

Honoring the Past

We are excited today to honor the past 25 years of Stephen Ministry here at Valley Presbyterian Church.

Since [Stephen Ministries St. Louis](#) was founded in 1975:

- More than 13,000 congregations have enrolled in Stephen Ministry.
- More than 75,000 pastors and lay leaders from those congregations have been equipped as Stephen Leaders.
- More than 600,000 people have been trained as Stephen Ministers
- More than one-and-a-half-million people have had a Stephen Minister to walk with them, providing one-to-one Christian care during tough times.

You'll find Stephen Ministry in congregations from more than 180 Christian denominations, across the U.S. and Canada and in 30 other countries.

In your bulletin today is an insert listing the nearly 250 people who have been trained as SMs here in the last 25 years.

Would all trained SMs here today please stand up?

Now I would like to take a moment to Honor Stephen Ministers who died in 2020-21 during the COVID lockdown. While they did not die of COVID, we could not have memorials for them due to the lockdown. Let us remember and honor

John Vold

Parker Long

Brenda Hait

Dorothy Barker

Charlene Campbell

Muriel Wagner

Joan Larson

Punky Griggs

We do have a Stephen Ministry memorial fund here at VPC that many have contributed to over the years in memory of a SM. We use those funds to train future leaders. Thank you so much for your support. Our current Stephen Leaders are all participating in the service today.

Being a SM or a care receiver is a special experience. Let's hear from some who have experienced both sides.

- Mary Lee Haas—trained in Ohio in late 70's, sharing from her experience as a CR here
- Marti Long—trained in 2004, leader since 2007—read by Parkie Copeland, trained in 2007—has been both a care giver and receiver
- Doris Steffy—one of our oldest SMs still active in church—trained in 1998—read by Craig

Looking to the Future

We have honored the past. Let us look to the future. Recently, Pastor Craig challenged us to think about what story Jesus told that resonates as our story. Today's scripture came to me as the image of what I am as a Stephen Minister. Stephen Ministers are like the mat carriers. They go alongside you. They don't heal you or give you answers to your concerns. Through prayer and listening, they bring you to Jesus to be healed in whatever way is needed. It wasn't easy to carry their friend's mat and then have to get it up onto the roof and lower it down to Jesus, but how thrilling it must have been to be in Jesus' presence as he healed their friend. I have experienced that joy of the Holy Spirit working in my care receiver's lives. In this world, we are all mat carriers. We are all the hands and feet and ears and mouths of Jesus. We each bring our family, friends, neighbors to the feet of Jesus through our prayers and listening.

We are a caring congregation—hence the buttons for all of you. We have a tremendous support system of mat carriers. The Network of Caring people regularly keep in touch with a lot of people in their area and provide assistance when needed. But they minister to many, and sometimes a person needs more long term, one on one care. This is when they may refer to Stephen Ministry. Then there is the grief ministry which provides after care through grief workshops [and](#) the ministry of presence who take the Stephen Ministry Grief booklets to the survivors during the first year after death. Many times, a Stephen Minister is also needed to follow these ministries with the grieving person for a longer time.

In a sermon this summer, Craig pointed out that when Jesus sent out his disciples, he ordered to them take a partner, to go out in pairs! As individuals, we sometimes misunderstand a circumstance. For instance, when we go to the doctors for a diagnosis, it is important to have someone else come along, as a witness to help us hear and remember what was said.

In talking about our concerns with a compassionate, [confidential](#) listener, it often helps us to clarify how we think, feel, and should act. The Stephen Minister is not there to tell you what to do but to listen as you sort out your directions.

What will your role be in the future—a Stephen Minister? Or one in need of care? There is no shame in asking for help. Remember that SM is there WHEN (not IF) you need someone to walk with you.

Focus on Today

We honor the past, look to the future, but what about today? As we come out of our COVID isolation, many of us are facing new directions in our lives. If someone you know is going through a difficult time, you might suggest to them something like this: "I've seen God really work through our Stephen Ministers to bring support and encouragement to people like you who are going through tough situations. Having one would be really helpful for what you're dealing with. I'd like to give our referrals coordinator your name and phone number and have them give you a call to tell you more about Stephen Ministry."

As I have said, all of you in the congregation are potential SMs or CRs. And certainly, all of you are lookouts for potential care receivers. In your pews today are small pew cards about Stephen Ministry. Take one with you as a reminder about how important you each are as a look out for those in need.

Also, at the end of the bulletin insert booklet is Seven Reasons to Consider Becoming a Stephen Minister. Read that later. The 50 hours of training as a SM will teach you what to say or **not** say to effectively care for others. Our bi-monthly education and peer care groups give you the support you need. You are not alone in serving as a SM, and you can make a difference in someone's life, so that they know they are not alone in their trials.

It is by His grace that we both give and receive. In the words of the song,
Every prayer and step of faith
Every difference we can make
Is only by His grace.
Every ray of hope we shine
Every blessing left behind
Is only by His grace.
Grace alone which God supplies
Strength unknown He will provide
We will go forth in grace alone.

Please visit our Stephen Ministry table today in Fellowship Hall to learn more about either becoming a Stephen Minister or having one just for you. And join us as we celebrate our 25th Anniversary with a special cake today. Thank you for honoring the past and looking to the future. Let us live today in Christ's calling for each of our lives—by his grace.