

WRITTEN BY BOB DIGGS

20 Years Strong



Dear Sharon,

Do you remember when you lived in another state, separated from your only family, with a number of burdens that seemed hard to bear at once? You were faced with tendon surgery in your right foot, while recovering physically from removal of a tumor from your spine, trying to recover financially from paying off a portion of a necessary hysterectomy, and still paying off foot surgeries—all within years. No close family was nearby or could travel to support you, and life seemed very dark and grim, hobbling from home to work and back. You had to move very suddenly from a third-floor walkup apartment to a first floor apartment, half the size, before the spine surgery. You were still not supposed to carry anything heavier than pounds—and your laptop in its bag was heavier. Visits to the store were painful, and rain and cold were difficult to maneuver in.

You heard about the Stephen Ministers from your church office, and found a confidential person who shared your faith, listened to you talk about your concerns and struggles, and prayed with and encouraged you through the dark winter months until spring, when your outlook and life improved.

It was hard to ask for help—but very welcome to receive caring, comfort and ministry by an empathetic peer.

Also, five years ago, when your year-old Mother had a massive heart attack and your job of years was eliminated, you had a sudden move back to your home state to support her healing journey through months of occupational and physical therapy at home and more months of occupational and physical therapy at home and more support until she could be left on her own for a full day again.

This time, you reached out immediately for a Stephen Minister and embraced the confidential and energizing support you knew you needed. I'm glad you are willing to encourage others to reach out for help and solace when they need a friend in Jesus, too!

It only takes a moment. Without warning, our stable life becomes unbalanced causing us to lose focus and sometimes hope. Over the past 20 years our church has offered a way, through Stephen Ministry, to be individually present to someone whose life is in turmoil. Through the christian action by care givers, care receivers feel more included and part of the faith community. The theme for transformation, impact, and the future is that our service spreads to many through a few.

In February 2016, FUMCR celebrates 20 years of healing within our congregation. Stephen Ministers come alongside a hurting person and meet with that person on a weekly basis to listen, care, encourage, pray, and provide emotional and spiritual support. Men are paired with men; women with women.

Over 260 individuals have benefited from the one-on-one, Christ-centered care of a Stephen Minister. This care is entirely confidential—no one knows the identity of a Care Receiver except for

his or her Stephen Minister and the Stephen Leader who paired the two together. The Care Receivers featured here stepped forward willingly to share their stories.

The ministry draws its name from St. Stephen. In the book of Acts, Chapter 6, Stephen was chosen to provide caring ministry to those in need. Since the days of the Apostles, caring ministry has been a hallmark of the Christian faith community—and is at the heart of all we do at Stephen Ministries.

One Care Receiver recounts their healing journey.

STEPHEN MINISTRY

20 Years of Healing

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH RICHARDSON

The Stephen Ministry logo consists of a cross and circle, together with a broken person and a whole person. The broken person stands behind the cross, symbolizing the **brokenness in our lives**. The whole person stands in front of the cross because it is through the cross of Jesus that we again are made whole. The circle symbolizes both the wholeness we receive through Christ and God's unending love for us.



“You were at a loss, but things would change and hope would come. There would not be a miracle cure for your husband, but a miracle cure for you!” M

Harriet Garnett, FUMCR Stephen Leader tells us: “Stephen Ministry training itself impacts trainees and I feel God touches them there enabling more growth and more sureness of the path we are traversing. That spreads outward. As we have increased awareness through video, posters, bulletin inserts, shirts, serving communion, etc. there is gratefulness in the church community knowing they have this caring team. Those who have been Care Receivers don't mind talking about having a Stephen Ministry, even introducing them to others. They are able to steer people towards us.”

“The impact of our program is, of course, felt by us and the person we walk with. It's a holy meeting, as we try to mirror Jesus. “The healing goes beyond the individual Care Receivers. Over 1,100 family members have also found healing.”

To date, over 10,000 hours of caregiving have been received by these Care Receivers.



“The assigned Stephen Minister simply listens to you as you express your feelings and concerns. After each weekly visit, you will feel much better.” Charles

FUMCR has commissioned 200 lay people from our congregation to serve as Stephen Ministers after they have received 50 hours of training in Christian caregiving. Topics include listening, feelings, assertiveness, confidentiality, and ministering to people in specific situations such as divorce, terminal illness, grief, and childbirth. Stephen Ministers also are trained to recognize when a Care Receiver's needs go beyond the care a Stephen Minister can provide and how to refer the Care Receiver for additional care.

The future of FUMCR Stephen Ministry includes adding more care givers to serve the younger generation in our congregation and those in congregations too small for their own Stephen Ministry program. Harriet sums it up: “We need to help those around us.”

“You found a confidential person who shared your faith, listened to you talk about your concerns and struggles, and prayed with and encouraged you through the dark winter months until spring, when your outlook and life improved.” Sharon

When you find yourself needing someone to listen, contact us in confidence at whatif@fumcr.com or call Rev. April Bristow at 972.235.8385