

*Guidelines for Establishing a*

## **Congregational Special Ministries Committee**







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## **GUIDELINES FOR ESTABLISHING A CONGREGATIONAL SPECIAL MINISTRIES COMMITTEE**

*The purpose of a congregational special ministries committee is to serve people who have special spiritual and physical needs with the gospel of Jesus Christ and loving action.*



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**OBJECTIVES****A. Identify members of the community who have special spiritual and physical needs.**

*Obviously most of the committee's attention will be focused on members of the local congregation. However, as much as we are able, the Lord encourages us to look beyond the immediate church family to offer assistance to those who are in need.*

**B. Complement the efforts of the pastor(s) in meeting the special spiritual and physical needs of people in the parish community.**

*The pastor, by virtue of his call, is responsible for the spiritual welfare of those in the community who are his rightful concern. As a Christian he will also be concerned about the general welfare of all. Because he is the chief administrator of the parish he must accept primary responsibility for its programs.*

*At the same time, however, God encourages every believer to "do good to all, especially to those who belong to the family of believers." The congregational special ministries committee will encourage and facilitate loving ministry by lay members, allowing them the special joy of demonstrating Christian love to others.*

*That said, however, the committee must be sure that the pastor is aware of its activities. The pastor is able to offer reinforcement from God's Word for all that the committee does. Without such reinforcement committee work could result in just that—work. Work or works in and of themselves are always commendable, but without proper motivation they are just plain dead.*

**C. Offer assistance to people in the community who have special spiritual and physical needs.**

*The local parish, through its regular programs of offering Word and Sacrament, takes care of the spiritual responsibility to the community. (The community includes members of the local congregation, those who are no longer active in a Christian church or are unchurched. When disasters occur this definition may be expanded.) There will always be those who have special spiritual needs (the boy who got caught stealing, the person who doubts, extramarital pregnancy, marital*

4. The education program of the congregation benefits as members have an opportunity to become involved in carrying out God's command to "do good to all men."
5. The overall stewardship program of the congregation will benefit as more of the members are involved and take an active role in serving the church or being served by it.
6. Called workers will benefit because they are able to devote full time to a ministry for which they have been trained. Yet at the same time they may extend their ministry into less familiar areas of service through the assistance of men and women who are willing and able to assume special responsibilities.

May God bless you as you develop a special ministries committee to serve people with special needs. May the Lord bless us all as we attempt to minister to the special needs of those whom he directs into our care.

members should include pastors. Advisory members should include a staff member from the Sunday schools and/or Christian elementary school.

## GETTING STARTED

We have already described the purpose and function of such a committee. In addition we suggest starting with the KEY, the pastor. If he is convinced, he will likely also be able to convince the voters' assembly, especially if a volunteer would identify the special needs of members in your congregation first. In larger congregations, especially in metropolitan areas, the need will become quite obvious. It may be less obvious in other congregations.

Congregations should be aware that they may receive assistance from district special ministries boards to help them get started.

## NAME

The name of a congregational special ministries committee is subject to suggestions. We have used the title congregational Special Ministries Committee throughout this presentation. Another good name is Congregational Services Committee, but many other names such as Helping Hands or, Love-In-Action would also serve well.

## BENEFITS

The benefits of a congregational special ministries committee are perhaps obvious, but we would like to list just a few:

1. God's people who are served through a special ministries program benefit from it.
2. The many volunteers who will eventually be called upon to assist in a special ministries program have the benefit of knowing they are able to serve God in a special way.
3. The evangelism program of the congregation benefits as the community becomes aware of a caring congregation.

*problems, divorce, etc.). In this case the pastor rightfully assumes the responsibility of providing spiritual counsel. But there comes a time when the demands on his schedule are such that he cannot find enough hours even for spiritual counseling let alone find time for taking care of people's physical needs. Even if he is able to take care of his members, he may not have time to extend his ministry to those in the community that could benefit from his assistance.*

### D. Assist district and synodical agencies in serving the people of the community who have special spiritual and physical needs.

*Some years ago a popular song put to music the poet's words, "No man is an island." This can be said for committees that work alone without consulting with others. We take it for granted that a congregational special ministries committee will be aware of other committees in the congregation. The committee will familiarize itself with the responsibilities and functions of other committees so there is no overlapping of effort. More importantly, when the committee, through its work, encounters certain needs that it is not equipped to handle, it will know to whom to refer the need.*

*The synod, synodical boards and commissions, district boards and commissions, and various independent WELS agencies including schools, have all developed programs for congregational use. Congregational special ministries committees would do well to be aware of such programs and make use of them. All of the above can report a consistent nagging problem: the constituency of the synod is not aware of programs that are designed to assist people who have special spiritual and physical needs. Congregational special ministries committees serve others well when they refer them to the services offered by WELS and its district agencies.*

### E. The members of the congregational special ministries committee will make every effort to equip themselves for this ministry by taking advantage of training opportunities as offered by the pastor, professional fellow members, district and synodical programs, and personal study.

*It seems almost redundant to suggest that all committee work must begin with a study of God's Word. A thorough understanding of what God expects of us as regards doing good to all men is a prime requisite. Not only will such study insure that the committee's work will be God-*

*pleasing, but it will also make the committee confident in its work knowing that the Lord's blessing will rest upon its efforts. Christian people are not saved because they do good works. They do good works because they are saved.*

*In addition to a thorough foundation in God's Word the congregational special ministries committee would do well to train itself in areas of special ministry. This may be done by private study; by calling upon members of the congregation who have vocational skills in these areas; and by attending workshops and institutes conducted by district Special Ministries coordinators, WELS Special Ministries, and other WELS and public agencies. Such training will help to give the committee confidence in its work. A well trained committee will know its own limitations and refer problems beyond its ability to the proper person or agency. Untrained committees tend to be afraid to acknowledge their limitations, but they should do so nonetheless.*

## **SHOULD EVERY CONGREGATION ESTABLISH A CONGREGATIONAL SPECIAL MINISTRIES COMMITTEE?**

Some congregations may not be able or have the need to establish a congregational special ministries committee. It seems to us that we ought to suggest establishing such committees if the congregation has more than 75 members in attendance for worship services. This does not mean that smaller congregations could not benefit from such activity.

Another factor to consider is the location and general character of the congregation. A congregation in an urban area with a highly mobile membership is far different from a rural congregation whose membership is less likely to change because of socio-economic conditions.

Each congregation, after studying the advisability and feasibility of establishing a congregational special ministries committee, will have to decide for itself. The prospect of establishing such a committee will seem like a monumental task at first. But in the long run it will save time, especially for the pastor. More importantly, the membership will be served better and by fellow Christians.

## **STATUS OF THE CONGREGATIONAL SPECIAL MINISTRIES COMMITTEE IN THE CONGREGATION**

The status of the congregational Special Ministries Committee should be the same as the Evangelism Committee, the Stewardship Committee or any standing committee of the congregation.

A description of the makeup of the committee, together with its stated purposes, should be added to the congregation's constitution and/or bylaws.

If funds are needed to carry out a program they should be added to the congregation's budget. Emergency funds, if needed, should be available through special gifts or even through synodical funds. Many WELS members have been assisted by the synod's Committee on Relief after disasters such as floods, fires, and tornadoes ([www.wels.net](http://www.wels.net)).

We suggest that the chairman of the committee be a member of the church council. This allows for healthy liaison between the committee and council. It also allows for regular reporting to the congregation at voter's meetings and through parish newsletters. Since the primary function of the committee is program development we suggest a committee of 3 to 5 members made up of men and women. Ex officio

**F. Membership Conservation is an Ongoing Need because:**

1. Human nature is such that we forget to send in names.
2. The church must be aware of its members on the move or away from home.
3. The WELS Mission for the Visually Impaired, Military Services, Special Education Services Committee, Mission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Prison Ministry Committee, Health and Wellness Committee, and the Mental Health Needs Committee—all need and want the names of people with special needs so they may be privileged to serve them directly and/or serve them through your congregation.

**G. Confidentiality**

Confidentiality is essential. Without it, any program of ministry will suffer. This subject is so obvious that nothing more need be said about it.

**H. Respond to Non-Member Needs**

To the extent that the Lord has provided resources to do so and to the extent that fellowship principles permit it, the congregation will respond to needs of people in the community who are not members of the congregation. When someone in your community suffers from some disaster, for example, members of your congregation may assist to alleviate pain and suffering. They may do this as individuals or through congregational or synodical programs such as the WELS Committee on Relief ([www.wels.net](http://www.wels.net)).

The matter of serving non-member needs is a very delicate and sometimes difficult problem, especially if the need is only physical. We must be sure that the person in need is really “my neighbor” in the scriptural sense. Is that person really my/our responsibility? Does such activity interfere with the congregation’s primary responsibility, namely, the preaching and teaching of the Word?

If, after prayerful consideration, a decision is made to assist those in the community who obviously are in need, such activity should be carried out in the name of the Lord and for the welfare of others. The congregation that demonstrates a genuine love for God and his people preaches a powerful evangelism sermon.

**PROGRAM****A. Study the Membership**

The committee should be encouraged to do a demographic study of the congregation’s membership. EVERY member should be accounted for. Among factors to note would be: date of birth, marital status, when baptized and confirmed, address, living with whom, and special needs. These and other details about each member will enable the committee to identify people who might benefit from a special ministries program.

**B. Identify People in the Congregation Who are:****1. INSTITUTIONALIZED**

*When someone in the family complains that the pastor has not called on Uncle George who is in the hospital, does someone ask that family, “Are you sure the pastor was notified that Uncle George entered the hospital?” Is the congregation aware of everyone who is residing in an institution? Sometimes when a pastor accepts a call to a congregation he is not aware that Aunt Minnie has been living in a nursing home for 10 years. Aunt Minnie, you see, never married so she has no children to look after her. You may think she is an exception, yet the largest single segment of population living in our WELS nursing homes is made up of single men and women and of married people without children. Aunt Minnie needs to see her pastor regularly. She needs to know that her brothers and sisters in Christ love her and care about her. Ron is intellectually disabled and has to live in a special home. Jim is in prison for stealing a car. Sue is in a home for unwed mothers. This list could go on and on.*

*The congregational special ministries committee identifies everyone who is in an institution of some kind. We would also include a listing of all long-and-short term shut-ins. The father living in his daughter’s home is really living in a kind of institution because it is not his home. It is safe to assume that people who are institutionalized will greatly appreciate the services that a congregational special ministries committee might initiate. Surely there will always be some who don’t want to be “bothered,” especially by religion because it really pricks their conscience.*

*Committees make a serious mistake if they only go through the identification process once and then assume that everyone has been accounted for and that any new names will be reported to them. Identification is a process that never stops. At least not as long as we are working with sinful mortals. The WELS Special Ministries, for example, is quite used to asking for names, names, names! Could it be that the work of a congregational special ministries committee would minimize the number of WELS members who are not benefiting from one or the other of the CSM's programs simply because they do not know about such programs? We think so.*

## 2. ABLE TO ASSIST IN JAIL AND PRISON MINISTRY

*It is easy to forget about our brothers and sisters in Christ who may be behind the bars of a jail or prison and even easier to forget the many imprisoned souls who are outside of the family of believers. They are "out of sight" and "out of mind" to most of the congregation. However, the Lord expects us to remember those who are "in prison" and commends those Christians who do. The WELS Prison Ministry Committee encourages laypeople to get involved in serving inmates locally and even in penal institutions around the country. If you would like help to organize a local jail or prison ministry, the WELS Jail Ministry Training Team (JMTT) would be happy to assist you. Simply call the Special Ministries Office at 414-256-3241 or e-mail [csm@wels.net](mailto:csm@wels.net). Many workers are often available from among the growing retirees, but it's usually best to include both young and old on your team.*

## 3. PEOPLE AWAY FROM HOME

*It is quite common for congregations to have members who live away from home, some for only short periods of time, others for long periods. This includes college students in the States (served by the Board for Home Missions/WELS Campus Ministry); students and others studying, living, or traveling overseas; and men and women in the U.S. military (served by WELS Civilian Chaplaincy in Europe: [www.welsmilitary.net](http://www.welsmilitary.net)).*

*For members who move to other communities in America for any reason, you may locate WELS or ELS congregations in the area by using the "Locator" feature on the upper right-hand corner of [www.wels.net](http://www.wels.net).*

## C. Make Pastors Aware of People's Needs

Pastors are especially called to take care of the spiritual needs of their members. When it comes to other needs, pastors may not have time or expertise to effectively deal with them. A wise pastor will often seek out and even rely upon the services of his members to meet these needs. However, he will also understand that life is complicated; most often it is difficult to separate the spiritual from the non-spiritual needs. The pastor's involvement in every facet of congregational ministry, even if only advisory, is always important.

## D. Membership Awareness of the Following is Vital

1. The purpose and function of the WELS Special Ministries Committee. Members should feel comfortable in contacting the committee for assistance.
2. Special services offered through synodical boards and agencies, especially those offered by WELS Special Ministries.
3. Opportunities for special programs as developed by the District Special Ministries Boards.

## E. Coordinate and Develop a Network of Volunteers to Carry Out the Program as Established by the Congregational Special Ministries Committee

In no way could a congregational special ministries committee carry out all of the tasks that an inventory will suggest. Nor could a committee respond to every request for emergency assistance. Its primary purpose/function is to develop a program of Christian service. It must seek and welcome the assistance of fellow members to carry out its program. By the grace of God most congregations have a ready resource available. There are many men and women who are retired, able, and willing to help. All we need to do is ask. They will respond to a well-defined program. They will not respond well to a program that patronizes them by offering them "busy work."

## 12. IN NEED OF TRANSPORTATION

*Many churches have a system of offering transportation assistance to members. In many churches the call for help comes to the church office and the pastor has to try to figure out a plan. There must be a better way.*

## 12. SINGLE

*Statistics tell us that the majority of people over the age of 18 are single. The single population includes: never-married by choice, divorced, deserted, separated, unwed parents, single parents or one parent units (some never-married singles become single parents by adopting a child), and widowed. Each congregation has a significant number of single members. The committee should be sure that the congregation's program encourages singles to be active in its ministry. The church should not be a "couples only" society.*

## 13. OTHERS

*As the congregational special ministries committee reviews the congregation's membership roster, it will discover many special needs that are not included among those listed. For example, members may find themselves confronted by:*

- children who suddenly lose their parent(s)
- an extramarital pregnancy
- a case of rape or incest
- murder
- house or office fire
- a serious car accident
- an emotional breakdown
- a vandalized home/property
- a loss of employment, etc.

*Be sure to give special consideration to all such cases. The congregational services committee of the congregation should stand ready to say, "We're here to help you to the extent that the Lord has given us the resources."*

*Ask anyone who has spent time away from home for several years what it means to get a letter from home, the home church bulletin, a newsletter from the congregation, or a letter from the pastor. Ask them what such contact does for their spiritual as well as emotional health. Ask the people on the ministry-by-mail program how they feel. It is important to keep in touch with members who are away from home, especially from their spiritual home.*

## 4. PHYSICALLY DISABLED

*Who is disabled in your congregation and community? What kinds of services would benefit them? There are many among us who, because of certain limitations, may be unable to attend worship services. A caring congregation will see to it that structural obstacles are not a barrier for people in wheelchairs or for people who need to use walkers. Most congregations have already developed a transportation network for those who do not have one of their own means of transportation for getting to worship services and church activities. Many of our schools are now accommodating physically challenged children. Many physically disabled people are among the elderly. Some congregations have the church secretary (or some volunteers) call a list of people each morning to make sure that everything is normal. Youth groups have adopted certain people and do tasks for them. Some senior citizen groups in our congregations assist those who are physically or developmentally disabled. A congregational special ministries committee should encounter little difficulty in enlisting volunteers from the congregation to assist in ministering to persons who are physically or developmentally disabled.*

## 5. WIDOWS AND WIDOWERS

*The loss of a spouse is always a very difficult experience. If the members of a Christian congregation are there to support a fellow Christian during this difficult time of life, the burden of suddenly being alone is lessened somewhat. For example, the widower who has not had to cook, clean house, and wash clothes for many years may appreciate advice and assistance. The widow who suddenly must be responsible for general maintenance and upkeep around the home, who must suddenly be responsible for maintaining the family car, or who*

*suddenly has lost her means of primary transportation will appreciate help from fellow Christians.*

#### 6. DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED MEMBERS

*Most of our congregations have one or more members who are developmentally or intellectually disabled. How are their spiritual and physical needs being met? Do parents of a special child have baby-sitting services available? Does the congregation offer special spiritual training programs? Are called workers and lay volunteers regularly visiting members who live in institutions? Has the congregation considered an advocacy program for persons who have developmental disabilities? Have the names of all special needs people been submitted to the Special Education Service Committee's "He-Cares/We-Care" ministry-by-mail program?*

#### 7. SENIORS (OLDER) MEMBERS

*The congregational special ministries committee should attempt to identify all members of the congregation who are age 65 or older. You may want to identify those who are robust and able to serve as well as those who are in need of special services. Find out which able seniors are willing to use their skills and time to minister to others in the congregation and community. Among those in need, determine whether their needs could be met through personal services of fellow Christians or whether the congregation's program should be adjusted to include special worship and communion services, Bible classes, etc.*

#### 8. DIVORCED MEMBERS

*Many of our fellow members have experienced the trauma of divorce. The very nature of the mission of the church as we know it in WELS militates against Christians getting a divorce, but we know that Satan is tempting God's people to fall into the snare of worldly influence. Consequently, the incidence of divorce in our churches continues to rise. When divorce occurs it is always accompanied by pain, including the children, siblings, parents, and grandparents of the divorced. Yes, and let's not forget the godparents. A Christian godparent who takes his responsibility seriously should be deeply concerned*

*when a godchild is a product of a divorced home, or if older, divorced themselves. Would it not be good to develop some kind of support system among our Christian community to assist people through this traumatic time of life?*

#### 9. VISUALLY IMPAIRED

*Identify members who have serious visual problems. Some may benefit from large-print hymnals and other spiritual literature. Others may prefer devotions, sermons, and other spiritual literature available on audio cassette. Others who are visually impaired may benefit from better lighting and transportation assistance.*

*In every instance, make sure that your members are aware of the excellent services that are available through the synod's Mission for the Visually Impaired. All of the mission's materials and services are offered free of charge! Visit [www.wels.net](http://www.wels.net) for a catalog of materials and services.*

#### 10. HEARING IMPAIRED

*Not so easy to identify are those fellow members who are experiencing hearing loss. Churches should consider good lighting, adequate sound systems, and the introduction of interpreted (signed) worship services, Bible classes, etc. A signer may also become necessary for Sunday or day school, instruction classes, and fellowship events. Those whose hearing loss is severe should be aware of the services offered through the Mission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Committee. Visit [www.wels.net](http://www.wels.net) for a catalog of materials and services.)*

#### 11. TERMINALLY ILL

*Most congregations have had or will have members who are terminally ill. In most cases their illness will end their lives after several months, a year, or more. In addition to the frequent services of the pastor, congregational members will be able to benefit the individual and the family in many ways. If, for example, the head of a family knows that his wife and children will be looked after by his fellow Christians, it removes a major burden from someone who will soon be entering the Life Triumphant.*















