

Fellowship Focus

Farewell to Publisher Stephen Bryant

Sherry Elliott, Executive Director of Administration, Interpretation, and Development



I knew this year would be a tough one, even before COVID-19 arrived and forced us out of our offices and into social isolation.

In our January staff meeting, The Upper Room's beloved publisher and my colleague for thirty-something

years, Stephen Bryant, announced his retirement plans. Without knowing what was ahead, Steve agreed to stay through 2020 to help us prepare well for a leadership transition. In hindsight, I see God's providential care for a year when we needed Steve's leadership more than ever.

What I appreciate most about Steve is that he leads with great purpose and passion, in good times and bad. He is grounded and stable, yet wonderfully flexible and adaptive. He loves adventure, innovation, and creative conversation. He seeks God's invitation in every situation and expects staff to do the same. He has great affection and respect for you, our donors, and sees you as vital partners in ministry. Steve has so much vision for our work that it's nearly impossible to capture on paper. He inspires and motivates us and works to secure a future where Upper Room resources will always be relevant and accessible.

If you know Steve, then you know he is our mission incarnated. Steve is a soul-tender, inviting and encouraging us all to create daily life with God, to sense our own belovedness.

It was Steve who showed me how to open and be attentive to God's presence while reading *The Upper Room* devotional guide. He has a real gift for teaching prayer practices and designing spiritual experiences that draw people closer to God and neighbor, demonstrating the way of Christ.

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Over the last 34 years, Steve's fingerprints and wise influence have shaped and re-shaped all of our legacy programs like The Walk to Emmaus, The Academy for Spiritual Formation, and the Companions in Christ study series. He kickstarted SOULfeast, Africa Upper Room, and

several indigenous publishing teams throughout Africa and in the Philippines. He has a pastor's heart and a mind for sound business practices, a secret recipe that gives long life to these programs that have meant so much to so many.

I will always be grateful for Stephen's leadership. He's a shining light, an engaging colleague, and a dear friend to us all. Most importantly, he has laid a strong foundation for The Upper Room with lasting results that we all can enjoy. Thanks be to God.

Job well done, Steve. We will miss you.

Please join me in saying thank you and best wishes to Stephen and his wife, Marcie. You can send a note to his attention to The Upper Room, 1908 Grand Avenue, Nashville, TN 37212.

May the peace of Christ be with you during this holy season. Please stay safe and well.

New Giving Fund Established in Honor of Stephen Bryant



In appreciation for Stephen's effective leadership and in honor of his upcoming retirement, The Upper Room staff and board of directors have established a new fund called the **Stephen Bryant Prayer and Spiritual Formation Fund**. This fund will provide financial support in creating virtual (and in-person) events designed for pastors and spiritual leaders to support their life with God as leaders in faith communities and will create eventually a library of digital content that can support the lifelong journey of spiritual formation. This new fund will serve as an ongoing reminder of Steve's deep passion for teaching spiritual practices and exploring their role in the restoration and renewal of disciples and congregations.

To give in honor of Stephen, please visit upperroom.org/bryantfund.

Responding to Crisis

Thanks to you, our donors, The Upper Room has been able to respond swiftly and effectively. In particular, your designation to "Where Most Needed" and to the "Crisis Impact Fund" has allo



The Academy for Spiritual Formation

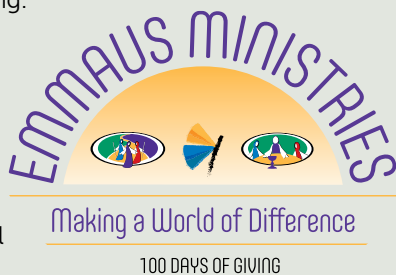
Due to the global pandemic, the Academy is re-examining the way it traditionally does spiritual formation. In September and

October, the Academy launched its first-ever Online Academy Day Apart retreats, centering on themes of dream making, compassion, and resilience. The online retreats will continue in 2021, inviting participants to create sacred space at home, to follow the Academy rhythm of praying the hours, to enjoy community, and more. If you're hungry for deep spiritual experience, please join us. Learn more at academy.upperroom.org.

Emmaus Ministries Making a World of Difference

On September 19, Emmaus Ministries held its first-ever virtual international Gathering. Nearly 2,000 people registered to attend the event. The Gathering was held to bring together communities from all over the world during this time of social distancing. People attended from 35 countries, and the positive feedback has been astounding.

The event also launched the giving campaign, **Emmaus Ministries: Making a World of Difference**, in which Emmaus Ministries seeks to raise \$100,000 in 100 days to help cover the operational deficit caused by COVID-19 and to prepare for its bold future of ministry. If you have attended an Emmaus weekend event, you know how this powerful program changes lives. Please consider supporting this giving initiative so that others may experience God's transformative love. Visit upperroom.org/emmausgives.



Braille

When the printing company that produces the Braille edition closed temporarily before it could complete the May/June 2020 issue, we made the daily devotional accessible as a digital file for Braille reading devices and as a phone-in audio devotional. Wendi Bolton, our senior coordinator of hospitality and services, called the 450 Braille readers to let them know their options.

"All of my conversations were at least 5–10 minutes long. People shared how the virus was affecting their lives, and many were lonely. They blessed me with their words of encouragement and extraordinary faith." —Wendi Bolton

First Responders Outreach

In the spring, Randy Eshleman from State Farm in Wernersville, Pennsylvania, reached out to us about its free chicken barbeque drive-thru for first responders. We sent them 600 copies of the daily devotional free-of-charge for their care packets.

Randy's team and partnering organizations grilled 1400 half chickens!

"Not only did we want to meet the first responders' physical needs but we also wanted to meet their spiritual needs. . . . We continue to pray that The Upper Room devotionals included in each meal bag will provide a source of hope." —Randy Eshleman



Merry Christmas!
from The Upper Room staff

in a Challenging Year

to the spiritual needs of people affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and by racial injustice. We've made this work to be possible. We are grateful. Here are some highlights of our work together.

Amplifying the Voices of Those Calling for Racial Justice

Beginning with the murder of George Floyd over Memorial Day, the U.S. has been racked with another pandemic, one that has never gone away: systemic racism. To help with the spiritual work of overcoming racism, The Upper Room has provided a platform on our website and social media channels for voices and stories of change.



"The role of the prophet is twofold: one, to speak with power and two, to speak to power. This work on anti-racism does both of those things. The videos, writings, and resources are powerful representations of what grace and justice sound like; and the orators and writers who approach this work do so with a conviction deeply rooted in the gospel. This work is needed." —Rev. Ron Bell, lead pastor at Camphor Memorial UMC, is one of these voices of change.

Other things we have been able to accomplish together because of your support during the pandemic:

- Morning Prayer on Facebook Live to people everywhere who need a word of encouragement, a moment of grace, and an opportunity to connect during social isolation.
- Online resource page and free eCourses for spiritual wellness during social isolation.
- Monthly sabbath time for spiritual renewal via Zoom for pastors and other church leaders.

With God's good grace, our work together will continue.

"In these strange new days devoid of our regular routine and filled instead with uncertainty and a hum of anxiety, my husband and I have found the practice of joining The Upper Room via Facebook to pray, listen, and learn in community . . . a much-needed healing balm."

—Judy Lewis, Nashville, Tennessee

"Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us."

—Matthew 1:23, NRSV

Let Us Go Now to Bethlehem

Like the shepherds, we want to go and see if Jesus will fulfill our longings and our hopes. We are drawn to Bethlehem to ponder deeper questions about Jesus and to see what God has done and can do in our lives. In *Let Us Go Now to Bethlehem*, Todd Outcalt invites us on a journey of wonder and discovery with daily devotions for the 28 days of Advent, 12 days of Christmas, and Epiphany. Visit UpperRoomBooks.com/Bethlehem or call 1.800.972.0433 to order.

In addition, The Upper Room is partnering with Outcalt to lead an eCourse based on his best-selling book *Blue Christmas*. For many people this year, Advent and Christmas will be especially difficult. To register, visit UpperRoom.org/ThisBlueChristmas.



Thank you for shining Christ's light brightly in 2020!

DONORS GAVE (Stats from October 2019 through October 2020)

\$904,798
to support the ministries of The Upper Room this year.

27%
of donations were from first-time donors!

94%
of all donations were \$100 or less.

225
Fellowship Circle members collectively gave \$7,444.50 each month.



To join this monthly giving circle of friends, visit UpperRoom.org/fellowship or call 1-877-899-2781, ext. 7212.

DONORS MAKE A DIFFERENCE



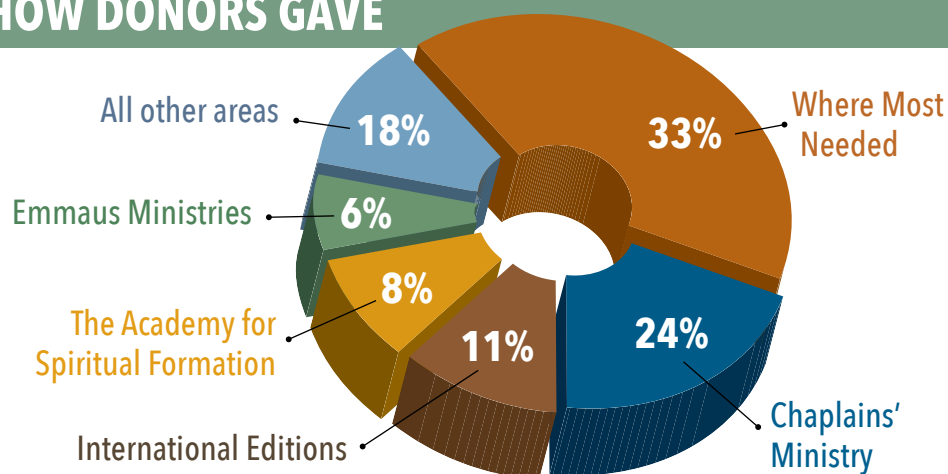
Name: Stephen Hoffman
City & State: Sarasota, Florida
Giving Fund: Chaplains' Ministry
Year of First Gift: 2017

Why do you give to this fund?
"My wife and I have volunteered at a maximum security state prison for eight years. We have great respect and affection for the men who live their lives there. *The Upper Room* is a significant source of inspiration and encouragement to them as they seek to witness to the grace of God's love through Jesus Christ. Each day's witness is a tangible expression of hope for these friends. We are humbled to know that our small monthly gift can be added to many, many more."

DONORS ARE FROM AROUND THE WORLD

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| Argentina | Canada | Japan | Sri Lanka |
| Aruba | Greece | Malaysia | Switzerland |
| Australia | Guam | Norway | United Kingdom |
| Bahamas | Hong Kong | Puerto Rico | United States |
| Barbados | Indonesia | Singapore | Virgin Islands (U.S.) |

HOW DONORS GAVE



Give Today!

The Upper Room covers all its ministry expenses from product sales, participants' fees, interest income, and the generous support of donors. We do not receive any apportionment funds from The United Methodist Church or any other denomination. Donations are needed to help sustain and expand the reach of our ministries so others may experience God more fully.