

A Small Church with a Big Heart:

Stephen Ministry in a Smaller Congregation



Zion Lutheran Church of Fairfield, Washington—a congregation with fewer than 50 people in weekly worship—is one of many smaller congregations that have received and given great blessings through Stephen Ministry.



Zion Lutheran Church has found Stephen Ministry to be a very powerful and effective way to provide care to hurting people in the congregation and community.

In 2007, the small farming community of Fairfield was left shaken when a tragic accident took the life of one of the town's youth. About the same time, several other members of the community passed away. Gwen Anderson, a Stephen Leader at Zion, remembers:

"There were so many grieving people, and none of us were really comfortable meeting their needs. We kept thinking to ourselves, 'What if we say the wrong thing? What if we just really blow it?'"

That's when Pastor Paul Anderson and Zion's members decided to start Stephen Ministry and increase the quantity and quality of care they could offer to members and to the community.

Stepping Out in Faith

Zion experienced an outpouring of support for beginning Stephen Ministry. The congregation set up fundraiser events and received several anonymous donations. The church

council unanimously supported the decision to begin Stephen Ministry and allocated funds toward it. Gwen recalls, "We just said, 'This is going to cost us some money, but we'll be able to help Pastor Paul extend the care that people need.'"

This generous support helped Zion to enroll in Stephen Ministry and send four people, including the pastor, to a Leader's Training Course. Pastor Anderson says, "It was a stretch for us, but we are really invested in Stephen Ministry. We stepped out in faith, and God hasn't let us down. It's by far the best money the congregation has spent for the benefits we've received."

A Formula for Success

The Stephen Leaders from Zion enjoyed the one-week Leader's Training Course. Gwen says, "We could have spent another week there, soaking up the excellent training and listening to people from other congregations share about their Stephen Ministry. There is such a shared excitement, and you get so many ideas."

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Rev. Paul Anderson

They also appreciate the system that Stephen Ministries provides. "When you follow the guidelines, Stephen Ministry works," says Gwen. "The training and resources are so thorough. You don't have to worry about what you're going to do next—Stephen Ministries

has already figured it out and provided what you need to take the next step.”

Pastor Anderson says, “Stephen Ministries’ follow-up support is wonderful. The St. Louis staff is so great—gracious, caring, and always there for us when we call.”



Pastor Paul Anderson (center) chats with Stephen Leaders Karl Felgenhauer and Gwen Anderson. “When you follow the guidelines,” says Gwen, “Stephen Ministry works!”

Caring for the Community

Zion has earned a reputation as an important caring presence in the community of Fairfield. Even people in town who don’t attend Zion are aware of the help that its Stephen Ministers provide—and many nonmembers have received care from one of Zion’s Stephen Ministers during a time of need.

Gwen says, “Our church may be small, but the whole community really looks to Paul as their pastor.”

This is possible for Zion Lutheran because of the way Stephen Ministry has built up the congregation’s caregiving capacity. “Stephen Ministry has been like adding another staff person. We’ve been able to do so much more ministry, and it’s been a great help to me,” says Pastor Anderson.

The success of Stephen Ministry has been a springboard for other ministries at Zion, including a weekly Bible study and several prayer

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groups. “People are getting more intentional about being disciples,” says Pastor Anderson.

The people of Zion and Fairfield have found Stephen Ministry to be a blessing—first in helping them through the tragedies they faced in 2007, and now in meeting new care needs that arise.

“God has had His hand in our Stephen Ministry from the beginning,” says Gwen. “Stephen Ministry truly works in any congregation, regardless of its size.”

The Stephen Series is a complete system for training and organizing laypersons to provide one-to-one Christian care to people in and around their congregations.

For more information about Stephen Ministry, contact:



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