

Counselor Answers Crisis Calls Through The Night

Gordon Schaeffer

Jefferson Award Winner Staffs Crisis Hotline For Nearly Half A Century

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SAN FRANCISCO (KPIX 5) When there's a crisis in the middle of the night, who can you call? In San Francisco, there's a hotline where someone is ready and willing to listen. This week's Jefferson Award winner is one of the counselors who's been answering calls for nearly half a century.

There something you should know about Gordon Schaeffer:

"I'm a day person," he said definitively. "I do not function at night."

And that seems odd considering Schaeffer volunteers to answer San Francisco's [Night Ministry](#) Crisis Line from 10pm until four in the morning.

"This was such a compelling story of the needs in San Francisco," he explained.

"To be available to people in the middle of the night, when the crises come, when the night closes in, when you feel like there's nobody who cares."

Schaeffer first heard that story in 1967, and he's been a Night Ministry crisis counselor for 48 of the hotline's 51 years.

The Night Ministry says its mission is to be the presence of the church in the city at night. Counselors answer the phone seven nights a week and when a caller says they need a minister, one is sent.

"If someone calls us and says we'd like to have a face to face conversation our crisis line counselors can page the night minister and we can arrange to meet someone," explained Director Rev. Lyle Beckman.

Schaeffer says he's certainly see the city change over the decades from the late 60's..

"Summer of Love when people would come into town and think 'Well, I can just crash anywhere. Night Ministry? Do you have a room for me? Well, no we don't you know.'"

..to the AIDS crisis.

"Where people were so desperate, not knowing what was happening other than their friends were dying left and right."

In its 51 years, the Night Ministry has operated out of three different locations, the latest being a small office in the middle of the city. As Schaeffer says, it's pretty tough to find free rent in San Francisco.

Why does Schaeffer do it? He says it's an important part of his being a Christian.

"There's a lot of loneliness in the city," he said.

But at 71 years old, how long will he keep answer the calls?

"I figure I'm going to do this until I can't do it anymore because crisis doesn't go away," he explained.

So for providing comfort and a listening ear to San Franciscans in crisis, this week's Jefferson Award in the Bay Area goes to Gordon Schaeffer.

The Night Ministry is always looking for volunteers and donations. To find out how you can help and to get the crisis line number, use this [link](#).