

Descriptions of the 25 Stephen Ministry Training Topics

The Stephen Series provides 25 modules that Stephen Leaders use to train their congregation's Stephen Ministers. The first 18 modules are used in the 50 hours of initial training, and the last seven modules provide the first 17½ hours of continuing education.

The *Stephen Series Leader's Manual* provides Stephen Leaders with complete lesson plans and scripted presentations for each module. Stephen Ministers use the *Stephen Ministry Training Manual*, which contains Preclass Readings for each training topic and outlines with notes for each classroom session.

The initial training is formatted for twenty sessions of 2½ hours each. Continuing education modules are usually taught in one-hour segments held in conjunction with the twice-monthly Stephen Ministry supervision sessions.

Initial Training

1 The Person of the Caregiver

This module introduces Stephen Minister trainees to one another, to Stephen Leaders, to the resources that the Stephen Minister trainees will be using, and to the topic of lay Christian caregiving. They learn about the Caregiver's Compass, which defines the character of a caregiver and guides their learning and caring. They also match up with a prayer partner that they have for the duration of initial training.

2 Feelings: Yours, Mine, and Ours

An important part of a Stephen Minister's caregiving is to help care receivers recognize, accept, and express their feelings, and to invite them to trust God to give them healing and wholeness. This explains why the topic of feelings comes early in training. Stephen Minister

trainees learn of the benefits of expressing feelings and the harm that can come when feelings remain unexpressed.

3 The Art of Listening

Listening is how Stephen Ministers go about discovering what feelings are in action in their care receivers. In this module trainees learn about open-ended questions and reflective listening and then practice these skills. By talking about their own listening experiences, they sharpen their understanding of when listening is effective and when it feels fake or makes them uncomfortable.

4 Distinctively Christian Caring

Stephen Ministry caregiving is distinctively Christian in character and thus warrants a special emphasis on using the tools of faith in caring for another. The training modules up to now have been 2½-hour sessions. This is a two-session (five-hour) module that uses the book *Christian Caregiving—a Way of Life* as Preclass Reading material for both sessions. Many congregations center a one-day retreat around these two training sessions, which are strongly relational and experiential.

5 Process versus Results in Caregiving

If ever there was a time for Stephen Minister trainees to say "Aha!" this module would be it. They learn that they do not have to (and indeed cannot) fix their care receivers' problems, which makes this session a time for a collective sigh of relief. Stephen Minister trainees learn that God is the caregiver, and the Stephen Minister is the care receiver. This concept runs counter to the strongly results-oriented approaches of today's society. But in caregiving, the more one pushes for results in another, the faster and farther they flee.



6 Assertiveness: Relating Gently and Firmly
Assertiveness has gained a bad name for itself in some circles of the church. It has erroneously been taken to mean “being pushy until I get my own way.” In fact, assertiveness is about relating to others gently and firmly. The Preclass Reading for this two-session module is the book *Speaking the Truth in Love: How to Be an Assertive Christian*, which acknowledges Jesus as the model for Christian assertiveness. Trainees learn and practice new skills in class and then use them in real-life settings between the two sessions so they can report on their results at the second session.

7 Maintaining Boundaries in Caregiving
The importance of maintaining boundaries is emphasized to protect Stephen Ministers from manipulation and to guard them against their own controlling impulses. Trainees learn the signs that indicate problems with maintaining appropriate boundaries and the consequences of boundary infringements. They briefly explore the difference between servanthood (good) and servitude (bad). They also learn that an effective caregiver must establish firm limits. This is a one-hour module, and in the typical 2½-hour training session it is combined with module 8, “Crisis Theory and Practice,” which is also a one-hour module.

8 Crisis Theory and Practice
Crises affect every area of a person’s life, and their certainty is what makes Stephen Ministry necessary. (No church staff could possibly care for every crisis in the congregation.) Stephen Minister trainees learn the effect crises have on people’s faith and how to encourage a person in crisis to move toward wholeness. This one-hour module is usually combined with module 7, “Maintaining Boundaries in Caregiving.”

9 Confidentiality
Stephen Ministry works because Stephen Ministers take confidentiality with utmost seriousness. If congregation members were not utterly convinced that their needs for care were kept confidential, few would ever agree to accept the care of a Stephen Minister. The trainees learn some simple, but vital, rules for confidentiality and ways to apply those rules in most any

situation. Trainees also learn important exceptions to the hard-and-fast rules, and how to respond if they occur.

10 Telecare: The Next Best Thing to Being There

Caregiving by telephone is not as good as caregiving in person, but it’s not bad either, provided you have learned some basic differences in techniques. Stephen Ministers typically visit with their care receivers about an hour a week in person, but sometimes they also care over the phone. This module teaches when use of the phone is right and how to overcome the challenges of caregiving by phone.

11 Using Mental Health Professionals and Other Community Resources

In preparation for this module, trainees read *When and How to Use Mental Health Resources*. They then view the video *Stephen Ministry and Mental Health Issues* during their in-class time. Trainees learn when and how to refer their care receivers to mental health professionals, when a Stephen Minister might continue caring for someone who is seeing a professional caregiver, and what other resources are available for people in crisis. As part of this module, trainees work together to compile a Community Resources Handbook, which lists available community resources for all sorts of special needs.

12 Ministering to Those Experiencing Grief
Stephen Ministers learn the stages of grief and what forms of caregiving are right at each stage. They widen their understanding of grief to include loss of any kind—loss of a job, of independence, of children who go off to college or to their own lives. As always, a Learn-It-From-Experience (LIFE) component of the training allows trainees to bring their own experiences of grief in its many forms to the instruction process.

13 Dealing with Depression: The Stephen Minister’s Role

Stephen Ministers are not qualified to care for those suffering from severe depression, especially when no mental health professional is involved. They may, however, care for people who are mildly to moderately depressed. In this module,

trainees learn the symptoms of mild, moderate, and severe depression, as well as when and how to involve a mental health professional. They also practice skills for providing care to someone who is mildly to moderately depressed.

14 Helping Suicidal Persons Get the Help They Need

Stephen Ministers are never knowingly assigned to a suicidal person, but may nonetheless find themselves in a caring relationship with a person who is suicidal. If so, they need to know what to do. This module teaches them how to determine the level of risk and how to refer the care receiver to a qualified professional. Expressions of suicide are not to be taken lightly, and trainees learn why this behavior, along with homicidal and abusive behavior, is an exception to the rules of confidentiality.

15 Bringing the Caring Relationship to a Close

Stephen Ministry relationships go on until the crisis is past, the need for care is diminished, and the care receiver is able to cope on his or her own. As important as learning how and when to close a caring relationship is learning how to head off premature closure. Trainees practice skills and share their own experiences of times when relationships have been helpfully and unhelpfully brought to a close.

16 Supervision: A Key to Quality Christian Care

Supervision is such an essential part of Stephen Ministry that trainees spend two sessions on this important topic. They learn what tools they have available for supervision and how to use them effectively so that supervision is extremely beneficial for all Stephen Ministers. Two videos add to the learning. *Stephen Ministry Small Group Peer Supervision: A Demonstration* is used with Part 1 of the module. *Focus on Specific Supervision Skills* is used with both parts. A practice supervision session reinforces the skills.

17 How to Make a First Caring Visit

The nitty-gritty of caring looms large as commissioning time approaches, which is why this module gives trainees the opportunity to review and put together everything they have learned about caregiving. Trainees consider the

important aspects that will help them get their caring relationships off to a good start. They practice setting up and conducting a first caring visit and explore their personal feelings about beginning their time of service as a Stephen Minister.

18 Follow Me

In this last session before commissioning, trainees view the video *Follow Me* and are inspired to follow Jesus in their caregiving. They review the Caregiver's Compass, which helps them focus on being compassionate, full of faith, skilled, trustworthy, and Christ-centered. They meet with their Supervision Group for the first time to begin building community, and then close their initial training with a worship service.

Continuing Education

19 Ministry to the Dying and Their Family and Friends

A welter of emotions and practical needs rise up in one who is dying as well as those connected to the dying person. Stephen Ministers explore their own feelings about dying. They learn specific ways to care for dying persons at each separate stage of the dying process. The Stephen Ministers practice using distinctively Christian tools—for example, prayer and the Bible—in caring for dying people in simulated interactions.

20 Caring for People before, during, and after Hospitalization

At the heart of this module is a field trip to a hospital or a discussion with a panel of experts on the routines of hospital care and the needs of hospital patients. Stephen Ministers learn the challenges that patients face and how best to minister to them. They learn and practice the many practical dos and don'ts of hospital care.

21 Ministering to Those Experiencing Losses Related to Aging

Differing needs for care accompany each category—young old, middle old, and frail elderly—of aging. Stephen Ministers learn those differences and practice caring skills related to each. Part of their education includes considering themselves as aging persons and what that means for them.

22 Ministering to Persons Needing Long-Term Care

Stephen Ministers learn about the many afflictions that result in a need for long-term care and the special needs long-term care receivers may have. Stephen Ministers learn how to apply their skills to these needs and explore some barriers to effective ministry. They come to recognize that this is a ministry for which some are uniquely gifted and evaluate their own gifts and commitments to care for long-term care receivers.

23 Ministering to Those Experiencing Divorce

Stephen Ministers are not marriage counselors, and in no way does this module prepare them for that. Rather, they learn to care for people experiencing the pain and suffering of divorce, especially how to provide the essential spiritual care. They learn the stages of the divorce process and what the Bible has to say about divorce. They also examine their own attitudes about divorce, which can help them avoid pitfalls in their caregiving.

24 Crises of Pregnancy and Childbirth

Even with a normal pregnancy resulting in a healthy baby, parents can experience crises. This module describes possible crises and how to care for people experiencing them. It also explores the crises of abnormal pregnancy and birth, including high-risk pregnancies, miscarriage, stillbirth, infertility, premature birth, and infant death. Stephen Ministers learn the effect that each of these might have on a care receiver and how to minister to parents when one or more of these difficulties or crises have arisen.

25 Providing Spiritual Care

Stephen Ministry is distinctively Christian care. Concern for the spiritual well-being of care receivers is obviously of prime importance. This module teaches spiritual caregiving skills and gives Stephen Ministers the opportunity to practice using these skills to identify spiritual needs in themselves and in others and then to provide gospel-centered caring for those identified needs.