

BELIEFS Values

Church adopts lay Christian service program

BY RENA FULKA
SPECIAL WRITER

When Lana Leckie of Bingham Farms learned that Northbrook Presbyterian Church was enrolling in the worldwide Stephen Ministry program, she immediately volunteered to become a lay leader.

"We had talked about Stephen Ministry for many years," said Leckie, a nine-year member of the Beverly Hills church. "But nobody had taken the ball to go with it."

Things quickly started rolling at the church at 14 Mile and Lahar roads once Leckie and former associate minister, the Rev. James McCracken, returned from a week of intensive study at the Stephen Ministry training conference in Orlando, Fla.

"We came back with a very ambitious plan," recalled the former dental hygienist. "We started our training classes three weeks after we got back."

During the three years that the Stephen Ministry series has been in place at the Oakland County church, 81 individuals — ranging in age from 30 to 76 — have undergone the 30-hour training session and committed to at least two years of Christian care giving. The mission is to engage in a confidential, one-to-one relationship with a church member experiencing a challenging situation like hospitalization, terminal illness, aging, divorce, job loss, or the loss of a loved one.

"The primary objective of Stephen Ministry is to open the line of communication with the care receiver and to encourage the care receiver to discuss what is going on emotionally and spiritually," explained Leckie, who directs the program for the 850-member congregation.

"We cannot solve anyone's problem. What we can do is be there as a friend and as someone who listens to them."

Lana Leckie
Lay ministry leader

Pam Moffett of Birmingham sees Stephen Ministry as a way to give something back to her church community. "I feel like we've all probably ministered to people in our life in one way or another," said the retired nurse. "This is a more formal way to care for someone in a Christian atmosphere."

A member of Northbrook for nine years, Moffett chose to familiarize herself with the program by attending the Stephen Leader conference in Orlando.

"I was with 600 other people and everybody was there for the same purpose — to minister to others," she recalled. "Being in the midst of such wonderful people adds more excitement and more zeal to the ministry."

Once she returned to Oakland County, Moffett began teaching Stephen Ministry classes, coordinating referrals and serving as a care giver. "The good part about Stephen Ministry is that it's so confidential and anonymous," she said.

Care givers and care receivers are paired in male-to-male and female-to-female relationships. Depending upon the situation, meetings between care givers and care receivers can occur in a variety of settings — from homes and restaurants to parks and movie theaters. The key is to offer support, prayer and an unbiased ear to the individual in need.

"I've gained a real good understanding of people and the needs they have, and I've developed and improved my communication skills," said Moffett, who admits that some sessions were characterized by tears and hugs. "What's impacted me the most is that I realize how blessed I've been."

Edith Fles of Bloomfield Township was among the first 16 individuals to attend training sessions at Northbrook.

She began her first relationship as a Stephen Minister with a care receiver struggling with terminal illness.

But the phone calls, notes, words of encouragement and twice monthly visits ended ten months later when the care receiver lost her battle for life. Though she feels the loss, Fles says she feels privileged to have shared the experience.

"Hopefully I have become a more caring person," said Fles, who has a degree in community

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Nurturing mission: Northbrook's Stephen Ministry director Lana Leckie of Bingham Farms prepares to hang a banner emphasizing the program's one-to-one care. Fellow Stephen Minister Pam Moffett of Birmingham created the banner.

Troy temple to host annual new-member picnic Aug. 17

Troy's Cong. Shir Tilevah, the only Jewish Reform congregation east of Woodward Avenue, invites new, old and potential members to its annual membership picnic at a lake-front home in Troy, Sunday, Aug. 17, from noon to 4 p.m.

This is a chance for everyone to spend a relaxing day by the water swimming, boating, sharing food, fun and conversation.

It's also a great way to check us out if you are interested in affiliating with a warm, welcoming, accepting congregation that strives to make everyone feel a part of our "family," said congregant Janet Schenk.

Each member family should bring a kosher-style dish to share, including bath suits and towels. Potential members are our guests and need only bring themselves and their beach paraphernalia.

Beverages and paper goods will be provided, Schenk said.

Anyone interested in participating and meeting Rabbi Arnie Sluteberg, Family Education Director Janet Moses and others in the congregation should call the Temple administrator at (248) 619-9669 for directions and to tell them how many will be in your party.

Oakland Jews make journey to their 'second home' in Israel

BY RENA FULKA
SPECIAL WRITER

They rode Jeeps up the rocky slopes of the Golan Heights, went "tubing" down the Jordan River, hiked the Judean Hills and floated in the salty, mineral-rich waters of the Dead Sea.

But for several Oakland County singles on the United Jewish Appeal's largest mission trip to Israel, Jerusalem seemed to hold the most powerful moments. It was in this holy city that the entire 13-bus constituency gathered for worship on a small section of the monumental steps, that centuries ago, led to the second Temple in Jerusalem.

"We met at the Western Wall to welcome in Shabbat," said Marc Berke, campaign associate for the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit. "We had our own ceremony with 540 people."

The following evening, the young adults marked the end of the Sabbath with a special Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony. Among the 200 participants was Southfield resident Lisa Barsone,

28, public relations executive for Events Marketing in Bingham Farms.

"It was always a dream of mine to have my Bar Mitzvah in Israel and I was never able to," said Barsone, who celebrated the life-cycle event as a teen in her home temple in Cleveland. "This was a symbolic service to reaffirm our commitment to Judaism."

Before leaving Jerusalem, the group explored the recently opened extension of the Western Wall Tunnel, built to support the compound where the Temple once

stood.


The summer mission trip, sponsored and subsidized by the United Jewish Appeal and the Jewish Federation, was open to single Jews ages 25 to 40 throughout the country. The Bloomfield Hills-based Federation drew a constituency of 28 young adults, nearly 37 from Oakland County.

For 27-year-old Berke, the July 6 to 17 excursion represented his third visit to Israel, his first stay at staffing a mission and another opportunity to visit his great uncle and his family.

"Going to Israel is special every time," said the Royal Oak resident, who divides his time at Federation between handling campaign gifts and working with young adults. "Jewish people, in particular, have such a special connection with Israel. It's like going to your second home."

A visit to the uncharted city of Beit Shean put hoes and buckets in the hands of tourists eager to dig for archeological treasures. The Oakland County group

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