

## **A LISTENING EAR**

by

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Have you ever gone through a loss or a difficult time or just felt like you couldn't cope on your own with all that life had thrown your way? Have you ever just felt so down but you didn't know exactly why you were depressed? I went through a particularly difficult phase in my life...a time when I felt like I was the only person in the world who could feel that bad and have so many painful thoughts and be that much of a mess! Fortunately for me, I have a friend who sat with me during that time and said, "I am not leaving just because you are going through a crisis." That was over 15 years ago and those words, and that truth, carried me through that dark period of my life and continue to buoy me every day. Whether she knows it or not, my dear friend's philosophy encompasses that of the Stephen Ministry Program.

I became a Stephen Minister eight years ago after sitting with several of my own friends during illness, family strife, and after the death of loved ones. I realized from experience what a gift it is to have someone to meet you exactly where you are and to be allowed the freedom to feel exactly what you feel. No hiding, no pretending, no performing, no "keeping it all together", no political correctness, no judging. Stephen Ministers support, affirm, listen, pray with, and accept their care receivers in a caring Christian relationship. I believe that the health of the human race hinges on a relational God and relational society. I believe God calls us to reach out even when we are afraid; to open our hearts to those in pain even when we think we do not have the words; to accept one another with all of the flaws and weaknesses we possess and not to judge, but to accept each other in love. As a Stephen Minister, I have learned to "pray without ceasing" for the strength and health and clarity in the light of God's love, so that I may share that light with others.