

LIFE IN FELLOWSHIP

FALL 2016



PAGES
10-11



TODD DEVANEY

FROM THE OUTREACH DIRECTIONAL PASTOR

Greetings! I hope you are enjoying our church's magazine as much as I am. It's awesome to read each issue about how God is working in, around, and through his people. Thanks for your attentiveness to his leading in your life, which is what creates these great articles about Jesus and his work in our people.

It's that time of year when summer comes to a close, temperatures begin falling, football season is in the air, kids are returning to school, and the HOPE Challenge is right around the corner. Coming again this October, Fellowship Greenville's Outreach team is leading this series of opportunities to engage your family in serving our global and local partners.

While the HOPE Challenge could just be something we do every October, it has the potential to be so much more, not only for the people we serve but also for your family.

For example, one of the challenges has us raising money to bless our missionaries with a special monetary gift at Christmas. After last year's HOPE Challenge, in which we raised over \$12,500 for our missionaries, we heard time and time again how those extra funds made huge differences in their ministries. One family in Liberia, in particular, used their unexpected gift to build a playground and gazebo that has become a gathering place for their entire neighborhood. (Read more about this family on page 14.) Again this year (Oct. 16), our Missionary Christmas S.W.A.P. will impact God's Kingdom around the world.

Our Outreach team often talks about the impact we all long for: we want to be serving and supporting Greenville such that if we were to disappear tomorrow, the community would feel a great loss because of how God has worked in us and through us to make a difference.

Last year, we collected **9 tons** (18,000 pounds) of food, over four weeks, for Harvest Hope! This is no small feat, and seriously impacts the food bank programs in the Upstate, which routinely report not having enough food to meet the needs of our community. Your family's contribution might feel small, but together we are making a big difference.

This year, we want to increase our impact even more. We want to collect 10 TONS of food... *in a single Sunday (Oct. 9)! And in addition, we'll further*

invest in our community by collecting household items for several local ministry partners to use and/or resell (Oct. 22).

Then, at the end of October, we'll collect luggage for our local foster kids. When a child is placed into foster care, he is often given trash bags or grocery bags to carry what few treasured items he brings. Can you imagine how insignificant you'd feel if all your possessions were stored in a trash bag? The simple act of giving a child a new or gently-used backpack, suitcase, or duffel bag goes a long way toward helping boost self esteem, at a time when their whole world is tossed upside down. What an impact we can make! (Read more about one such child on pages 12-13.)

SEE PAGES 10-11 FOR CHALLENGE DETAILS.

So as we approach this month of serving and giving, I want to challenge you to put others first and to **give your best**, not just your leftovers. I was recently listening to the following lyrics of a popular Chris Tomlin song we sing often, *Good, Good Father*:

Oh, and I've seen many searching for answers far and wide
But I know we're all searching
For answers only you provide
'Cause you know just what we need
Before we say a word
You're a good, good Father
It's who you are, it's who you are, it's who you are
And I'm loved by you
It's who I am, it's who I am, it's who I am

We have a good, good Father who loves us *because of who he is*. His love for us is extravagant and never failing. He doesn't give us his cast-offs, he gives us his very best... his Son!

As I think about serving with no expectation of return, I want to do it as extravagantly as I have been loved. The question we need to ask ourselves is: how can I extend that same love and blessing to others? I imagine our church stepping into this year's HOPE Challenge opportunities to show extravagant love and grace to others, thus being a community of grace passionately pursuing life and mission with Jesus.

Learning to love,

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We live in an age and culture full of misconceptions about Christianity. As a result, many people are left with negative impressions of Christians and the church as a whole. At Fellowship Greenville, we want to live in such a way that others can't help but see what authentic Christianity looks like. Our hope is that the misconceptions people might have carried for a long time will begin to fade away as we seek to become a community of grace, passionately pursuing life and mission with Jesus. We long for people to be drawn back to Jesus, seeing him and the life he offers in a fresh, new way.

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FALL EVENT CALENDAR

For details, visit FELLOWSHIPGREENVILLE.ORG/CALENDAR

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
4 September	5	6 FG Women (WBS, SYP)	7 FG Women (WBS, PC, MWSK) FG Students (HSM)	8 FG Women (MWSK)	9 WOMEN'S MINISTRY WOMEN'S NIGHT	10
11 SERVICES+ABS, DC, GS, CE20 GroupConnect Stepping In (NextGen) Mom & Me (NextGen)	12 FG Women (MMBS, AM2PM)	13 FG Women (WBS, SYP)	14 FG Women (WBS, PC, AM2PM) FG Students (HSM) FG Men (EMMG, TJ, BW, TGS)	15 FG Women (AM2PM)	16	17
18 SERVICES+ABS, DC, GS, CE20 Mom & Me (NextGen) Starting Point A comprehensive training of Fellowship Greenville	19 FG Women (MMBS)	20 FG Women (WBS, SYP)	21 FG Women (WBS, PC, MWSK) FG Students (HSM) FG Men (EMMG, TJ, TGS)	22 FG Women (MWSK) FG Seniors (Men/Women) Senior Sweep (HSM)	23	24
25 SERVICES+ABS, DC, GS, CE20 Imagine Parenting	26 FG Women (MMBS, AM2PM)	27 FG Women (WBS, SYP)	28 FG Women (WBS, PC, AM2PM) FG Students (HSM) FG Men (EMMG, TJ, BW, TGS)	29 FG Women (AM2PM)	30	1 KNIGHTS OF ADVENTURE 10th Annual Father and Son Campout
2 SERVICES+ABS, DC, GS, CE20 Zero to One Class (JR) Connecting Point MEMBERSHIP CLASS	3 FG Women (MMBS)	4 FG Women (WBS, SYP)	5 FG Women (WBS, PC, MWSK) FG Students (HSM) FG Men (EMMG, TJ, TGS)	6 FG Women (MWSK) Set Free Gala	7	8 October
9 SERVICES+ABS, DC, GS, CE20 Membership Class (cont.) Parenting Growth Group HOPE Challenge #1 FOOD DRIVE	10 FG Women (MMBS, AM2PM)	11 FG Women (WBS, SYP)	12 FG Women (WBS, PC, AM2PM) FG Students (HSM) FG Men (EMMG, TJ, BW, TGS)	13 FG Women (AM2PM)	14	15
16 SERVICES+ABS, DC, GS, CE20 Parenting Growth Group HOPE Challenge #2 CHRISTMAS SWAP	17 FG Women (MMBS)	18 FG Women (WBS, SYP)	19 FG Women (WBS, PC, MWSK) FG Students (Fall Fest) FG Men (EMMG, TJ, TGS)	20 FG Women (MWSK) FG Seniors (Men/Women)	21 WOMEN'S MINISTRY Chalk & Talk WOMEN'S CAFE	22 HOPE Challenge #3 HOUSEHOLD COLLECTION
23 SERVICES+ABS, DC, GS, CE20 Grow (FGK) Stephen Ministry Information Meeting Missionary Update: Cliftons Parenting Growth Group	24 FG Women (MMBS, AM2PM)	25 FG Women (WBS)	26 FG Women (WBS, PC, AM2PM) FG Students (HSM) FG Men (EMMG, TJ, BW, TGS)	27 FG Women (AM2PM)	28	29
30 SERVICES+ABS, DC, GS, CE20 Parenting Growth Group HOPE Challenge #4 SUITCASE SUNDAY	31 FG Women (MMBS)	1 FG Women (WBS)	2 FG Women (WBS, PC, MWSK) FG Students (HSM) FG Men (EMMG, TJ, TGS)	3 FG Women (MWSK)	4	5
6 SERVICES+ABS, DC, GS, CE20 Start Here (FGK) Baptism Class Surviving the Holidays (Care)	7 FG Women (AM2PM)	8 VOTE	9 FG Women (PC, AM2PM) FG Students (HSM) FG Men (EMMG, TJ, BW, TGS)	10 FG Women (AM2PM) Senior Sweep (HSM)	11	12
13 SERVICES+ABS, DC, GS, CE20 CHURCH IMPACT SUNDAY Parent Dedication (JR) Stepping In (NextGen)	14 November	15	16 FG Women (PC, MWSK) FG Women (Christmas Study) FG Students (HSM) FG Men (EMMG, TJ, TGS)	17 FG Women (MWSK) FG Seniors (Men/Women)	18	19
20 SERVICES+ABS, DC, GS, CE20 Discovering Outreach Baptism	21	22	23	24 GIVE THANKS	25 Church Office Closed (11/24-11/25)	26
27 SERVICES+ABS No MSM or FGK	28 FG Women (AM2PM)	29	30 FG Women (MWSK) FG Women (Christmas Study) FG Students (HSM) FG Men (EMMG, TJ, TGS)			

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
				1 FG Women (MWSK)	2	3 Single Parent's Day Out
4 SERVICES+ABS, DC, GS, CE20	5	6	7 December	8	9	10
11 SERVICES+ABS, DC, GS, CE20	12	13	14 FG Women (MWSK) FG Women (Christmas Study) FG Students (HSM)	15 FG Women (MWSK) FG Seniors (Men/Women)	16 Christmas Open House	17
18 SERVICES+ABS, CE20	19	20	21	22	23 Church Office Closed (12/24-12/26)	24 CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICES
Christmas NO SERVICES	26 Church Office Closed (12/24-12/26)	27	28	29	30 Church Office Closed (12/30-1/2)	31
1 WELCOME 2017! SERVICES (JR only)	KEY: ABS: Adult Bible Study AM2PM: Affirming & Mentoring Preschool Moms BW: Biblical Worldview (Men) CE20: College and Early 20s	DC: Divorce Care, Divorce Care for Kids EMMG: Early Morning Men's Group FGK: FG Kids (Grades 1-5) GS: Grief Share HSM: High School Student Ministry	JR: FG Kids Jr. (Preschool, Nursery, K) MMBS: Monday Morning Bible Study (Women) MSM: Middle School Merge MWSK: Moms With School-age Kids PC: Precept Bible Study (Women)	SYP: Single Young Professional (Women) TGS: The Gospel Story (Men) TJ: The Journey (Men) WBS: Women's Bible Study (All ages)		

Make the time TO FIGHT FOR THEIR HEARTS

REimagine PARENTING
SEPT. 25, 5:30PM
FELLOWSHIPGREENVILLE.ORG/EVENTS

KEEP FIGHTING FOR THEIR HEARTS IN COMMUNITY GROUPS THIS FALL, AS WE STUDY "PARENTING BEYOND YOUR CAPACITY." NOT IN A COMMUNITY GROUP? JOIN ONE OF OUR PARENTING GROWTH GROUPS. VISIT FELLOWSHIPGREENVILLE.ORG/EVENTS TO FIND A GROUP.



MEET THE HOLEMANS

BY BETH BEUTLER, WITH EDDIE AND DIANE HOLEMAN

Technology is something that affects much of our everyday life—especially when it's not working as we like. But when it is, we go about our day without much thought for the people behind the scenes who aid in keeping it running.

Fellowship Greenville has several behind-the-scenes workers who help the congregation have as seamless an experience as possible for everything from participation in Sunday morning to registering for an event to giving online. One of the key players behind the scenes is Eddie Holeman, Director of Information Technology. But there's more to Eddie and his wife Diane's life and ministry experience than technology. I asked a few questions to help us get to know them better.

Where did the two of you meet?

We met at LeTourneau College in Longview, Texas, when I (Eddie) transferred there from Bryan College. I lived off campus at the time and for quite a while Diane was the only girl on campus that I knew. When I would run

into her in the cafeteria, I'd greet her by name—but she couldn't remember my name! Diane's defense is that the ratio at LeTourneau was 11 guys to every girl, so she was used to having guys know *her* name. We did start attending the same church, so we ran in the same group and became great friends before we started dating.

Tell us about your children.

We have two daughters, Rachel (shown to the right of Eddie in the photo above), 25, and Rebecca, 22. Rachel was born in San Jose, Costa Rica during our one year of Spanish language study there. Rebecca was born in Bluffton, Indiana, during a missionary furlough. Rachel is currently a fourth-year medical school student, and Rebecca is in her second semester of occupational therapy school at MUSC in Charleston.

What do each of you do for fun?

Diane's hobby is photography. I really enjoy softball and coached for 15 years at Southside Christian School.

Our hobbies have complemented each other over the years since Diane loves to take athletic photos.

Since coaching is another hat that you wear, what are some highlights from this part of your life?

In almost every season of coaching, God has given us the opportunity to walk through dark times with one of our players. We had a player lose a parent during a season, while others encountered significant illnesses, injuries, or other emotional situations. We've had the unique opportunity to be part of their lives during difficult times.

Prayer has been a huge part of this ministry. Over the years we have had many opportunities to pray for needs of our opponents. Coaches have been diagnosed with cancer or their players have had other significant needs. Making this a priority with our own team and players has also had an impact in all of our lives.

You were missionaries during an

earlier season of life. Where did you serve and what was that like?

We served as missionaries with Serving in Mission (SIM) in Bolivia from 1990–1997. We first became familiar with SIM in 1987 when we served for a summer in Liberia.

We served in two primary support roles in Bolivia. First, we were the directors of a camp project under construction in the Yungas region near LaPaz, Bolivia for one year. The mission then moved us to the city of Cochabamba, where we served at Carachipampa Christian School. I was the business administrator. Because the school served not only missionary children, but also the children of Bolivian professionals, our life there allowed us to develop close friendships with that segment of the Cochabamba society. This led to opportunities to share and input Christ into their lives. In addition, we also ministered to the large group of single teachers at the school. Most were there for a one- or two-year stint, so we were thrilled to include them as part of our family and hosted them on a regular basis.

What lessons did you learn as foreign missionaries that apply to your life serving here in the States?

Living in the Bolivian culture taught us to value the people God allows us to live around, so we were quickly able to become part of the Upstate community. God can use anyone or anything in his ministry. We weren't pastors, medical specialists, or theologians, yet he was able to work through us as long as we

were willing. Sometimes, in Bolivia, it was something as simple as Diane giving an American cooking lesson to a Bolivian friend. We have found the same is true here in the States, be it through coaching, technology, or photography.

What was something you struggled with while serving in Bolivia?

What we learned the hard way while serving in Bolivia is that missionaries are a lot like manure: spread out, a lot of good can come, but piled up just brings a bad smell. We spent the first part of our missionary career as members of a very small team, but then moved into a situation where there was a very large missionary community. The "politics" of that situation were a struggle for us.

How has technology affected/changed life for overseas missionaries?

When we first moved overseas, email wasn't a prevalent part of life yet, so when we communicated to family and friends back home via letters, we never told them about small life details like an illness. We felt far away. During our second term, we returned to the field with an email account, so then we wrote about mundane, but important, parts of life. The instant-access communications technology of today helps missionaries feel much closer to supporters back home, and gives us (at home) a great opportunity to encourage them!

What are some ways the Lord has showed his faithfulness to you?

As faith-based missionaries, it was always amazing to experience God's provision of financial and prayer

partners for our ministry. The hymn, *Great is thy Faithfulness*, states: "All I have needed thy hand hath provided." God's provision for our material needs, our children's education, our health needs, and numerous blessings throughout our marriage are all a testimony to his faithfulness.

What is your main role now?

I manage the IT department as well as the accounting staff. I honestly believe I work with some of the most dedicated, passionate, and giving people on earth. Diane is the Registrar at Southside Christian School and has been there since 2007. She loves to help students as they navigate high school courses and grades on their way to higher education.

How can IT be viewed with a ministry mindset?

As an IT professional, most people presume that I am a techie. Actually, I am not. I don't play computer games or hang out with others in hack sessions. That isn't my thing. What I love about working in IT is the opportunity to use technology as a tool to enhance ministry. I love to listen to a ministry need and then identify a system which can address the issue. I encourage others to seek out a way to serve in ministry using whatever skills God has given them.

God has used a variety of experiences in Eddie and Diane's life to impact the lives of others, both in direct ways and behind-the-scenes, here and abroad. We are thankful for his faithfulness to them, and through them to so many others, exhibited in more ways than just from behind a screen.

Above: A recent family photo.

Below: A young Holeman family in Bolivia (left), Eddie and Diane's engagement photo (center), Eddie coaching last spring (right).





"Had a wonderful time! You all did an amazing job, to God be the Glory! All praise and honor to him!"

"Thank you Fellowship Greenville! May God bless you as you reach out to Greenville and the surrounding area!"

"Loved every minute! Great evening at a great venue with a bunch of great people..."

"So many people heard the gospel there!"

FEEDBACK ON THIS YEAR'S DOWNTOWN WORSHIP NIGHT

DOWNTOWN celebrations

TWO EVENTS THIS SUMMER BROUGHT FELLOWSHIP GREENVILLE DOWNTOWN. The worship night resulted in hundreds worshipping Jesus together, on a beautiful July night, in the middle of downtown Greenville. Then, in early August, over 500 of our volunteers (including the four shown right) spent an evening celebrating, at the Hyatt Regency, all God is doing through us. The theme of that night was **IT Matters #forGVL. Serving matters.**



READY TO START SERVING?

STOP BY THE INFORMATION DESK IN THE LOBBY
OR EMAIL NEXTSTEPS@FELLOWSHIPGREENVILLE.ORG.

leading
cleaning
encouraging
driving
singing

the hungry
the needy
your kids
the lost
the thief
my brother
the fearful

the one who disagrees
an orphan
JESUS
the widow
the broken
my daughter
the confused

the innocent
a customer
my parents
the depressed
nobody
my husband
a boss
a neighbor
the old
a let
the worried
the joyful
the foolish
the weak
the rich
a student
a friend
the homeless

FELLOWSHIP GREENVILLE
matters
#forGVL

LIFE IS BETTER
CONNECTED

READY TO JOIN A COMMUNITY GROUP?
FIND ONE AT GROUPCONNECT ON SEPT. 11
OR EMAIL GROUPLIFE@FELLOWSHIPGREENVILLE.ORG.



SHARING OUR BURDENS

BY LYNN BLACKBURN

When Casey and Alysia Clifton moved to Greenville from Maine, they found Fellowship Greenville through the recommendation of an acquaintance. They attended services for two years, but mostly kept to themselves and didn't really connect with anyone. Casey found a job, Alysia homeschooled their four children, and they were managing to get by on their own... until the diagnosis that changed everything.

If you spent time with Casey, who appears to be a healthy man in his 30s, you wouldn't think he was fighting stage III colorectal cancer. If you sat beside Alysia in church, you'd see a woman with a beautiful smile, but never imagine the difficulties she and her family have endured.

With bills mounting and surgeries looming, the Cliftons realized they couldn't do it alone. So, in the middle of Casey's chemotherapy regimen, the Cliftons joined a community group. It was a big step to put themselves out there and intentionally connect with others. Casey describes it as one of the hardest things he's ever had to do, but the families in their group embraced them and have been a huge blessing in their lives.

"It's so hard to ask for help, especially when the needs are overwhelming," Casey says. "We were blown away by the way people took it upon themselves to meet our needs."

When what was supposed to be a brief hospital stay this spring turned into sixteen days of hospitalization,

small group members provided childcare and meals, helped with the house, cared for beloved pets, and kept up a constant stream of texts, Facebook posts, and visits.

As challenging as the extended hospital stay was, they were overwhelmed by the contrast to their previous experiences. Before being connected in the church, when Casey had needed surgery early on, they'd had no one to help. This time, there were friends coming by and sitting with him for hours, just talking, watching TV, or playing cards. It took a lot of the pressure off of Alysia knowing that when she was with Casey, friends were caring for their children, and when she was home with the kids, friends were visiting her husband.

"Because of my past, I have a hard time being vulnerable with people," Alysia says. "But the women in our small group broke through my walls and refused to believe me if I said everything was fine. **They were intrusive in the best way.** I've prayed for years for friends who would accept me and not judge me and they have become those kinds of friends."

Casey finished his treatments a few months ago and has recently been able to return to work, but they face obstacles that will take years to

overcome. Even as their circumstances have improved, their needs remain great. Casey's health is fragile and the risk of a recurrence of cancer is high. Their bills will take decades to pay off. Many things that have been put to the side over the past couple of years need to be taken care of. The future they face is brighter, if still overwhelming. Yet their faith remains unshaken.

When they share their story, they don't wish the suffering away, or moan about the trials they have endured and continue to deal with. Instead, they point to the faithfulness of God. They share example after example of how God has provided through his people—of the way Casey's parents have been financially and emotionally generous, for encouraging notes and gifts from friends back in Maine, of local friends who have stepped in and helped their children have a great Christmas, of property managers who have worked with them to keep their rent from going up, and of gift cards arriving in the mailbox just when they needed groceries.

They don't see their past suffering as something to be angry about, but as proof God was preparing them for what was to come. They know it is God who sustains them, and their hope remains firmly rooted in Christ.

DON'T MISS a video of Casey sharing his story:
FELLOWSHIPGREENVILLE.ORG/STORYFILMS-FALL16

HOPE CHALLENGE

2016

THIS IS HOW WE KNOW WHAT LOVE IS: JESUS CHRIST LAID DOWN HIS LIFE FOR US. AND WE OUGHT TO LAY DOWN OUR LIVES FOR OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS.

—1 JOHN 3:16

 **SUN 10/09, 8AM - 2PM**

FOOD DRIVE

Items collected: Canned vegetables, canned meat, dry goods, peanut butter, beans, toiletries, diapers, baby wipes, detergent, plastic bags, and paper bags.

Who benefits: The needy in our communities who are served by the sponsoring organization.

Sponsor: Harvest Hope

WAYS TO MEET THIS CHALLENGE:

SERVE Share this need with your friends and neighbors, then offer to bring their donations to church with you on 10/09.

GIVE Purchase needed items and deliver to one of the Harvest Hope collection sites at Fellowship Greenville on 10/09.

PRAY Commit to prayer for the hungry.



 **SAT 10/22, 8AM - 12PM**

HOUSEHOLD COLLECTION

Items collected: See sidebar for complete list.

Who benefits: The needy in our communities, who are served by the sponsoring organizations.

Sponsors: Miracle Hill, Habitat for Humanity, Child Evangelism Fellowship

WAYS TO MEET THIS CHALLENGE:

SERVE Help unload/load items collected on 10/22.

GIVE Drop off **gently-used/new items*** you collected on 10/22.

PRAY Commit to prayer for the sponsoring organizations and the population they serve.

**Separate your items according to sponsor prior to drop off, as each will be received by a different truck.*



343,400 (18%)
PEOPLE ACROSS
HARVEST HOPE'S
20 COUNTY
SERVICE AREA DO
NOT KNOW WHERE
THEIR NEXT MEAL
WILL COME FROM.

Miracle Hill is collecting:

» Men's, women's, and children's clothing, coats, shoes, handbags, accessories (hats, scarves, ties), and jewelry

Habitat for Humanity is collecting:

» Household and office furnishings including cabinets, furniture, fixtures, working appliances, new and used building materials (especially electrical supplies, tile, doors, windows, and hardware)

Child Evangelism Fellowship is collecting:

» New and gently-used elementary age books (preferably those on the American Library Association's list of recommended titles)

Please do not bring:

» Anything broken or in need of repair
» Hazardous materials, paint, or chemicals of any kind
» Pianos/organs, mattresses/boxsprings, CRT monitors or TVs



THERE'S NOTHING THAT MAKES [ENTERING FOSTER CARE] EASY. AND HAVING YOUR PERSONAL ITEMS THROWN IN A TRASH BAG MAKES YOU FEEL REALLY SMALL. I WILL NEVER UNDERSTAND WHY WE DON'T GIVE KIDS SUITCASES.

—FORMER FOSTER YOUTH

...GIVING OUR BEST.

 **SUN 10/16, 8AM - 1PM**

MISSIONARY CHRISTMAS SWAP

Item collected: Funds

Who benefits: Our missionaries around the world

Sponsor: Fellowship Greenville Outreach

WAYS TO MEET THIS CHALLENGE:

SERVE Give up a luxury your family usually enjoys (such as a dinner out, daily gourmet coffees, new shoes, a vacation, etc.).

GIVE Instead, donate the money you would have spent to give to a missionary family for Christmas. Place an envelope, marked Missionary Christmas and containing your monetary gift, in the offering plate on 10/16.

PRAY Commit to prayer for a missionary family. [Visit our web site for family details.]



 **SUN 10/30, 8AM - 1PM**

SUITCASE SUNDAY

Items collected: Gently-used/new duffel bags, suitcases, and backpacks.

Who benefits: Foster kids in the Upstate who typically only have trash bags to carry their belongings.

Sponsor: Fostering Great Ideas, Hope for Children at Fellowship Greenville

WAYS TO MEET THIS CHALLENGE:

SERVE Help collect items at church on 10/30.

GIVE Drop off gently-used/new luggage at church on 10/30 to help us collect 1000 pieces of luggage!

PRAY Commit to prayer for a foster child.





WE ARE WORTH IT

A FORMER FOSTER CHILD TELLS HOW ONE FAMILY'S CHOICE TO PUT FAITH INTO ACTION COMPLETELY CHANGED HER LIFE.

BY MARY BETH WILLIAMS

It's the same story for many foster kids around Greenville County: A teenage couple. An alcoholic father. A mother with little-to-no education struggling to make ends meet.

The story has become so commonplace, that we roll our eyes when we hear it. No matter how many times that man fails her and her children, she continues to support him until things begin to spiral out of the little bit of control she had to begin with. It's easy for us to hear that story, shake our heads in judgment, and continue living our own lives.

The realization that this story is a part of God's bigger story in the lives of those teenage parents compels us to something more than an eye-roll. The realization that God is writing a story in the lives of the innocent children caught up in this saga, compels us to much more. It must compel us to action.

Can you, reader, shed the familiarity of the story for a second, and walk into one such story?

She's nine. A head full of unruly curls tumble around her face and into her jade-colored eyes. Her daddy picks her up from school early; unusual, but not alarming. In a single act of revenge against her mother, he drops his only daughter off at Miracle Hill Children's Home, and she loses the only family she'd ever known. Her name is Michelle, but because there are several other girls who share that name and she's the youngest, she gains the nickname "Shelli."

In many ways, that was a day of deep loss—she'd even lost her name. Everything was different as she lay down to sleep: her pajamas, her bed, the pillow, the person sleeping across the room from her. That day is also the day God began writing the turning point of her story. He's had redemption in mind for all eternity, and, as she lay her curly head on that pillow that night, he had redemption in mind for her.

Her two younger brothers soon followed her to the Children's Home and, though the three were separated because boys and girls had separate dormitories, they were united in their loyalty to the mom who had birthed them. Shelli recalls that, at that time, they had "family weekends" at the Children's Home—a time when kids went home and visited with their birth families. Their mom would promise to come and she'd even make the arrangements necessary with those in charge. When the time came, Shelli and her

brothers would pack a few things in whatever random bag they could find and head out to the curb to wait. She remembers times they waited until dark before heading, brokenhearted, back into their rooms. She never showed up to take them for a single one of those visits, and weekend after weekend of disappointment led to an understandable mistrust of adults. Walls were being built around her pre-teen heart that would take a lifetime to break down.

At age 15, Shelli says, Christ rescued her.

Around that time, the foster care program began at Miracle Hill, and Shelli's roommate was selected as the very first foster child. As she stood back and watched, Shelli knew deep in her heart of hearts that her desire was for a family. She made that desire known to those caring for her and soon began to build a relationship with one such family—Jon and Addie Schweigert, members of Fellowship Greenville. At first, she would spend holidays with them, and soon, they asked her to move into their home—to be their daughter. She began to ever-so-slowly build the trust she'd lost back again. She felt what unconditional love was as they accepted her—and all of the parts of her story—without question.

From Jon and Addie's perspective, each part of Shelli's story was worth stepping into. Their confidence in God's call on their family and their reliance on his faithfulness brought them to a place where they were able to engage Shelli and her "at times, unique challenges," in their words.

"I can assure you of one truth." Addie says to anyone considering taking such a step, "The Lord will enlarge your heart and give you a greater capacity to love. The Lord will do the enabling." Jon and Addie agree that the desire to be more like Jesus—stepping out to love a child with no expectation of return—turned out to be a blessing and great reward in their lives, such that they cannot imagine their lives without Shelli as their daughter.

Decades later, it feels all nice and neatly tied up in a bow. But Shelli is the first to admit she was not an easy teenager to love. The patience and love her mom and dad showed her in those pivotal years cost them both dearly. But as a result of their relentless love and perseverance, and God's unwavering faithfulness, Shelli, against all odds, got a college degree, married the man she dared not dream of, and they, also members of Fellowship Greenville, are raising together three sons (shown above, right).

Speaking for foster children across South Carolina and, more immediately, those right here in our counties, Shelli, who officially changed her name to "Shelli Schweigert Wilburn," says:

"We are worth it. *We are worth it.* Had Jon and Addie not taken that chance on a teenage girl, my story would have turned out completely different. These kids are worth it."

Indeed, we might think stories like this all sound the same. Though familiar, each story has a unique face behind it: a face that belongs to a greater story. It's the same story you and I belong to—the story that is being written for eternity and points to him alone. And each story belongs to a child, a child who is worth it. ☘



IS GOD PROMPTING YOU, YOUR FAMILY, OR YOUR COMMUNITY GROUP TO **PUT YOUR FAITH INTO ACTION** BY CARING FOR THE UNPROTECTED CHILDREN IN OUR COMMUNITIES? HERE ARE A FEW SUGGESTIONS FOR HOW YOU MIGHT **GET STARTED...**

PARTICIPATE IN OUR ANNUAL HOPE CHALLENGE. THIS YEAR WE ARE COLLECTING LUGGAGE FOR FOSTER KIDS, ON OCTOBER 30. REFER TO PAGES 10-11 FOR DETAILS.



ADOPT AN ACTIVE FOSTER FAMILY IN OUR CHURCH AND WRAP AROUND THEM TO MEET PRACTICAL NEEDS. CONTACT HOPEFORCHILDREN@FELLOWSHIPGREENVILLE.ORG.

HOST A THANKSGIVING MEAL FOR CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE AND THEIR BIRTH FAMILIES. VISIT FGIONLINE.ORG/IDEAS/#THANKSGIVING-GRACE TO LEARN HOW.



MENTOR A YOUNG ADULT WHO HAS AGED OUT OF FOSTER CARE WITHOUT THE STABILITY OF A FAMILY. LEARN MORE AT FGIONLINE.ORG/IDEAS/#LIFE-SUPPORT.

DON'T MISS
Shelli sharing her own story:
FELLOWSHIPGREENVILLE.ORG/STORYFILMS-FALL16

Missionaries to Liberia, West Africa JOHN MARK AND SARA SHEPPARD

John Mark and Sara Sheppard are much like us. John Mark heads to his office each morning. Sara stays home with their three children all under the age of five. They have busy schedules and never enough time for laundry. You can hear the neighborhood kids playing in their yard after school and on Sunday evenings their home is full of little ones learning about Jesus. John Mark and Sara love Jesus and love their neighbors. They just do it on the other side of the world, in a place where face-to-face relationships are still more commonplace than digital interactions.

God has put in John Mark and Sara's hearts a deep passion for the people of Liberia. They are SIM missionaries serving the Manya people. John Mark is working closely with the local people to translate the Bible into their heart language and produce dramatized Scripture recordings. Their mission is to get the gospel in the hands of the Manya people, knowing God's Word doesn't return void and brings true Life.

John Mark grew up in Liberia and the Ivory Coast as a missionary kid. After returning to the States for

BY JESSICA SATTERFIELD



Last Christmas, John Mark and Sara used the money they received from the HOPE Challenge to build a playground (shown right). Their yard houses the only reliable and safe well in the neighborhood. When the people in their neighborhood come to get their water, children are able to play. They also built a gazebo to give shade and rest to weary travelers, and to host group gatherings.



college, he attended a mission conference where he knew God was calling him back to Liberia. John Mark recalls, "Just like in the States, some people here are more difficult to love... but I knew going back to Africa was the right thing to do, and it was the best way I could use my unique talents for God's Kingdom."

Sara grew up in a small town in Wisconsin. Missions were not emphasized in her church, but during college she went on a short-term mission trip to Nicaragua and God ignited a passion for the nations in her heart. Then she went on another trip to Liberia and met John Mark. God intersected their passions and they both knew their ministry would be together in Liberia.

The Manya people of Liberia are primarily Muslim. Many seem more concerned with protection and blessing from the spirit world than eternal life. Even so, the people are curious about Jesus and the freedom he brings. However, knowing and walking with Jesus comes at a heavy price. When they accept him, they lose everything—their families, their jobs, and their safety. Yet, John Mark encourages young believers to "let your light shine bright but don't burn bridges. Build them." Because of this persecution, the work of the gospel is slow, but is piercing through the darkness. God is pursuing hearts to be known by him.

While John Mark works to translate God's Word, Sara lives intentionally working at home. Her mission is to develop deep relationships with other

moms in her community, giving her the opportunity to love them like Jesus. Although she has floors to clean, meals to make, and her own children to serve, when a neighborhood mom stops by, everything goes on hold. Those seeming interruptions are really perfectly positioned moments of time she can deposit the love of Jesus into other moms' hearts.

John Mark and Sara's home is their primary place of ministry. They are raising their children to love and serve Jesus, as well as investing into the lives of the children and families in their neighborhood. They celebrate birthdays and have play dates in their yard, then share Bible lessons and crafts around their kitchen table.

John Mark and Sara are doing exactly what we've all been called to do. Their challenges include difficult living conditions and neighbors with a radically different culture and language. Ours include seeing our home as a place of refuge instead of ministry and neighbors we rarely encounter offline. But we all have the same mission—to propel the gospel, to love those right in front of us, and to serve without expecting anything in return.

When asked what they would like to say to us, the North American church, their response is simple: *Remember Liberia. Remember the people here.*

We have a tendency to get so caught up in our first-world culture—full of fancy houses that always have running water, climate-control, wifi, 24/7 entertainment, the answer to any question at our fingertips, and the latest and greatest of everything—that we often forget who made us and why. Many of us have three Bibles in our language that often don't even get read. We definitely forget there are people on the other side of the world who lose everything to follow Jesus.

So, remember John Mark and Sara. Pray the Lord protects them and their children from sickness. Pray the Father gives them community with other believers. Pray that when they feel lonely and isolated, he will be their friend, their portion. Pray for the people of Liberia to have open hearts to the gospel. Pray the Holy Spirit would open the hearts of the Manya people as they hear God's Word for the first time in their own language.

And remember the people of Liberia. When you throw away that bread you didn't get to eat before it molded. When you step out clean from a warm shower, pick up the hose to water your grass, or see your Bible sitting on the table and have the privilege to soak the goodness of God's Word into your heart in your language. Remember those people who lose everything to know Jesus. Remember those brothers and sisters around the world who lose everything to follow Jesus. **Pray for the strength to take hold of opportunities to love and serve your neighbors, right where you are.**



WE SET OURSELVES ADRIFT

BY REID LEHMAN

Adapted for this space, with permission, from God Wears His Own Watch, a book Reid wrote about his experience as Director of Miracle Hill Ministries.

There came a day when I realized I had confidence in the provision and watch care of God. I knew he would take care of my needs in the future. I longed for my two sons to experience this as well. Our family prayed together for Miracle Hill's needs. My sons prayed with me for dollars for the ministry, but I saw no evidence that praying for or even hearing of God's supply had any real meaning to the two of them in their own lives. Because we did not live on campus, they would hear of God's supply but not often see it for themselves. For several years, I searched for a way to give them the experience of seeing God provide for them directly.

I finally realized that the only way I could do so was to take them into a situation where we had no resources of our own, and where we had to depend upon God to supply. I visualized it like climbing into a boat without oars and pushing out into the stream to see

where God would take us. Because of my work with the homeless, I decided to take my oldest son Matt, as he turned 13, to a city unknown to us. I planned to go to a city several hours from Greenville where the street people would not know me, to live on the streets of that city for five days with no preplanned resources, to look for God to supply.

Pursuing that goal, my wife Barbara dropped Matt and me off in the heart of Wilmington, North Carolina, on Palm Sunday, 1992. I knew nothing about Wilmington. We left the car with only the clothes we were wearing and a driver's license in my pocket to prove my identification, if I needed to. I had not shaved in almost two weeks. Matt had not cut his hair for several weeks. Both of us wore our oldest clothes. We had no money, no credit cards, no toiletries, and no food except a pack of crackers that Matt saved from lunch.

Not surprisingly, Barbara was distraught at leaving her young son exposed to the unknown for a week. I had assured her Matt and I would be completely safe. But, to be honest, I had hidden an envelope, in my sock drawer,

with the ominous words inside, "If you find this letter..." While I felt confident interacting with the homeless, I knew we weren't completely safe. I wasn't sure I could stay awake to keep an eye out for danger if we had to sleep outside. Those who prey on the homeless while they sleep generally don't wake them up to ask for money. They may just hit them in the head with a brick to keep them unconscious while they search. As the car disappeared, Matt and I prayed for God's supply.

Walking down the street, we came to a maritime museum on Market Street. With empty pockets, I asked if we could do any work there to gain admittance. Admitted at no charge, we explored the museum until its closing. Then we asked for directions to the local rescue mission. We walked several blocks and found the place. They offered me a place to stay, but said they couldn't accept children. They told us about a Salvation Army shelter nearby. We walked there and learned they had room for us.

I told the desk clerk that Matt and I were temporarily separated from our family and thought we would be able to

rejoin them on the following Thursday. We ate supper, received clean linens, towels and soap, and were assigned a bunk in the men's quarters. Although Matt's bunk was above mine, he was frightened and slept very little that first night.

On Monday we began looking for work. Most of the morning we experienced rejections, and no wonder. Why would a prospective employer want to hire a scruffy-looking man with a boy attached? However, just before noon, a contractor offered me a job pouring concrete if I would return the next morning.

We walked on to a church-sponsored soup kitchen for lunch. Matt was pretty discouraged, and I shouldn't have been surprised. As I ate my soup, I noticed he wasn't eating. Looking more closely, I saw he was crying.

"Dad, they put mayonnaise on my bologna sandwich! And I don't want to be here anyway!" I sensed it wasn't just the bologna sandwich; and I concluded Matt was tired and scared.

My eyes filled with tears, but I didn't know anything I could do to help him. Matt excused himself and walked, sniffing, outside the building to wait while I finished eating. After he left, one of the soup kitchen volunteers came over. "I notice your son seems to be having a hard time. Can I help?"



"I'm sorry to inconvenience you, but do you suppose you could make him a bologna sandwich without mayonnaise?"

"Sure can!" she said cheerfully. Back in the kitchen, she created a deluxe ham sandwich with lettuce, tomato, no mayonnaise, and fresh bread! She added treats and snacks and brought it all out in a brown paper bag. When Matt saw that "goodie bag," he began to brighten up—that moment became the turning point of our trip.

When I asked Matt, now a teacher

in the Upstate, for permission to share the story of our trip to Wilmington, he shared new information on the emotions he had that day.

"It wasn't necessarily the mayonnaise on the sandwich that put me over the edge, it was a guy sitting next to me who was very overweight and severely mentally challenged. While we were eating I didn't take my eyes off him. Everyone that walked by him made a joke about him, and they would also pile their leftover food on his plate to make fun of his weight. He didn't say a word the whole time I watched, he just ate. When you add the mayonnaise from his sandwich running down his chin to everything that was going on around him it was just too much..."

"There was too much emotion. My heart was broken for this man: for these people. I grew up around people like this, but there was always a sort of protective barrier. The barrier was no longer there in Wilmington. I think for the first time that I saw the homeless as real people." –Matt Lehman

"...That is why I started crying about the mayonnaise. It was years before I could eat mayonnaise again. Even now, when I put a little on a sandwich, I see his face."

We settled in that afternoon to relax and enjoy the rest of the week. Since we had work lined up the next day, we began to explore the waterfront. After supper, confined to the shelter's fenced walls, we talked, used a small rock as a soccer ball, talked, listened to other people talk, and talked some more. What a wonderful time of uninterrupted, unpressured time together.

On Tuesday the promised concrete work did not materialize, but we soon found work with a contractor tearing out plaster walls in an old house. We had lunch again at the soup kitchen. The contractor assured me he had work for me for the duration of our stay.

By Thursday morning I had \$60 in my pocket, fresh clothing, and personal toiletries. Matt and I had turned down housing and a permanent job. In fact, God answered every prayer exactly as we had prayed it during the five days. By the last day, we needed nothing for

ourselves, so we prayed for a fellow shelter guest at the Salvation Army who was in danger of losing his job because he was running late. We saw God answer prayer that morning when his ride came on time for the first time.

You can imagine Barbara's relief when I phoned. We called to let her know we were all right and where to pick us up. My primary goal of the venture was to help Matt see God act in his own life in a real and personal way, but it had a secondary benefit I had not expected. Matt's twelfth year had been frustrating for him, his mother, and me. When we left on this trip, I didn't really like him very much. Of course I loved him—fathers are supposed to love their children! But I thought he was selfish and self-centered, and I hoped he couldn't tell how I felt. I sensed he didn't care for me at all, either. He saw me as autocratic and out of touch with the real world. But by the time Barbara picked us up at the end of that week, we were deeply committed to each other. We had forged a closeness that helped us all survive his turbulent teens. Of course we had later conflicts, but always both of us were sure of the love of the other.

Two years later, in August, just before Andy turned 13, I planned a similar experience for him in Savannah. While Barbara had allowed my excursion with Matt without strenuous objection, this time she wanted to be sure she was getting through to me. She said without a smile, "You do understand, don't you, Reid, that if you come home without our son, we are going to have a real problem in our marriage."

I answered, "I'm listening very carefully. I promise I'll bring Andy back in good shape."

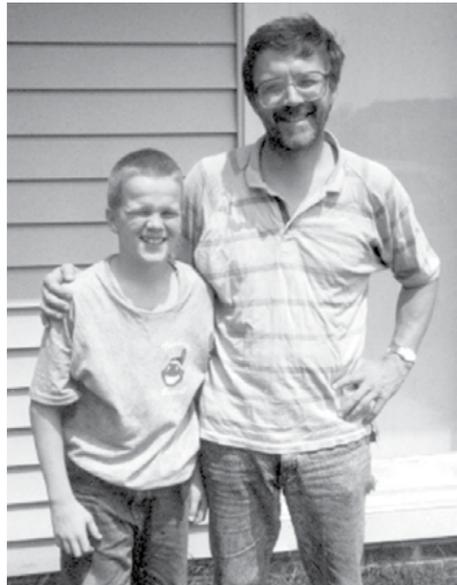
"Then don't you leave a letter for me in the sock drawer that says, 'If you find this letter...!'" she responded.

On a Saturday afternoon, Andy and I drove to Savannah and left the car in long-term airport parking. I left a credit card in the car so we could pay for the long-term parking later, but I took only car keys and a driver's license with me. We hitchhiked several miles into Savannah. As we walked, I discovered some change in my pocket and left it on a manhole cover so we could arrive truly broke. A light rain turned heavy quickly, and by the time someone stopped to offer us a ride, we were ➤

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 17

soaked. The driver knew of the local Rescue Mission and took us there. They fed us supper, but the mission had a policy, just as in Wilmington, that no children could stay.

After supper, we walked about 40 minutes to find the Salvation Army. I told the intake counselor we were temporarily separated from our family and hoped to rejoin them again before the end of the week. Once again, I had a two-weeks' start on a patchy beard,



a safety pin held my glasses together, and my clothes were speckled with paint. Andy's hair was shaggy, but he had been looking forward to the trip and found it hard to hide his grin of excitement.

On Sunday morning we attended a service at the Salvation Army church. After a Sunday lunch, as good as we could have received at home, we set out to explore the neighborhood. The Savannah Science Museum looked interesting. Having no funds, I offered to work around the place to gain admittance for Andy. Five minutes sweeping, a job given more to protect our dignity than to meet the needs of the museum, gained us admittance. We spent a pleasant afternoon together and returned to the shelter for supper. In the evening, one of the cooks gave Andy sweets and some snacks for later.

Monday, after breakfast, Andy and I began looking for work. Remembering Matt's discouragement while in Wilmington, I made a solemn prediction to Andy. We would ask for

work at ten different locations, and the first nine would turn us down. But the tenth request would be granted. We began walking southwest of the shelter on Montgomery Street. At every business I asked, "Is there any work I can do for you? I'm willing to do the dirtiest job you have. You can pay me whatever you think I am worth, and if you don't like my work, you don't have to pay me at all."

As expected at the first three places we stopped, our offer was declined.

"Isn't this great, Andy?"

"What's that, Dad?"

"Only seven more requests like this and we'll have work."

"Aw, Dad."

We walked for a while in a poorer residential neighborhood, seeing no opportunity for work. When we came upon a contractor conducting a morning work meeting with his crew on the front porch of a house undergoing renovation, I made my fourth request, "Sir, do you have work for me?"

The carpenter knew many ask for work when all they really want is money. To my surprise, he called my bluff and sent me back to the kitchen with a sledgehammer, shovel, and wheelbarrow, to knock down a chimney and empty the debris into a metal container in the back yard. Andy helped for a while and then explored the neighborhood while I worked.

God had provided work that morning, but we didn't have any resources for lunch. We couldn't go back to the Salvation Army until supper. A shelter client had told us of a soup kitchen downtown. Shortly before noon, I finished the chimney. The contractor and his crew were working elsewhere, so Andy and I walked more than half an hour to the area of the soup kitchen. We finally found the address only to find a sign on the gate that said, "Closed two weeks for repairs."

Andy sat down on a park bench and wept, and so did I, sitting beside him. My tears were not from hunger but from helplessness. "Lord," I prayed silently, "it doesn't matter whether I have lunch, but I told Andy you will supply our needs. I would like you to give him a hamburger, fries, and a Pepsi." (Andy wouldn't touch a Coke back then!) A little roughly, I got Andy up and marched him back to the job site. In our absence, the contractor

had returned bringing us each a hamburger, fries, and a Pepsi. Since we were gone, he'd eaten the hamburgers. Our lunch consisted of fries, Pepsi, and snacks Andy had brought from the Salvation Army shelter. We could have had hamburgers, too, except we went looking for lunch instead of waiting on God to deliver it!

That afternoon I used the contractor's tools to frame windows and doors—I enjoy working with my hands. Before the end of the day, my employer offered me regular work and a place to live. I promised him an answer by Tuesday afternoon, which is when I told him I had a job back in Greenville and I appreciated his offer.

By the time we left Wednesday morning, we had cash in our pockets, extra clothing, toiletries, and we had not missed a single meal. Once again, God had answered every prayer as we had prayed it. On Wednesday, with more than \$50 in cash in our pockets, we took a taxi back to our car at the airport, paid the cost of the parking, and drove home again.

My Savannah experience was everything I hoped for and more. Andy saw God answer prayer every day. Both of us gained insight into the lives of other shelter guests as we heard what they say when the staff aren't around. We had come to no harm, except that we caught body lice from the bedding in the shelter. A good dose of Quell shampoo got rid of it when we got home.

There was never a time when I felt unsafe, we never missed a meal, we never slept outdoors, and my terrific wife stayed married to me even though I had put her children at risk.

Though Andy and I had a good relationship previously, what we experienced in Savannah drew us much closer. It built a deep reservoir of trust and mutual respect that brought us through some scary teenage years.

But best of all, my sons had not just heard about a God who answers prayer. They had come to know the God who answered their prayers and who delights to do so. ☘



DON'T MISS Reid sharing this story via video: FELLOWSHIPGREENVILLE.ORG/STORYFILMS-FALL16



EXODUS WORD SEARCH

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- Passover
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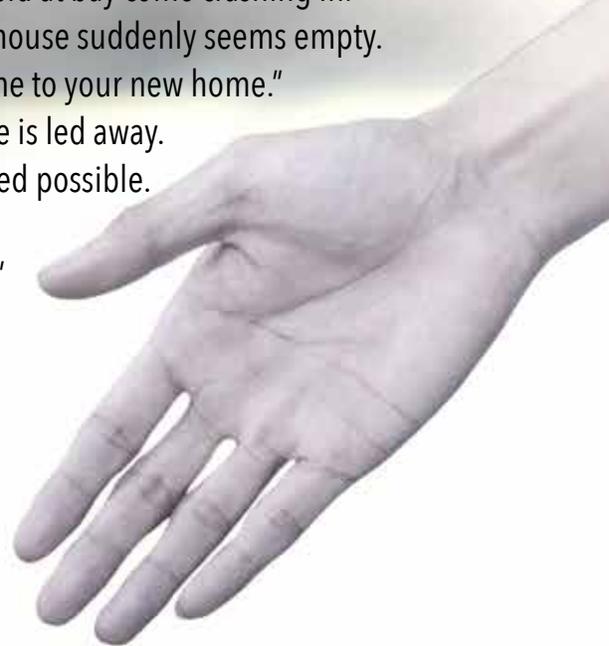
ARE YOU CARRYING A HEAVY BURDEN?

If so, a Stephen Minister might be able to help. People often ask, "What exactly is a Stephen Minister?"

One way to put it is that Stephen Ministers are the After People. Stephen Ministers are there:

- ...after your family and friends have heard your story one too many times, but you still need to talk it out.
- ...after the funeral, when everyone has left and the emotions you've held at bay come crashing in.
- ...after the last child honks the horn, waves, and drives away—and the house suddenly seems empty.
- ...after the nursing home director shakes your hand and says, "Welcome to your new home."
- ...after the gavel comes down, the handcuffs go on, and your loved one is led away.
- ...after the baby arrives, demanding more of you than you ever dreamed possible.
- ...after the relationship falls apart and the bottom falls out of your life.
- ...after the doctor says, "I'm sorry, but there's nothing more we can do."
- ...after you find a pink slip with your final paycheck.
- ...after the phone call you hoped you'd never get.

Stephen Ministers are the After People. They are ready to come alongside you—or your friends, neighbors, coworkers, or relatives—to provide comfort and support for as long after as needed.



MIGHT GOD BE CALLING YOU?

A Stephen Minister begins a caring relationship when matched with a person experiencing a life crisis. The Stephen Minister then meets with that person on a weekly basis to listen, care, encourage, and provide emotional and spiritual support. The caring relationship lasts as long as the person is in need of care. If you sense that God might be calling you to serve as a Stephen Minister, the first step is to find out more at one of our upcoming informational meetings.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT RECEIVING CARE FROM A STEPHEN MINISTER OR BECOMING A STEPHEN MINISTER, STOP BY THE INFORMATION TABLE ON SUNDAY, OCTOBER 9 OR 16. OR EMAIL CARE@FELLOWSHIPGREENVILLE.ORG.



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