

## Christ Caring for People through People

January 27, 2013

1 Corinthians 12:12-31a

Each Wednesday evening, for the last 5 months, 6 Stephen Minister trainees and 2 Stephen Leaders have been meeting together here at the church to learn about Stephen Ministry. You've already met 5 of them earlier in the service. Twila Leichty is also part of this group, but was unable to be here this morning.

And each Wednesday, we began our evening with a few jokes. Perhaps to entice you to consider joining us for the next round of training, let me share a few jokes with you.

This is a good reminder to all of us of good practice:

\*One day, Jesus and the Devil were both working on their computers. Jesus was typing away. The Devil was typing away.

Suddenly a huge blackout filled heaven and hell. When the lights came back on, Jesus picked up right where he left off, but the Devil's screen was black.

Satan says, "How could this happen? I did everything Jesus did!"

Then one person in Hell says, "No, Jesus Saves." <http://www.joke-db.com/jesus#ixzz2lq3Srb3l>

And then, of course, we have the wisdom of children:

A little boy opened the big and old family Bible with fascination, looking at the old pages as he turned them.

Then something fell out of the Bible.

He picked it up and looked at it closely.

It was an old leaf from a tree that has been pressed in between the pages.

"Mama, look what I found," the boy called out.

"What have you got there, dear?" his mother asked.

With astonishment in the young boy's voice he answered, "It's Adam's suit".

The preacher was wired for sound with a lapel mike, and as he preached, he moved briskly about the platform, jerking the mike cord as he went.

Then he moved to one side, getting wound up in the cord and nearly tripping before jerking it again.

After several circles and jerks, a little girl in the third pew leaned toward her mother and whispered, "If he gets loose, will he hurt us?"

And lastly:

A boy was born to a couple in Goshen. The problem was, he was born without a body; he was just a head. Well, the couple loved him as much as any parents love their children, and he grew up. When he was 18, they wanted to celebrate with him, so they took him to The Chief for ice cream. He tried the bacon ice cream, and it was so good that suddenly out popped his torso. They were all so surprised, that they gave him the toasted coconut ice cream, and it was so good, that out popped his arms. They then got him the strawberry, and it was so good, that out popped his legs. He was so excited that he ran out of the parking lot and ran right into the on-coming traffic. The Chief employees turned to the parents and said, "That boy should have quit while he was a head."

What part of the body are you? Are you the ears, or the eyes, or the brain, or hands, or feet? Perhaps you're the funny bone.

This passage from 1 Corinthians is a very familiar passage for most of us. Sometimes it's hard to know what to do with these familiar passages--we tune out, because we've heard it so many times, or because we think we know what it says, or because we don't find it interesting anymore.

And yet, this familiar passage is a good one to remind us yet again, that we are all part of the one body that is Jesus Christ. It is easy to think that if we aren't serving on a commission, or involved in some public way, that our contribution to the body is a lesser one. We forget that the body is incomplete if even one member is not recognized and valued for who they are.

Can the preacher be heard without the sound operator? Can we drink coffee without the cups being washed? Can we understand in the simplest way that God loves each and every one of us, without the sounds and voices of our youngest members? Each person, from the youngest to the oldest; each member whether present or absent, contributes in their unique way to the wholeness of the body of Christ. Those of us who are strong need the weaker members to remind us of our own vulnerability and need to rely on God and

others. Those of us who are weak, need the stronger members to remind us that we can do more together than we can alone.

And while today we are commissioning particular members for particular tasks--those related to caregiving, it is not to say that the care and love that are already being given and received here in the congregation are lesser than the care that will be given and received in the context of Stephen Ministry. There are so many of you here in this congregation who give of yourselves in this way, and we want you to continue to do that. Stephen Ministry will augment what is already happening, and actually works best alongside that kind of care.

Perhaps it might be helpful to picture our congregation as one big caring unit. In it, there are those who regularly send cards and notes to people to let them know they are being prayed for and remembered. There are others who, while not sending the card or note, regularly remember and pray for others. And there are those who through concrete acts of caring, like casseroles, rides to appointments, gifts of groceries or flowers, or baby-sitting, provide the love and care needed at just the right time. And there is also the care we extend to others beyond the congregation, through our involvement with IHN, The Window, and other community agencies. And there is the care for creation that happens in the collecting of batteries, the recycling, the bicycling, the car-pooling.

This list is certainly not complete, but gives you an idea of the kind of everyday caring that happens regularly here.

If that wasn't enough caring, during the transition and re-structuring that happened in the last couple of years, the Caregiving Commission was formed, as a way to formalize the caring that was happening, and to make sure that no one is overlooked. We realized that caring for people, body and soul, was so important that we designated a particular group of people, the deacons, to oversee the caregiving in a more formal way.

And then if that wasn't enough, one of the pastoral positions was designated for pastoral care, and called to oversee the implementation and training of people to provide even more specific and formal care--the Stephen Ministry

program. Stephen Ministry briefly is lay Christian caregiving in a 1:1 relationship. It is lay, because the people doing the caring are lay members; they are not professional counsellors, or therapists. They are members of the congregation who received 50 hours of training to do this. It is Christian, because those providing the care are committed Christians who see their ministry as living out the call of Christ to be Christ's loving, caring, healing presence in the world--Berkey's mission statement fits very nicely into the mission of Stephen Ministry. It is caregiving because it is providing a supportive, listening, caring presence to someone in need. It is not therapy, it is not counselling; it is caregiving. The biblical image of providing a cup of cold water is a good one for this ministry. The care given is like a cup of cold water to a thirsty person.

It is 1:1; Stephen Ministers only meet with someone of their same gender, and they only meet with one person at a time. Providing care to more than one person takes different training and skills.

Stephen Ministry has developed the Caregiver's Compass, which you see on the back of the bulletin. The 4 points of the compass remind Stephen Ministers to be compassionate, full of faith, skilled, and trustworthy. At the centre of the compass are the Greek letters, Chi and Rho, the first two letters in the Greek name, *cristos*, for Christ. It is a reminder that Christ is at the centre of Stephen Ministry.

We've already mentioned that these Stephen Ministers have gone through 50 hours of training. The other piece you should know is that Stephen Ministers will participate in Small Group Peer Supervision twice a month. During these sessions, they will receive continuing education on various aspects related to caregiving, and they will share about how they are doing as caregivers. Confidentiality is a very important part of Stephen Ministry, and names are never used in supervision. Only details that will help the group support the Stephen Minister in providing care are shared with the group. If you are receiving care from a Stephen Minister, the only people who will know about it are the Stephen Minister and the pastors.

We are all members of one body; each of us has a valuable role to play in that body. When one part of the body suffers, we all suffer; when one part

rejoices, we all rejoice. Paul does not apologize for this, or for the diversity that exists in community. In fact, he assumes there is diversity, and shows that diversity is essential to being the body of Christ. If the body is made up of only one part, then the body can do only one thing. But if there is diversity, the body is equipped to do many things.

As a community we share our life together. We share in our sufferings and in our joys. And this is all possible through the Spirit, the one Spirit, in whom we were baptized into one body. It is because of the Spirit working in us and through us, that we, the diverse body of Christ, can grow and thrive.

And that is the foundation of Stephen Ministry: we provide the care; God provides the cure. It is easy to think that healing depends on us and our ability to get it right. If I just say the right thing in the right way at the right time, the other person will feel better, their situation will improve and all will be well. We've spent a lot of time in the 50 hours of training, learning the skills of caregiving: good listening, focusing on feelings--our own and the other person's; not working toward a particular result or solution. All of these skills, while important, can distract us and make us think the right skill or technique will make everything better. But that is not the case. While we want to provide the best care we can, we recognize that we are imperfect human beings, and we will make mistakes; and we recognize that we can't provide this care on our own. We need to rely on the presence of Christ and the Holy Spirit, to work in us and through us to bring healing and hope to others.

And that takes the pressure off of us in all situations--not just in Stephen Ministry! It isn't about us, and it's not up to us! The ministry of healing belongs to God; we are but the ministers of the healing, the instruments of God's love, and the tools of God's care.

Thanks be to God, who heals and provides in ways beyond our knowing and our doing!