

2. The reawakening of our Stephen Ministry has begun!

(by Myron & Kendra Kirkpatrick)

On January 6th, we began working through the first step described in our January Cross & Flame message – the 10-week online training required to become commissioned Stephen Leaders. This course will equip us to formally re-start **our** MUMC ministry. We emphasize “**our**” because this is truly **your** ministry as much as ours. We are just two trained Stephen Ministers in your midst who have felt called to bring this once-vibrant ministry of MUMC back to life so members of **our** church and **our** community can have trained and caring men and women available to walk alongside them in their times of greatest need.

While our study time passes, it seems appropriate that we explain for those who have never known (and review for any who may have forgotten) just what Stephen Ministry is, how it works, and the way in which blessings can flow from it to anyone needing support while facing life’s difficult challenges. (*Note: Much of the following information has, with permission, been adapted, from the Stephen Ministry-St. Louis website and publications. You are encouraged to visit that website at <https://www.stephenministries.org>.)*

So what is Stephen Ministry and where does it fit in at MUMC?

Stephen Ministry is a 50-year old Christian organization founded by Dr. Kenneth Haugk, a once-young pastor who is also a psychologist. From its inception, it’s mission has been to train laypeople to provide confidential, high quality, one-to-one, Christ-centered care and support to persons in church congregations and their surrounding communities who are facing all manner of life crises such as grief, major medical situations, job-related problems, divorce or broken relationships, chronic care needs, end of life or hospice situations, major life transitions, financial difficulties, difficult family relationships, and many variations of these.

To put things in perspective, there are now over 600,000 commissioned Stephen Ministers in over 190 Christian denominations and 14,000 congregations spread over 50 states (there are 50 in Nevada), 10 Canadian provinces, and 30 other countries. And the most important statistic of all... over 1.5 million people have received care in a formal, one-to-one Stephen Ministry caring relationship.

Stephen Leaders, which is what we are in training to become, are equipped for this role by completing the 10-week Stephen Leader Training Course professionally developed and presented online by the organization Stephen Ministry-St. Louis (“SMSTL”).

Stephen Ministers, *on the other hand*, are congregation members trained by their local Stephen Leaders, again using professionally developed materials from SMSTL. Stephen Ministers can be laypersons, lay leaders, other ministry leaders, church staff, the occasional pastor – **or, yes, even you!** They can be men or women, young or old, but one thing they must feel is a strong calling to take an active and dedicated part in a personally rewarding ministry whose objective is to help those who are struggling with life’s challenges.

As Stephen Ministers, ***we are Care Givers; God is the Cure Giver.*** Our job is to walk alongside those who are struggling – listening, asking probing questions, occasionally suggesting, and then listening some more, for as long as it takes. Our objective is to help people work through their problems for themselves, supporting them along the way. If you picture life as a mud pit with the Care Receiver mired in the bottom of the pit and a Stephen Minister standing at the edge, holding onto a nearby tree branch and reaching out to grasp the Care Receiver’s hand, that is a good representation of Stephen Ministry. We are not there to get down in the pit with the Care Receiver; we are there to extend a hand and help them pull themselves up out of it.

There is another very important caring ministry at MUMC, and that is the Care Ministry led by Sue Taylor. Their role, in contrast to Stephen Ministry, is to help people with their immediate needs on a day-to-day basis. One way to look at it is if you know someone who needs specific help such as food, grocery shopping, transportation, money to get to the next town, minor home repairs, a hospital visit, or just a phone call or a greeting card, that is the role of the *Care Ministry*. But if you know someone who is grieving the loss of a loved one, depressed, concerned about health issues, having financial difficulties, etc. and would benefit from having a trained Christian of the same sex walk alongside them, confidentially and for as long as it takes to work their way through their situation, that is the role of a *Stephen Minister*. To very loosely paraphrase our Lay Leader, Pat Harger, “The overall MUMC care umbrella includes two ministries that work in parallel – the Care Ministry, which helps with immediate, generally short-term needs, and Stephen Ministry, which confidentially helps people work through their own deeper, long term needs.”

To look at it from another angle, there are several blessings that our Church as a whole can derive from Stephen Ministry and apply directly to its specific mission here in Mesquite:

- **Our congregation** will continue to carry out Christ’s commandment to “Love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:12 RSV) in a powerful and effective way.
- **Our Pastor** will have a team of gifted, trained, and committed lay caregivers ready to minister to hurting people.
- **Our participating laypeople** will nurture and use their gifts in meaningful ministry, growing spiritually as they serve others.
- **People among us who are hurting** will have available a caring Christian presence to provide emotional and spiritual support.

Please keep *our* reawakening Stephen Ministry in your prayers as we make our way forward. Thank you!