  **Stephen Ministers Speak……….**

**By: Eleanor Hodges** April 2014

**“How Stephen Ministry Provides a Glimpse of God’s Kingdom”**

In my view, the Stephen Ministry program can give both “care givers” and “care receivers” a glimpse of what it might be like to have God’s Kingdom here on earth.

The extensive training, the community of loving support from our leaders and fellow volunteers, and the Grace of the Holy Spirit combine to enable Stephen Ministers to offer an extra measure of one-to-one emotional and spiritual care to individuals who are in crisis or suffering. This care exceeds the bounds of typical friendship, and focuses on a care receiver’s needs. It can supplement, but does not take the place of, expert professional care. Stephen Leaders and Ministers continually seek God’s help, and trust God to provide needed healing of body, mind, heart, or soul.

By together intentionally allowing God’s will to be done, both care giver and receiver find themselves blessedly transformed. Both participants become more fully attuned to the presence of God as they walk through life’s crises and suffering together. For certain, there will be challenges, but the sacrifices of time and effort involved in entering a caring relationship are well rewarded. Already, as a novice volunteer in the Stephen Ministry, I have caught glimpses of the wondrous transformational blessings that can occur.

Additionally, participation as a Stephen Minister volunteer has other benefits. I can apply the skills and insights gleaned from training, as well as the blessings gleaned from participation in the Christ–centered transformational caring process, to better support my family members and friends in the throes of life’s crises and suffering. This opportunity is one I truly treasure.

**By:** **Bob Wardwell**  March 2014

At Saint Peter’s we are always challenged to put our faith into action and we do so in many ways both within our congregation and in the rest of our community. I volunteered to become a Stephen Minister because I wanted a way to reach out to another person who was in crisis on a one-to-one basis with the assurance that they would be interested in that support. I have found the time I have spent in training with my fellow Stephen’s Ministers and Leaders to be one of the most spiritually reassuring and faith building experiences in my life. The sharing of my life challenges and my faith with other trainees, as we practice among ourselves the role we hope to play for our future care receivers, has given me fresh insights into my own life and faith. It has also given me an understanding of the life challenges that everyone faces at one time or another. Stephen Ministry can mean the opportunity to never having to go through those times feeling alone. My experience with Stephen Ministry has boosted my optimism about our Church truly being the hands of God reaching out to those in crisis in a very real and meaningful way.

**By: Dr. Robert Dellanoce** February 2014

**How Stephen Ministry Chose Me**

Stephen Ministry is an opportunity of the heart. After being received in the church last year, I decided to identify an appropriate ministry in which to serve. My sister, Dr. Kathleen Leonard, suggested I investigate Stephen Ministry. Kathy had joined a Stephen Ministry group near her home in Raleigh, NC, and was thoroughly enjoying the training experience. I followed her advice and was drawn to it’s essence of simply caring for an individual while providing that person space and time to be heard and positively supported. The actions of caring, listening, supporting, respecting without judgment or bias appealed to me. Occasionally, Kathy and I spoke about the readings and weekly preparations of her Stephen Ministry process. Although her eventual commissioning was an anticipated event, her enthusiasm focused upon her availability and readiness for helping someone in need. It was something sincere and heart- felt. Her newly found commitment became my inspiration.

You see, my sister is a cancer survivor. She endured an unrelenting disease, a subsequent bone marrow transplant, and years of side effect-related health issues. Yet, despite serious and ongoing challenges, she entered Stephen Ministry in order to help alleviate the stress or suffering of another. In conversation she noted: “Stephen Ministry allows me to leave any limitations behind. To me, it’s both living and practicing my faith in an excellent way.” Hearing those words sealed the deal for me.

I applied to, and entered, the Stephen Ministry training program in October. I encountered eleven other congregants and several program leaders. Together, we studied information, discussed topics, and most important, explored our personal reactions, values, and feelings relative to the helping relationship. In time, being classmates evolved into being friends. Then the friendships evolved into a uniquely powerful group dynamic. I began to sense—and share—a contagious energy dedicated to serving others; what we discovered was the clear, engaging, and purposeful definition of Stephen Ministry. I also realized it was the exact reflection of Kathy’s words.

And now, after my own commissioning, I envision Stephen Ministry as an opportunity for many hearts. I comprehend that all persons who enter this special, supportive ministry can realize opportunity to grow in compassion, giving, sensitivity, and deeper understanding of the self and others. A Stephen Minister can give of him/herself, and in doing so, receive unexpected, sometimes unprecedented, spiritual reward. To that possibility I add having gained caring friendships among my Stephen Ministry class members, along with invaluable guidance from our Stephen Ministry leaders.

I expect incredibly hopeful things to happen as my colleagues and I journey further into Stephen Ministry. And I am personally reminded that a sister’s words can be trusted.

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