

Stephen Ministry at Calvary Lutheran Church



Stephen Ministry is a way for Calvary to provide the training, resources, and ongoing support to equip lay caregivers, called Stephen Ministers, within our congregation. This call to discipleship is a direct response to our mission "to give God glory and share the love of Christ" by using our spiritual gifts and to *bear one another's burdens and therefore fulfill the law of Christ.* (Galatians 6:20)

Stephen Ministry takes its roots from the work of the apostles in the early Christian church. After the resurrection, Jesus commanded the apostles to "go and make disciples of all nations" by sharing with the world the great things that he had done. Jesus gave them the specific spiritual gifts with which to accomplish this task. Acts 6 records the work of Stephen, the earliest named lay person who provided compassionate care for the new Christian community.

The care provided by Stephen Ministers is always one-to-one, gender-specific, and is trustworthy, compassionate, skilled, and faith-filled. There are many reasons one might require the care of a Stephen Minister. Someone who needs care might be experiencing grief, divorce, illness, job loss, loneliness, guilt, discouragement, lack of faith, or be isolated from worship experiences by being homebound or perhaps living with a disability. Sometimes the adjustment to a new home or a relocation warrants the care of a Stephen Minister.

Stephen Ministers are not pastors, counselors, or therapists. But they dedicate themselves to spiritual growth and development, learning specific skills in order to provide confidential, Christ-centered care. Stephen ministers, once commissioned, meet weekly with their care receivers for as long as these needs are present.

Since 1975, the Stephen Ministries organization, based in St. Louis, Missouri, has helped more than 11,000 churches begin ministries in their own congregations. In June, 2011, Calvary Lutheran Church, through a Bold in Mission Grant, enrolled as a Stephen Congregation and sent five leaders, including Pastor Bill McGowan, to the Leadership Training Seminar. There, they learned the rudiments of the Stephen System in order to develop the ministry.

Calvary's Stephen Leaders continue to serve as an established ministry team, meeting frequently, functioning interdependently, and working collectively toward: healthy awareness building within our congregation; recruitment, education, supervision, continuing education, and spiritual care for our Stephen Ministers; accepting referrals and matching Stephen Ministers with care recipients; and, finally, providing ongoing evaluation for the ministry.

In June, 2012, our first class of Stephen Ministers completed their training course and began providing care for their care receivers. On September 16th, 2012, Calvary commissioned our first class of fifteen Stephen Ministers.