



The Story of Stephen Ministry

Stephen Ministry - where did it all begin? It dates back to 1974 when Kenneth C. Haugk, a pastor and clinical psychologist, was pastor of St. Stephen's Lutheran Church in St. Louis, Missouri. Fresh out of seminary, his strengths and heart were in caregiving ministry, and he was looking forward to making a positive impact on his congregation and community by providing pastoral care to all those experiencing divorce, grief, hospitalization, discouragement, and other life difficulties.

Very quickly, though, he found that the needs for care by far exceeded that which he alone could provide. He faced one of a pastor's greatest frustrations: seeing people slipping through the cracks because their urgent needs are going unmet. In November of 1974, he discussed the situation with two seminary friends over a cup of coffee. The conversation turned to Ephesians 4 and "equipping the saints for the work of ministry." Haugk realized that God didn't intend for pastors to monopolize ministry. Rather, God gave all his people gifts for ministry and one of his roles as pastor was to equip others to use their gifts in ministry.

Haugk returned to St. Stephen's with a plan. In the coming months he recruited nine lay people who had the gifts and heart to do caring ministry. He then used his combined backgrounds in theology and psychology to develop a training program in Christian caregiving. By March 1975 the nine were commissioned as "Stephen Ministers." Their first care receivers included a widower, a blind person, a young woman with cancer, a truck driver

forced to retire early, and an inactive member struggling with faith issues.

The impact was immediate. People began receiving the focused Christian care they needed. Fewer people were slipping through the cracks, and Haugk found he had more time to perform his other pastoral duties. The Stephen Ministers were surprised by the spiritual growth they encountered as they saw God working through them to bring love and healing to others.

The story would have ended there, had not two of the Stephen Ministers cornered Haugk on a hot May morning after worship services. "This is good stuff," they said to him. "We're not going to let you go until you promise to bring this ministry to other churches!" Still wearing his vestments and perspiring from the heat, Haugk gave in and agreed to find a way to bring Stephen Ministry to other churches.

In November 1975, Haugk and his wife Joan founded the not-for-profit Stephen Ministries organization and began bringing Stephen Ministry to other congregations. It spread like wildfire. Saint Andrew Presbyterian Church is one of more than 7,000 congregations from more than 90 Christian denominations that now has Stephen Ministry. Over a quarter million people have been trained as Stephen Ministers, a number that grows by tens of thousands each year. More than a million people across the United States, Canada, and the world have been touched by God's love through a Stephen Minister. And that is the mark of God's doing, because finally the story of Stephen Ministry is a million stories and more of caring ministry.