

PEOPLE WHO COULD HAVE BEEN STEPHEN MINISTERS, IF ONLY...

Why I answered the call to Stephen Ministry

So, here you are coasting through life when WHAM!- the unexpected, unforeseen, unimaginable crisis raises its ugly head and you are left stunned, numb and wondering where to turn for solace. Your first thought may be to tough it out on your own. Our culture has taught us that we need to “be strong”, turn to God who “never gives us more than we can handle”, “suck it up”, “get over it”, “move on”. You get the picture. We are supposed to draw on our inner resources and not bother others with our problems. Right? Wrong!

As God’s children we know in our heart of hearts that God is there for us, but sometimes the crisis is so startling that we can’t pray for ourselves. We need others to pray for us, and to intercede on our behalf. For instance, when we were involved in an accident in Texas, we were so overwhelmed by the circumstances and logistics there that we could not focus on prayer for our situation. So we called home to St. Matthew’s and others prayed with and for us. Most of us have some family, friends or co-workers who genuinely care about us, but they may also be hurting because of what is happening to us, rendering them well-meaning but unable to give the care we need. Let me share with you three times when people I believe were sent by God, and perhaps were angels in disguise, helped me through a life crisis.

First, when I was a teenager, my mother was having surgery in a Roman Catholic hospital. I was alone, no one with me, furiously crocheting an afghan while I waited for the outcome of her surgery. Out of the blue I was joined by a retired nun who spent her days visiting with families of people in the hospital. Sister Louise sat quietly, listened to my concerns, watched me crochet and filled the void of loneliness and stress. What was her gift to me? Her presence and her ability to listen without trying to fix anything were exactly what I needed.

Fast forward a decade and you’ll find me and my two year old baby on a Greyhound bus going from North Carolina to Pennsylvania. My first husband had deserted us and we were headed to stay with his parents for a while. In the midst of a snowy night, as the bus lumbered up the West Virginia Turnpike, my seat mate, an older African American woman, listened and listened to the bewildered person that I was- all night long. Through the snow and over the treacherous road, she listened and listened and helped soothe my heart. I never knew her name and I never saw her again, but she remains in my heart as the personification of an angel sent to comfort me at that time of crisis.

A number of years later I was in the Winn Dixie parking lot in Lawrenceville when a church member asked how our son was. He had just been hospitalized and I was really losing it emotionally. This kind person went for coffee and took time from his day to listen to me as I poured out my grief and fears.

Now, do you see the thread here? LISTENING! All of these people and many more that have helped me along the way were not Stephen Ministers but their actions and caring exemplified what Stephen Ministry is about.

Because of the love and caring given me, I feel called to serve as a Stephen Minister with the hope that walking the journey with another of God's children and listening, listening, listening will help them.

Stephen Ministers commit to be with their Care Receiver longer than the encounters I have shared with you but the essence is the same- listening, being non-judgmental, honouring confidentiality and helping a fellow traveler know that the journey does not have to be walked alone.

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August 2018