to take the necessary time to care for themselves and their own health.

## **8 The Joy of Equipping the Saints**

Stephen Ministry provides a wonderful means to help pastors "equip the saints for the work of ministry" (Ephesians 4:11–12). Stephen Ministry pastors report that they find great joy in helping laypeople recognize that God is calling them to ministry, helping them to identify and nurture their gifts, and then seeing them use those gifts in meaningful ministry.

## **9 Care and Support for Pastors**

By being closely involved in caring ministry, lay Stephen Leaders and Stephen Ministers become keenly aware of the pressures and difficulties pastors face. As a result, they become very supportive and protective of their pastors and their pastors' families. Many pastors have described how, when they or their spouses have been going through a difficult time, they have received care from Stephen Ministers in formal caring relationships.

More commonly, pastors tell us how they and their families have benefited in less formal ways from the supportive care of Stephen Leaders and Stephen Ministers. Stephen Leaders and Stephen Ministers become strong supporters, advocates, and defenders of their pastors.

## **10 Time-Saver**

Stephen Ministers save time for pastors by making many of the caring visits that pastors otherwise would need to make. These time savings go beyond simply the number of caregiving hours because most of the visits Stephen Ministers make are house calls that involve commuting time to and from the hospital, home, or convalescent center where the care receiver is located. In some areas, the commuting time can approach or even exceed the actual visitation time. So Stephen Ministers free up time for pastors—the time that would have been spent on the caring visits and the travel time as well.

## **11 Training Effective Lay Leaders**

The purpose of Stephen Minister training is to equip laypeople to serve as Stephen Ministers. A side benefit is that the training increases the involvement and commitment level of laypeople.

One Stephen Ministry pastor said, "We've had Stephen Ministry for ten years, and you'd be hard-pressed to find an elder or a deacon active in our body who has not been through our Stephen Ministry training. You'd have a hard time finding a Sunday school teacher who has not been through Stephen Ministry training. We've trained more than 100 Stephen Ministers, and I like to think that all are 'actively serving' in some capacity—whether as a Stephen Minister, as an elder, as a Sunday school teacher, or in another ministry. Our congregation recognizes that the people best prepared to serve anywhere are those who have received Stephen Ministry training."

## **12 Spiritual Growth of Members**

One goal many pastors have is that each member of the congregation will grow spiritually. Stephen Ministry accomplishes spiritual growth for members through activities that draw the Stephen Ministers closer to Christ. One such vital spiritual activity is prayer. A good Stephen Minister has to be a frequent pray-er. As Stephen Ministers observe God working in the lives of care receivers, they appreciate more deeply God's awesome power and incredible love for his people.

## 13 Help in a Crisis

Stephen Ministers have played key roles in caring for those deeply affected by natural or human-caused disasters, such as tornadoes, floods, Hurricane Sandy, the Newtown school shootings, or the 9/11 terrorist attacks. When events of this magnitude occur, churches are overwhelmed with needs for care. Numerous pastors have told us how helpful it has been to be able to quickly mobilize scores of Stephen Ministers—currently active as well as retired—to assist in providing much-needed care in and around the congregation in the aftermath of a crisis.

## 14 More Care-Conscious Congregation

Congregation members sometimes have the unrealistic expectation that the pastor will automatically know who in the congregation needs care. If a need goes undiscovered, blame falls on the pastor. As Stephen Ministry permeates a congregation, members come to understand that they all share in the responsibility of recognizing who needs care and helping to connect them to the care they need. More and more people are on the lookout for and know how to respond when they encounter people in need of care—not only members of the congregation but also people who have no church home. People in Stephen Ministry congregations often talk about the warm, caring climate in their congregation.

## 15 Training Applicable to Other Ministries

Many pastors who have attended a Leader's Training Course find that the Stephen Series resources, training, structure, and systematic approach adapt well to other ministries in the congregation. As one pastor summed it up: "The skills and tools I received at the LTC will impact my ministry far beyond just Stephen Ministry. I wish I had attended the LTC years ago!"

Many pastors feel the same way about Stephen Minister training. Pastors often tell us that the practical, Christ-centered, psychologically sound training Stephen Ministers receive surpasses the caregiving training they received in seminary.

## 16 High Quality and Greater Accountability

Because they are ultimately responsible for the care in a congregation, pastors appreciate how the Stephen Series system safeguards the quality of care people receive. Stephen Ministers are carefully selected and well trained. They receive their caregiving assignments from the pastor or another Stephen Leader, and they participate in twice-monthly peer supervision. If a person's needs exceed what is appropriate for a lay caregiver, he or she is referred to professional care. Pastors can feel confident that their Stephen Ministers will provide people with the right type of high-quality care.