



West Side Missionary Baptist Church: Sharing the Hope of Jesus through Stephen Ministry

STEPHEN MINISTRY IN ACTION

It's a quiet ministry at West Side Missionary Baptist Church in St. Louis, Missouri—but a powerful one. Week in, week out, Stephen Ministers from West Side meet privately with their care receivers, providing a listening ear and emotional and spiritual support.

- One Stephen Minister may be ministering to a grieving widower.
- Another Stephen Minister may be praying with a patient before surgery.
- Another may be offering empathy and support to a single mother.
- Yet another may be sharing encouraging words to a young man in jail.
- Still another may be bringing a friendly smile to a homebound person.

“Our congregation's mission is to *share the hope of Jesus Christ in a hopeless world*,” said Paula E. Wills, a Stephen Leader at West Side. “Our Stephen Ministers live out that mission in a very real way.”

What Stephen Ministers Do

West Side currently has 23 active Stephen Ministers, who extend the caring reach of



West Side's Stephen Ministers provide the congregation with a powerful way to live out its mission statement to “Share the hope of Jesus Christ in a hopeless world.”

the congregation far beyond its pastors—providing one-to-one ministry to people in the congregation and community who are experiencing divorce, grief, unemployment, hospitalization, a terminal illness, relocation, loneliness, a spiritual crisis, and other life difficulties.

“The role of a Stephen Minister is to provide emotional support, to pray with and for their care receiver, and to walk with the person for the duration of the crisis,” said Wills. “Stephen Ministers are there to listen and care.”

A Stephen Minister typically meets with his or her care receiver once a week for about an hour. Caring relationships last as long as the need is there—perhaps only a month or two, in the instance of someone recovering from surgery, or possibly a year or more, in the instance of someone grieving the loss of a loved one.

Stephen Ministers keep everything their care receivers say, even their identity, confidential. “People are willing to open up and share their feelings when they know that what they say will be kept private,” said Stephen Minister Marguerite Grandelious. “The high level of trust helps healing to happen.”

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Alicia Johnson | Stephen Minister
West Side Missionary Baptist
St. Louis, Missouri

Since beginning its Stephen Ministry in 1993, West Side has trained more than 150 Stephen Ministers. They commit to two years of service, although many serve longer. After that, many go on to serve in other ministries.

“Stephen Ministry is a great training ground for lay leaders,” said Rev. Rosalind Denson, who coordinates Stephen Ministry at West Side. “Many of our Stephen Ministers move into other leadership positions in the congregation. They continue to use their caring skills in everything they do, which makes our other ministries even more caring.”



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A Worldwide Ministry with Roots in St. Louis

Though worldwide in scope, Stephen Ministry has its roots in St. Louis. It was started in 1975 by Rev. Kenneth C. Haugk, Ph.D., a pastor and clinical psychologist, who at the time was pastor of St. Stephen's Lutheran Church, just over a mile from the front doors of West Side. Fresh out of seminary, Dr. Haugk quickly discovered there were many more needs for care than he alone

could meet. So he drew on his background in theology and psychology and trained nine parishioners to assist in pastoral care.

It was so successful that other churches became interested, and the Stephen Ministries organization was founded. Today, more than 11,000 congregations from 160 denominations are involved. Most are in the United States and Canada, but there are also Stephen Ministry churches in 24 other countries.

Great Benefits

The people cared for by Stephen Ministers benefit greatly—receiving support and encouragement in their time of need. Stephen Ministers benefit tremendously too.

“I’ve really grown spiritually and deepened my prayer life since I became a Stephen Minister,” said Claude Wills, one of the male Stephen Ministers at West Side. “This has helped me to be a better mentor to the men I minister to.” The congregation has found its male Stephen Ministers to be especially valuable because of the continual need for men to mentor and minister to other men going through tough times.

“I became a Stephen Minister to help someone else, but I found that I have grown a lot too,” said Alicia Johnson, a Stephen Minister at West Side. “It’s an amazing experience to see God work through you to change the life of another person.”

Senior Pastor Ronald L. Bobo recognizes the positive effect Stephen Ministry has had on West Side's ability to reach out into the community. He said, “Stephen Ministry is a very concrete way that we share the love and hope of Jesus Christ as we fulfill our vision to *Take the City for God.*”