

## **Stephen Minister Training Class Planned to Begin in August, 2010**

We need to identify men and women of our congregation who are willing to answer Jesus' call to serve as Stephen Ministers. Once we identify potential trainees, we will hold an informational meeting about Stephen Ministry and answer questions that they may have about the program and the training. We plan to begin a training class in August 2010 with 50 hours of stimulating and useful training in Christian caring skills. In the past the training has averaged about 10 hours a month in the evenings at a time that best fits the schedules of the trainees and the Stephen Leaders that teach the classes. Also, we welcome any Parkway active or inactive Stephen Ministers that would like to receive refresher training as the new class is being trained. This could be for one or more training modules or even the entire training period as I did myself. The training schedule will be determined once trainees fill out Stephen Minister applications and are selected to be trained. The training material includes a comprehensive Stephen Ministry Training Manual and three other books: Christian Caregiving-a Way of Life, Speaking the Truth in Love (How to Be an Assertive Christian), and When and How to Use Mental Health Resources (A Guide for Stephen Ministers, Stephen Leaders, and Church Staff).

Stephen Ministry training combines sound theological principles with contemporary psychology. Richard Tidwell, our Training Coordinator, will lead in teaching the Stephen Minister trainees with the assistance of our other Stephen Leaders (Norman Baker, Carolyn Jones, and Marcia Tidwell). The skills our Stephen Ministers learn and practice prepare them to provide a very high level of Christian caregiving. The training is intense because it explores some serious life issues, but it is also a growth-producing and enjoyable experience.

The 50 hours of Stephen Ministry training is normally broken down into twenty 2½-hour sessions. Training topics include: The Person of the Caregiver; Feelings: Yours, Mine, and Ours; The Art of Listening; Distinctively Christian Caring; Process versus Results in Caregiving; Assertiveness: Relating Gently and Firmly; Maintaining Boundaries in Caregiving; Crisis Theory and Practice: Danger versus Opportunity; Confidentiality; and Ministering to Those Experiencing Grief.

At the completion of the training, the trainees will be commissioned as Stephen Ministers. They will then join our active Stephen Ministers at Parkway in providing Christ centered one-to-one care to individuals experiencing difficulties in life. Stephen Ministers are assigned to care receivers of the same gender (male with male, female with female) at least 18 years to age. Most meet once a week for about an hour at a time. They may also check in with the care receiver by telephone or E-mail, particularly when the care receiver is going through a difficult time.

Before becoming a Stephen Leader, in January 2007, I went through Stephen Minister training twice. Initially I received training at the Monument Community Presbyterian Church in Colorado in 1993, then here at Parkway in 2004. I expected to learn a lot about caregiving, but didn't anticipate the personal and spiritual growth I experienced. Looking back, perhaps what I enjoyed most was the close Christian bond formed with those in our training class. Our trainees are in for a rewarding experience and have the opportunity of being part of "God's love in action."

Please lift up our Stephen Ministry at Parkway in your prayers as we identify, select and train a new class of Stephen Ministers to minister to the needs of our congregation and community.

If you would like to become a Stephen Minister, if you would like more information on Stephen Ministry, or if you or someone you know might benefit from the care of a Stephen Minister, please contact Pastor Bill Ford, Phone 770-889-8694, E-mail: [Bill.Ford@parkway-church.org](mailto:Bill.Ford@parkway-church.org) or Norm Baker, Stephen Leader, Phone 770-886-0439, E-mail: [normanmaryb@bellsouth.net](mailto:normanmaryb@bellsouth.net).