

Acts 6: 1-6  
"The After People"  
June 27, 2021  
Rev. Lou Nyiri

**[Title Slide]**

This morning's sermon is based upon Acts 6:1-6. Let's lean in and listen to God's word.

**[Scripture Slide – Acts 6:1-6]**

Now during those days, when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. <sup>2</sup> And the twelve called together the whole community of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables.<sup>(a)</sup> <sup>3</sup> Therefore, friends,<sup>(b)</sup> select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task, <sup>4</sup> while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word." <sup>5</sup> What they said pleased the whole community, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, together with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. <sup>6</sup> They had these men stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

**[Title Slide]**

**Let us Pray:**

Come, O Holy Spirit, come.  
Come as the fire and burn,  
Come as the wind and cleanse,  
Come as the light and reveal,  
Convict us, Convert us, Consecrate us...until we are wholly thine.

And now, Lord, my prayer is simply this:  
That the words of my mouth  
And the words of all our hearts will be found pleasing and acceptable to you,  
for you are our rock and our redeemer...Amen.

**Sermon**

The young Christian church, as written about in the New Testament, chapter six of Acts, has been growing so fast that it has cultural conflicts between foreign-born members and the native Jews. Following the lead of the synagogue, the Christians pool their food and money to be distributed to their needy members. Some in the group complain that their widows are being overlooked.

**[Slide – Brown Silhouette Image of Stephen & Six]**

As the text explains, the apostles find themselves harried by the task of delivering food to the needy. "So, the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, ... Friends, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task, while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word.'" (Acts 6:3-4)

What happened next was those seven did the task so well that the community stopped arguing. As the gathered community began utilizing the gifts God had bestowed upon them in service to God through service to one another, the church grew... Stephen was one of the seven and is described as, "...full of faith and the Holy Spirit." (Acts 6:5)

This Stephen, the one with the gift to care for others, is the one after whom Stephen Ministry is named.

**[Slide – Stephen Ministry *Heart in Hands* Image]**

In effect, Stephen Ministers are, [those] with the gift to care for others.

Stephen Ministers use basic human wisdom as they care for others, while relying heavily on the guidance of the Holy Spirit and God's wisdom to offer distinctively Christian care.

The gifts that send them into ministry derive from God, however, many of the insights they learn to apply developed in the psychological and counseling disciplines.

**[Slide – Dr. Haugk]**

This is because the ministries founder, Dr. Kenneth Haugk comes from a counseling background.

Dr. Haugk is a faithful man who saw a need to assist Christ's church by training lay members to be Christian / Christ-like care givers.

He explained it this way at the Stephen Leader training course I attended, "It's like, if your house catches fire you call the fire department. They come and extinguish the flames. The fire department can't stay at your home forever, because ultimately there will be another fire in another part of town to which they must respond. Thereby leaving you to sift through the ashes.

There are people who will go through the remnants and help you discern what to keep; what to discard; and how you can rebuild and move forward.

Friends, family, salvation army, red cross are some examples in this illustration.

Haugk, relates this to the church, by saying, "when a crisis arises members will call the church and someone from the pastoral care team will meet the family. However, they cannot stay indefinitely with the family. They will see them through the initial traumatic moments, however, at some future point they will need to be graciously excused to accompany another member. Pastoral Care Ministers know that each family could still benefit from having someone to walk alongside, however, due to the urgency of need elsewhere, they must be allowed to graciously shift their focus on to the next concern."

**[Slide – Stephen Ministry "You are not alone"]**

Enter Stephen Ministers who will walk alongside individuals – in the aftermath of the initial crisis – to help one move forward.

Following fifty hours training, engaging in regular group supervision and continuing education, a Stephen Minister prayerfully and faithfully seeks to offer practical human wisdom mixed with faithful Christian practice – a gift which is very much experienced as the grace of God.

Stephen Ministers are an example of God's grace lived out among us. Stephen Ministers are ready to walk alongside you – your friends, neighbors, coworkers or relatives – and provide comfort and support – for details on how to make this happen speak with me / speak with a Stephen Leader / call the church office.

This ministry of healing and wholeness is what Stephen and those other six who were full of the Spirit and wisdom were called to fulfill in the early Christian church in Jerusalem.

Stephen Ministers are as much a gift to this congregation and community as those seven.

This morning we commissioned three Stephen Ministers & one Stephen Leader.

We rejoice in advance for all those people these new Stephen Ministers and all Stephen Ministers will bring hope, grace and compassionate care to through their caring service.

We confirm their calling with our continued prayers.

Here's the thing...the special service to which we commission Stephen Ministers & Stephen Leaders (and our Deacons) – is that to which all Christ-Followers are called.

### **[Slide – Heart]**

Everywhere around us are people awaiting someone to notice their discontent, their suffering, their silent pain...awaiting another to offer genuine concern and care that abundant life might be known to them.

Being Christ's hands & feet at work in this world is not just for Stephen Ministers, Stephen Leaders or Deacons – it is for every one of us.

Stephen Ministers, Stephen Leaders and Deacons though provide disciplined, trained and organized ways of facilitating such Christ-like care.

Stephen Ministers care for people who are grieving / people who have been betrayed or let down by others – OR – by life.

Stephen Ministers help people who have made poor choices and now could use assistance to carefully consider decisions they might make in order to move forward in a healthier fashion.

Stephen Ministers care for and walk alongside those whose significant other will not seek help – OR – for those whose significant other requires all their help.

Stephen Ministers offer compassionate care for those facing acute or chronic health conditions – OR – those teetering painfully between health and illness.

They might offer care for those who are dying – OR – those who are changing so much it feels as though they are in the midst of a new birth.

This community...this world...is full of people awaiting us to share Christ-like faith & love.

They need what Stephen Ministry has to offer.

They need what Deacon Ministry has to offer.

They need what Christ-Followers have to offer.

To that end:

- When a Deacon calls you to ask if you can assist with an immediate care-giving need know that you are being asked to be part of a Christ-like response.
- When you encounter a friend, family member, co-worker or close acquaintance who might benefit from having someone walk alongside them in their journey, consider sharing with them information about Stephen Ministry – ask them if you could have someone call them to explain it in further detail – then contact me in the church office with their name & contact information and we'll follow up accordingly.

### **[Slide – Stephen Ministry Seal]**

Stephen Ministers have been called “The After People” - *A Stephen Minister is there:*

...after you've washed and returned the last casserole dish.

...after the last child honks, waves and drives away – and the house seems incredibly empty.

...after you arrive home following the service and the emotions you've held off come crashing in on you.

...after the nursing home director says, “Welcome to your new home.”

...after you realize the hands on the retirement watch you received move more slowly than you ever imagined.

...after family and friends have heard your story, but you still need to talk it out.

Stephen Ministers are ready to come alongside you – or your friends, neighbors, coworkers, or relatives – to provide compassionate care, comfort and support for as long “after” as they are needed.

Won't you consider & pray for the gift of Stephen Ministry today?

Amen.