

The Story of Stephen Ministry

Stephen Ministry dates back to 1974 when Kenneth C. Haugk, a pastor and clinical psychologist, was a pastor of St. Stephen's Lutheran Church in St. Louis. Fresh out of seminary, his strengths and heart were in caregiving ministry. 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, and other life challenges.

He quickly discovered that the needs for care far exceeded what he alone could provide. 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.' He realized that his role as pastor was to equip others to use their gifts of ministry. Pastors do not have to do it all.

He returned to St. Stephen's with a plan. He recruited nine lay people who had the gifts and heart to do caring ministry. He then used his combined background to develop a training program in Christian caregiving. In March of 1975 he commissioned the first nine 'Stephen Ministers'.

The impact was immediate. People began receiving the focused Christian care they needed. Fewer people were slipping through the cracks. 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 after church one Sunday. "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!" And that is how the not-for-profit Stephen Ministries organization was founded. It spread like wildfire.

Today, First Church is one of the more than 12,000 congregations from more than 170 Christian denominations that have Stephen Ministry. More than 600,000 people have been trained as Stephen Ministers, who have provided care to more than 1.5 million hurting people. Stephen Ministry is in all 50 states, 10 Canadian provinces and 29 other countries.