

Stephen Ministry: “Caring for Arlene”

One way to better understand what it's like to be a Stephen Minister is to read about a typical caring relationship. This fictional story shows what thousands of Stephen Ministry relationships are like.

When Arlene's husband, Phil, died in an car accident, Arlene was left to care for three young children on her own. Two months after Phil died, most of the support had pretty much dried up. Arlene came to feel very alone and very angry. Caring for three young children by herself was more than she could handle. She felt angry at Phil for dying and would break down in tears for an hour at a time. She would feel angry at herself for neglecting the children, then angry at the children for all their demands.

Arlene's neighbor, Mary, checked in now and then and asked Arlene if she could talk to her pastor about a Stephen Minister who could visit. She said yes.

Arlene's Stephen Minister, Sandra, visited her the very next day. They agreed that, in addition to their weekly visits, Arlene would call Sandra whenever she was feeling overwhelmed. After a while, Arlene's anger turned to deep sadness. Sometimes when she and Sandra met, she would cry for much of the hour that they were together. With Sandra's support, Arlene managed to carry on, but just making it from one day to the next was the most difficult thing she had ever done. Sandra and Arlene would pray together, asking for God's presence and help, and Sandra assured Arlene that she prayed for her every day, often many times a day.

Sandra made sure she was with Arlene on the one-year anniversary of Phil's death, and that day seemed to mark a turning point. Arlene began talking more frequently about the good times she had had with Phil. She and Sandra would talk about the children's grief and ways that Arlene could help them express their feelings. Certainly there were still bad days, but they were becoming less intense and less frequent.

On the second anniversary of Phil's death, Arlene and Sandra went out to lunch together. Arlene talked about how she was finally resigned to missing Phil.

Sandra and Arlene met every week for another couple of months. They spent a lot of their time talking everything the two of them had shared in almost two years. When Sandra brought up the idea of bringing their formal caring relationship to a close, Arlene was a bit apprehensive, but Sandra assured her that they could still be friends, and she would be there for Arlene whenever she needed her.

About a month after they ended their official caring relationship, Sandra was assigned to another care receiver, Betty, who had just entered a nursing home.