

E-Series Called



1 In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. **2** So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. **3** Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them **4** and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word." **5** This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. **6** They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. **7** So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith. **8** Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people. —**Acts 6:1-10**

If you ask most Christians who Stephen was, the most prominent answer will likely be that he was the first martyr. Since he offered the ultimate sacrifice for his faith, it's understandable why we remember him this way. But there's more to Stephen than his martyrdom. There's also his ministry.

In the sixth chapter of Acts, we read Stephen's story. The church is growing so fast that the Twelve apostles' can't keep up with everything. So, seven people who are "full of faith and of the Holy Spirit" are chosen to spread out the ministry of the early church.

Stephen was one of those. We learn that because the Twelve apostles multiplied their ministry by commissioning the seven, Stephen "did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people." No doubt, Stephen was invigorated and filled with joy as he went about the tasks to which God had called him and for which God had given him gifts. Even as Stephen ministered to others, he was ministered to himself.

In the coming weeks and months, we will hear a good bit more about Stephen and his ministry at Wightman UMC. In 1975 a plan emerged for organizing and training Christians to follow in Stephen's footsteps. Stephen Ministry was born. Since then over 500,000 Christians have been trained to be Stephen Ministers in over 10,000 congregations in the United States. More than a million people have benefited from having a Stephen Minister who has cared for and supported them.

Stephen Ministers are trained to offer one-to-one Christian care for people who are hurting in all sorts of ways—like the loss of a loved one, a relocation, divorce, loneliness, hospitalizations, terminal illnesses, or unemployment.

Recently, we had two of our members to travel to Orlando for intense training as Stephen Leaders. Their vision and task for the next couple of years will be to identify people within our congregation who have the necessary gifts for Stephen Ministry, train and organize them, and facilitate their placement with those who need to receive their care.

I am very excited about Stephen Ministry's arrival at Wightman UMC. Stephen Ministers will be able to broaden, deepen and multiply the pastoral care ministry of our church. In addition to that, it will provide some of our members to use the gifts God has given them to do what God has called all of us to do—offer love and support to others in times of need.

Please pray for Nelson and Brenda Perry in the coming weeks and months, and the launching of Stephen Ministry at Wightman.

Excited,

Pastor Michael