



Stephen Ministry at Greensboro Urban Ministry

STEPHEN MINISTRY IN ACTION

“Stephen Ministry is the glue that is helping many of our guests put the pieces of their lives back together,” said Chaplain Frank Dew of Greensboro Urban Ministry in Greensboro, North Carolina. Helping individuals and families break the cycle of homelessness and poverty is a difficult but rewarding assignment. In this setting where ministry often begins with a bowl of soup or a warm sweater, Stephen Leaders and Stephen Ministers are finding that their relationships with guests last much longer than gifts of food or clothing.

Greensboro Urban Ministry (GUM) began in 1967 with the desire to express the love of God to those in need through practical action. Today it is supported by more than 200 congregations representing a broad range of faith traditions. As the economy continues to struggle and unemployment rates keep rising in the Greensboro area, the community needs this type of outreach more than ever.

Many types of assistance are available through GUM—from emergency assistance to hot meals to transitional housing to counseling, and even a day care center and medical clinic. More than 100 volunteers work with staff mem-

bers to keep all these programs active and available. “This shelter and its related services are not a solution, but a motivation for guests to get their lives going again,” said Chaplain Dew.



Since beginning its Stephen Ministry in 1996, Greensboro Urban Ministry has trained more than 200 Stephen Ministers. Chaplain Frank Dew says, “Stephen Ministers let guests know that they are valuable because God loves them.”

So how does Stephen Ministry fit into the mix?

“Stephen Ministry fits well in this setting,” said Rev. Andrei Spells, another of the Stephen Leaders at GUM. “Those who come to us need God’s healing touch to bring them back to the fold. A guest may have a Stephen Minister while here, but then he or she leaves us. Often, if the person returns, the first thing he or she does is to look for that Stephen Minister. The bond which the Holy Spirit creates between a Stephen Minister and a care receiver makes them friends for life.”

“Our culture values people by their wallets,” said Chaplain Dew. “These folks are devalued every day. The act of listening communicates to them that they are worth listening to. Stephen Ministers let the guests know that they are valuable because God values them. That’s another reason these relationships are so special.”

Supervision is a key component in maintaining the integrity of Stephen Ministry and

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ensuring that Stephen Ministers at GUM provide the best care they possibly can. “We do it ‘by the book,’” said Chaplain Dew. “If a Stephen Minister isn’t involved in supervision on a regular basis, he or she cannot have a care receiver. That’s the rule. That’s how important supervision is.”

“Once care receivers have been helped, they often want to help others,” said Rev. Spells. “They have a deeper understanding of the needs and hurts of this population. One of my goals for

One woman, after completing her Stephen Minister training, gained enough confidence to go back to nursing school to get her degree.

“We know we aren’t here to fix or solve our guests’ problems. We know *God is the caregiver, and we are the caregivers*. But it is so encouraging to see how many guests have returned to productive lives because of Stephen Ministry,” said Chaplain Dew. “It is also our hope and prayer that they take Stephen Ministry with them to their congregations.”

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One of Chaplain Dew’s long-term goals is to see more of the congregations that support GUM get involved in Stephen Ministry. “This is a great vehicle to help Christians claim their ministry. The training is excellent, good theology and good psychology combined. It is truly the priesthood of all believers in action. It empowers lay persons for ministry and allows God to work through each of them in a powerful way,” Chaplain Dew said.

the future is to see more care receivers become Stephen Ministers.” This has already begun to happen. Several people who have received care from Stephen Ministers, after getting back on their feet, have returned to become Stephen Ministers so they can provide care to others.

“If they don’t have Stephen Ministry yet, pastors and congregations don’t know what they’re missing,” said Rev. Spells. “We all know we can’t do this alone. We need good Biblical support for those who are going through a crisis. Any congregation that wants to see the teaching and love of Jesus in action needs Stephen Ministry.”