

The Story behind Stephen Ministry

A Conversation with the Founder



Dr. Kenneth Haugk, pastor, clinical psychologist, and founder and Executive Director of Stephen Ministries, sat down for a conversation with Peter Rosenberger, author, speaker, and host of the syndicated radio show *Hope for the Caregiver*. On the show, Dr. Haugk shared the story of the origin of Stephen Ministry, his personal experience receiving care, and how congregations can get involved with this lay caring ministry.

Rev. Kenneth C. Haugk, Ph.D.
Founder & Executive Director
Stephen Ministries St. Louis



Peter Rosenberger
Author & Radio Show Host
Hope for the Caregiver

Peter: Some years ago, my wife, Gracie, took a really dark turn physically, and we really didn't know if she was going to make it. It was pretty rough. But our pastor came to us and said, "I've got a lady I would like to connect with Gracie as part of our Stephen Ministry." And this woman, a Stephen Minister, came over to sit with Gracie—just to listen to her, love her, and care for her. And I was so moved by the whole concept of Stephen Ministry.

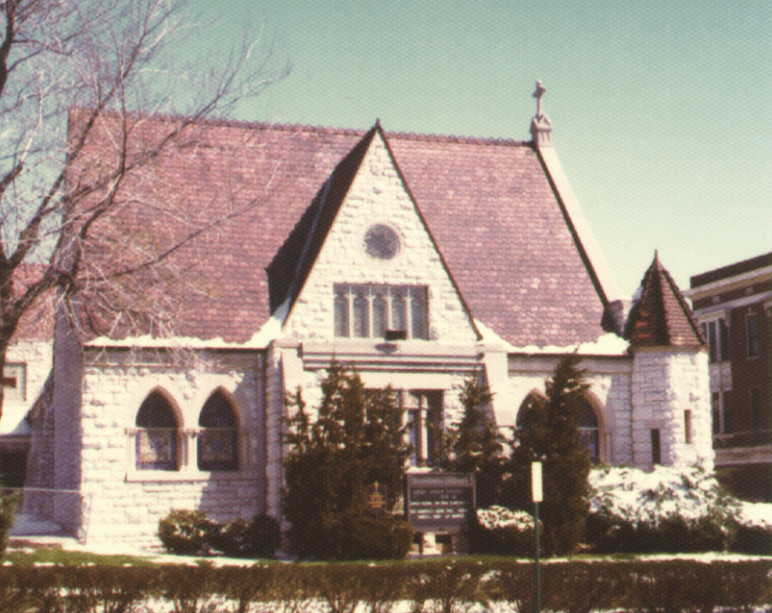
There's now 13,000 churches that have Stephen Ministry, so I want to introduce to you right now the guy who founded it—his name is Dr. Kenneth Haugk. Welcome to the show!

Ken: Thank you, it's a real pleasure.

The Beginning of Stephen Ministry

Peter: I want you to know how much my family has benefited from your vision that you had back in 1975. You've been a tremendous blessing to my family, and now we're meeting for the first time. The impact that you've had is almost immeasurable. But it started off as something very small, like most things that have greatness; it started with you being aware of a pressing need. Take us back to that for a moment.

Ken: Well, it was the mid-1970s, and I was the pastor of a congregation, and I just found that I couldn't do it all. I remember there was one



Saint Stephen's Lutheran Church



Stephen Ministry began in a small church in St. Louis, Missouri. Today, it's being used by over 13,000 congregations—small and large, urban and rural—representing more than 180 Christian denominations and located in all 50 states in the US, 10 Canadian provinces, and 30 other countries.

Holy Week when we had a bunch of worship services and a bunch of people in the hospital. And I was going back and forth from the hospital to working on sermons, from working on sermons to the hospital.

So one reason why I decided to start training laypeople to do one-to-one caring is because I couldn't do it all. A second reason is that because I was stretched so thin, I couldn't provide the quality of care that people really needed. I was only one person.

And the third reason is that there are laypeople in congregations who have gifts for one-to-one caring and want to use their gifts. These are the people who have come forward, as you mentioned, in 13,000 congregations to serve as one-to-one caregivers—as Stephen Ministers.

Peter: That's extraordinary. Talk about the makeup of that first group of people who were trained as Stephen Ministers.

Ken: In that first group, there was a stay-at-home mom, there was a business executive,

there was a seminary professor, and an insurance salesman—to name a few. And I think the key to this was that they weren't just put into service. They were trained first.

I got that idea from studying what had gone on in the church, but also in the secular environment, like the National Institute of Mental Health and various other organizations. They were training paraprofessional caregivers. So I had the church influencing me from one side and my profession as a psychologist influencing me from the other side, and these came together in a kind of a flashpoint to give birth to Stephen Ministry.

Peter: Tell us a little bit why you named it Stephen Ministry.

Ken: Well, it comes from Acts 6:8. Stephen was commissioned by the apostles to do acts of pastoral care. At that time, as the church was growing and the apostles were doing all sorts of things, they didn't have the time to do the caring that they really needed to do. So they appointed seven laypeople, and Stephen was one of them. And he did great work, not only caring but witnessing to his faith—which is what Stephen Ministers do today.

How Stephen Ministers Serve

Peter: One of the guiding principles that you have in the training for congregations around the world is that Stephen Ministers are not there to solve people's problems.

Ken: Back in school when I trained as a clinical psychologist, we talked a lot about active listening. A Stephen Minister is not just a passive listener who just sits there and doesn't respond. A Stephen Minister is an active listener—someone who is there, who sometimes leans forward, who asks good questions, who says at times, "Tell me more."

A Stephen Minister doesn't try to solve people's problems, but gets people to tell their stories and really listens to and cares for them, which is extremely healing.

Peter: In Stephen Ministry, it's about laypeople ministering to others. By engaging people in this way and getting them involved in active lay ministry, you are teaching people that they're able to receive—and then able to give that out. We never deplete the inexhaustible love and ministry of Christ in our life, and you're teaching people how to flow in that, in such a profound way.

Ken: When Stephen Ministry started—and it still happens now—Stephen Ministers would come up to me and say, “Ken, I feel like I'm getting more out of this than my care receiver is. Is that all right?” And I would tell them then and still do, “It is perfectly all right!”

Peter: That's a sign that you're doing it right!

Ken: Yes! It is not only that Stephen Ministers are ministering to their care receivers. The whole process ends up helping the Stephen Ministers. They get personal growth through their training. They get personal growth through their service. And then they are supervised with their fellow Stephen Ministers back in the congregation, and they get personal growth there, too. We did not set out to do that, but that personal and spiritual growth is a wonderful byproduct that Stephen Ministers have experienced and still are experiencing today.

A Personal Experience with Stephen Ministry

Peter: The reason this show exists is for the 65-million-plus caregivers just in the United States. How are you seeing that level of need impact the work that you guys are doing?



Commissioning of the First Class of Stephen Ministers

Dr. Haugk commissioned the first class of nine Stephen Ministers during a worship service in the spring of 1975. Since then, over 600,000 laypeople have been trained as Stephen Ministers, and they in turn have gone on to care for millions of people experiencing life difficulties.



Ken: Stephen Ministers care for people who are grieving, who are homebound, who are divorced and separated, and so on. But one type of care receiver that people may not think of is someone who is involved in a caregiving relationship themselves. Stephen Ministers care for caregivers.

Peter: And you were the recipient of care from a Stephen Minister yourself. What was it like for you to have put so much into this ministry, and then to have it coming back and caring for you?

Ken: My wife was diagnosed with ovarian cancer, and she lived for three and a half years. And during that time, I was her primary caregiver. I had a Stephen Minister, and it sure was helpful just to get those feelings out and have somebody listen to me.

Peter: As a caregiver for three decades myself now, I think sometimes people think, “Well, you've created this program, so therefore you're the expert on it.” And I've got a radio show, but people forget that we need this ourselves. The reason we say these things and do these things is



Stephen Ministries Center



Stephen Ministries is a not-for-profit Christian educational organization based in St. Louis, Missouri, that supports ministry in congregations worldwide. Its 40-person staff develops and delivers resources on topics including grief, dealing with cancer, lay caregiving, assertiveness, conflict resolution, and more.

because we are also preaching to ourselves. We need this coming back on us. That had to have been deeply moving for you to have a Stephen Minister come alongside you during that time.

Ken: Yes, it was very, very moving.

How Congregations Begin Stephen Ministry

Peter: I love that. That's exactly what drew me to you all, and I want to not only extol the work that you guys are doing, but I want to help people connect to it. Now, Stephen Ministry is not some kind of huge financial commitment from a church or anything. This is very affordable, very doable. And you don't have to have a big church to do this. Church size is irrelevant when it comes to this.

If a congregation wants to get involved, what can a church expect from the process? From the moment they call to the moment where they are engaging in this ministry?

Ken: Well, after a congregation has made that decision to enroll, we have six Leader's Training Courses each year in various parts of the country. A congregation will select some people who will go and be trained. And by the way, we train the trainers—the pastors and lay leaders—who train others to do the one-to-one caregiving. And then these Stephen Leaders go back to their congregation and recruit, select, train, supervise, and make assignments of care receivers to Stephen Ministers.

Peter: So if a pastor's listening at this moment or a church administrator and they're saying, "You know what? We need to be doing this at our church"—what's the best way for them to connect with you?

Ken: They can go to our website to learn more—stephenministries.org—or give us a call at (314) 428-2600, and we can send them a packet of information about Stephen Ministry.

Peter: Dr. Ken Haugk is the Executive Director of Stephen Ministries. If you think this is something your church needs to be a part of, please go to stephenministries.org to get involved. These people are ready to help you start ministering to the people in your church and in your community who are overwhelmed. I've been the recipient of this in my own family. I love what they do.

Dr. Haugk, thank you for joining us. I really do appreciate it.

Ken: Thank you!

*This interview has been condensed.
To listen to the full interview, visit
stephenministries.org/conversation.*



Stephen Ministry is a lay caring ministry being used in over 13,000 congregations across the United States, Canada, and 30 other countries. With Stephen Ministry, congregations equip and empower a team of laypeople—called Stephen Ministers—to provide one-to-one, Christ-centered care to people experiencing grief, divorce, serious illness, unemployment, hospitalization, financial stress, or other life difficulties.

For more information, visit stephenministries.org or call (314) 428-2600.