

TEXAS STEPHEN MINISTRY NETWORKING GROUP

“To equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.” Ephesians 4:12-13

NOVEMBER, 2006

VOLUME 1, NO. 2

Your **TSMNG** Leaders believe the above scripture is appropriate as we welcome our new approximately 83 Stephen Ministry churches and their individual Stephen Ministers with our second **TSMNG** Newsletter and the expansion of our program, member benefits and care giving.

The role of the TSMNG is to coordinate assistance to member churches in order to nurture and enhance their Stephen Ministry. TSMNG is a focal point where Stephen Ministries can share challenges and solutions, provide resources and encouragement, as we all strive to be the best Christian care givers we can be. Praise the Lord!



CARE RECEIVER'S EXPERIENCE

My world suddenly and painfully shattered. It fell apart throwing my mind into a swirling and dizzy state never before experienced. The dark hole was truly bottomless. After 49 years and 9 months of an extremely happy marriage, I found myself without a loving wife who was also my best friend. What a shock. What do I do? Where do I turn? Can anyone help? Can someone guide me? How can I find comfort and relief?

I was distantly aware of the services Stephen Ministry provided. My Pastor offered to have them contact me at the lowest level of my life. I adamantly refused. I don't know why. However, my pains and utter confusion continued. After time and prayer, I acquiesced. I let go to let God. I contacted my Pastor and requested a Stephen Minister to enter my world of pain and suffering. This was one of the best decisions of my life.

A Stephen Ministry care giver was assigned to meet with me. As we became acquainted, it was obvious our temperaments and personalities meshed. Regular visits were established. Discussions focused on many areas—life, marriage, religious activities,

friends, sports, ambitions, etc. Over a period of time, my pain became a comforting pain. Because of my care giver's training and continuing education, I began to cope better with my loss and grief. God has eased my pain and left me with many pleasant memories.

When you experience a significant emotional event in your life and need prayer, comfort, and someone to turn to in addition to our Heavenly Father, I would strongly recommend Stephen Ministry. God bless them for their love, dedication, special training and tender understanding we all need during these times. I needed them and they were there for me. I am now helping TSMNG help other care receivers and will start my Stephen Ministry training in January.

I will be happy to talk with any care receiver prospects to discuss how God has really blessed me and can bless them. Ace Hopkins, The Lakeway Church. 512 -261-4170, acekje@aol.com.

Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples. John 13.35
(NLT)

NOW THAT I=VE BEEN TRAINED, WHERE=S MY CARE RECEIVER?

This is the most mentioned problem that we hear about from our SM churches. Stephen Ministers can become frustrated when they have finished their training and there are not enough willing care receivers. As Leaders, we need to keep our Stephen Ministers enthused, active and sharp. Some of the most popular and easy ways to do this are as follows:

Hospital, Nursing & Retirement Home Visits:
Assign your inactive/unassigned Stephen Ministers to cover one day a week visiting church members, their family and neighbors. Once the person improves, this can be expanded to home visitation or a short term assigned S/M relationship. A check -in statement and in-depth report can be made and will be effective to improve SM skills and awareness. The SM and caring skills remain the same; only the patients change.

Holy Communion/Eucharist taken out by Stephen Ministers to shut -ins, hospitalized, rehabilitation patients, and their families Any person unable to get to church for the Sacraments can call the church and request a visitation from a Communion team member, including Stephen Ministers.

Schedule unassigned Stephen Ministers to be available each week after each service at the altar area or prayer chapel for prayer time with anyone who needs individual prayer.
Place in your weekly Sunday Service Bulletin wording similar to:

Alf you are in need of prayer or need a listening ear, there will be a Stephen Minister available for you at the altar rail at the close of each service@.

Train every Stephen Minister as a facilitator and rotate the role of facilitator each Small Group Peer Supervision session so that those unassigned Stephen Ministers can have an added sense of contributing and belonging during supervision.

Assign unassigned Stephen Ministers to partner with an assigned Stephen Ministers so

that the Care Receiver and the assigned Stephen Minister are both covered in prayer as they are meeting. The unassigned Stephen Minister should setaside the hour of the caring meeting each week to be in prayer for the relationship, the Stephen Minister =s skills and the Care Receiver =s spiritual growth as it is happening.

Utilize your unassigned Stephen Ministers while setting up your continuing educa tion each month. Encourage them to share their expertise in the individual areas, or assign them to find, schedule and introduce speakers from any unique sources to which they are connected or could locate.

Rotate or sign up all Stephen Ministers, assigned or not, to provide the devotion and refreshments for each meeting.

If your congregation / Parish have implemented other ways to use unassigned Stephen Ministers, please let us know and we will publish them in the next newsletter.

Through networking we a ll grow stronger. Praise the Lord.

Jeanne Heffern, TSMNG Leader, Austin Region

MEMBER BENEFITS

Our basic benefits for members are a quarterly Newsletter; a web site; basic information on TSMNG and Regional Groups; Team e -mail addresses to receive you r questions, suggestions and complaints; a Help Line, Regional Prayer Lists for serious cases; Training materials, lists of speakers and religious books; updates on Headquarters activities and meetings; the shared experiences of our Stephen Ministers; and any other information or activity that will help provide better care to our care receivers, care givers, SM churches, family and friendsYas the Lord leads us.

Please offer any requests and/or suggestions for expanding and improving the program

TSMNG REGIONAL LEADER=S REPORTS

AUSTIN: Jeanne Heffern, 512-260-9585,
jhheffern@yahoo.com

The first re-organizational meeting of the Austin Area Stephen Ministry Network was held at Covenant United Methodist Church located off 183 on Duval Road, September 24, 2006, Sunday afternoon from 2:00 to 4:00. Barbara Perry, Stephen Leader at Covenant United Methodist Church, opened the group of 12 people with a devotion and prayer.

Ten Stephen Ministry churches were represented, ranging from non-denominational, Catholic, Episcopal, to United Methodist.

Vern Bennett, head of TSMNG, the TEXAS Stephen Ministry Networking Group, talked to us about the support that is being formed statewide uniting all Stephen Ministry churches across Texas into a larger network. We agreed that all Austin Stephen Ministry churches networking locally should also be automatically part of the TSMNG with Jeanne Heffern as the representative and link between the two levels.

A round-robin discussion followed. The format began with looking at the pre-existing network and what re-organization would be needed to revive it. We agreed that the Austin Network Group should be led by a team of people working together for a common good, keeping each other accountable, and for the network itself to be more supportive and flexible in design.

We then brainstormed ideas of what we would like to see in a network. As ideas were shared, faith, hope, strength and excitement were also shared. We heard lots of wonderful suggestions, hints, and positive encouragement.

We agreed to set the next meeting @ Covenant UMC at 4410 Duval Road in Austin, Texas for the purpose of re-activating the Austin Area Stephen Ministry Network. (Date to be determined) At that meeting, we will set a steering committee and commit to a common direction and purpose. Our homework is to visualize our ideal networking dream plan. We will put those ideas together when we meet and use them to reactivate the previously existing network.

We want it to be more about helping people than about the organization behind it. If you are interested in joining us, please contact Jeanne

Heffern at the above phone number or e-mail address for more information.

TSMNG REGIONAL LEADER=S REPORTS (continued)

HOUSTON: Bette Range, 201-499-5044,
brange1@msn.com

The Houston Metropolitan Area had Dr. Tommy Thompson COO of CanCare talk to our group on how CanCare and Stephen Ministry could partner. CanCare has a 17-hour training that is much like part of ours. Most of their training is about listening and not giving advice.

The group discussed what type of programs they offer at Christmas for those who have lost loved ones during the past several years. Bette Range handed out the program that Sugar Land First United Methodist Church did last year and we discussed that it is available for all churches.

The program this year will be on December 12, 2006 at 7:00 pm at 431 Eldridge, Sugar Land, Texas. For information call 281-491-6041

We plan to start a speaker's bureau among the Stephen Ministry churches in our area. We are all looking for speakers for our continuing education classes and felt that if we shared speakers it would help all of us.

Any church that has an event coming up will send it to Bette Range and she will get it out to all the Stephen Ministry churches in the area to let them know about the workshops that are available.

Our next meeting will be February 10, 2007 at Grace Fellowship United Methodist Church in Katy, Texas, attending a workshop by Dr. Townsend talking about boundaries. There will be a charge of \$10 for lunch and snacks. This will be an all day meeting.

Other areas discussed were getting new Stephen Ministers into the program, when do you get new Stephen Leaders, and how do you deal with conflict among your Stephen Leaders.

We had a great program and a wonderful time of networking and sharing information.

WACO: Carol Linda, 254-772-9349,
clinda@saintmarrhewwaco.org

Three area churches met at St. Matthew Lutheran church in Waco, on Sunday, September 17th to discuss the TSMNG with

Vern Bennett and Carol Linda. Ten people were in attendance. Vern Bennett presented information on the TSMNG. The Stephen

TSMNG REGIONAL LEADER=S REPORTS (continued)

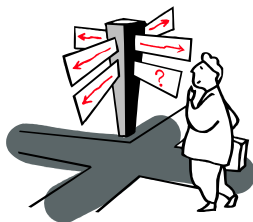
Ministers were very impressed with the networking possibilities of TSMNG. During the meeting, Stephen Ministers also discussed ideas regarding a regional meeting for the Waco area. We were all in agreement that this is something we want to implement.

Three people volunteered to serve on a committee to plan the regional meeting. It was decided that we would work toward planning a regional meeting in early November and would meet quarterly thereafter.

It was a very productive meeting and information was shared between churches on various aspects of the Stephen Ministry. The sharing of ideas seemed to be of significant importance among those in attendance.

We are off and running and very excited about what God has in store for us as we come together.

TSMNG WEBSITE



The **TSMNG** documents and SM information has been delayed until the end of January because of a possible change in location and the decision to have links to our regional leaders in Austin, Houston, San Antonio, and Waco and possibly in Tarrant County. We will also list all available information on Regional SM Groups and welcome updates and scheduled meetings as submitted by their leaders. We plan to have a large amount of information on the web site and use this site for our central posting of

ANGER SOLUTIONS: A comprehensive faith-based anger management ministry in the San Antonio area. They provide educational seminars to churches. They also provide one-on-one sessions, small group sessions and family intervention assistance.

Phone 210-804-0085 or email:
www.angermanagementnow.org.

REFERRAL PROBLEMS

Phyllis Miller writes that her church has a successful program with 21 Stephen Ministers and used to have more care receivers than Stephen Ministers. Her church lost the Pastor who did the referrals. They have not had a new referral since Christmas.

They have bulletin announcements, Stephen Ministry Sunday, testimonies by two care receivers and mention in sermons and posters. They know there are persons with needs but cannot get care receiver prospects to accept a Stephen Minister relationship.

Please e-mail your suggestions to Phyllis at
egmpfm@verizon.net.

information available to all SM churches in Texas.

MEMBER COMMUNICATIONS

Please contact us whenever you have a question, suggestion or complaint or just want to get acquainted. You will receive a reply by e-mail, letter or phone call. We will also be listing the best items we receive on our Web Site and in our Newsletters. Please send your questions, suggestions and complaints to your Regional Leader if you live

in the Austin, Houston, San Antonio or Waco areas. SMs in the rest of Texas should contact the **TSMNG** Coordinator **Vernon Bennett**, vern@austin.rr.com, 512 -261-3895.



TSMNG PRAYER LISTS

Starting in late November 2006, we will have **TSMNG** Prayer Lists in each of our current regional areas plus one other list for statewide **TSMNG** members outside those areas.

Please e-mail your prayer requests for serious situations to your regional Leader or to Vern Bennett for the rest of the state.



AWARENESS PROGRAM

There are two phases to this program. Phase I is designed to contact, provide basic information and possibly discuss our TSMNG program with the approximately 360 active Stephen Minister programs in Texas between July 1, 2006 and June 30, 2007. We estimate that we have contacted about 200 SM programs to date. We will send our first two newsletters to all non-members to give them good information and hope they join.

We set a goal to have 50 SM churches as members by Christmas, 2006. We met that goal in early October and now have about 126 SM churches as members with over 12 churches considering TSMNG at this time. Praise the Lord!

Our second phase will be to visit the SM churches in 2008 who were not interested or inactive during 2006-2007.

We appreciate very much the many

volunteers who are making contacts for us and the existing SM churches who have recommended TSMNG to their neighbor SM churches.

STEPHEN MINISTERS= EXPERIENCES

Stephen Ministers= personal experiences will be a regular feature of our Newsletters. We will also place select personal experiences on our Web Site, with permission from the member. We would love to receive and share your good or bad Stephen Ministry experiences. Please contact Vernon Bennett, Coordinator, 512 -261-3895, vern@austin.rr.com.

MEET YOUR TSMNG LEADERS TEAM

Coordinator: Vernon Bennett

Austin, 512-261-3895; vern@austin.rr.com

Austin Regional Leader, Jeanne Heffern

512-260-9585, jheffern@yahoo.com

Houston Regional Leader Bette Range

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San Antonio Regional Leader Lyn Anello

830-285-2344, 1pa1952@gvtc.com

Waco Regional Leader Carol Linda

254-772-9349, clinda@saintmatthewwaco.org

We look forward to hearing from each of you!

WHY JOIN TSMNG?

T is for TRAINING Stephen Ministers to be the very best they can be when relating to their care receivers.

S is for SHARING Christ's love to people in crisis.

M is for MINISTERING to those who feel alone and afraid amidst their troubles.

- N** is for NETWORKING Stephen Ministry throughout the state of Texas.
- G** is for GOD=s infinite wisdom, guidance and strength that we pray for and seek.



Being a Christian is like being a **pumpkin**. God lifts you up, takes you in, and washes all the dirt off of you. He opens you up, touches you deep inside and scoops out all the yucky stuff including the seeds of doubt, hate, greed, ego, etc. Then He carves you a new smiling face and puts His light inside you to shine for the entire world to see.

This was passed on to us from another pumpkin. We are sending this to all the **TSMNG pumpkins**.

HAPPY FALL!

**TEXAS STEPHEN
MINISTRY
NETWORKING GROUP
Austin, TX**



**COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS
THIS THANKSGIVING**

As we gather with family and friends this Thanksgiving, may we ever be remindful of our gracious Heavenly Father who has blessed each of us this year!

TSMNG has received many blessings from the numerous contacts we have made to Stephen Minister Leaders, Stephen Ministers, and Pastors throughout the year. As the contacts were made, we discovered that we were truly blessed by all whom we came in contact with. Stories were shared of churches networking with other churches in assisting with Stephen Ministry training, and helping sister churches begin their Stephen Ministry program. There were Stephen Leaders working along side other Stephen Ministers to give “distinctively Christian care giving” to those who are going through a crisis in their lives.

Yes, we have been truly blessed as we have networked throughout the State of Texas and we are looking forward to many more blessings as we visit with churches regarding Texas Stephen Ministry Networking.

We give thanks to God for his wonderful and bountiful love that radiates through Stephen Leaders and Stephen Ministers as you work together to spread Christ’s love among those who are suffering!

Thanks be to God!