



FOR THE WELS CONGREGATION:

How to minister to those who serve

As our servicemen and women defend our freedom, they face unique challenges. We recognize they need spiritual support and guidance that addresses their specific needs. The men and women who have served our country in the armed forces deserve praise—and, if needed, a helping hand.

While you can't compel the military members, their families, and veterans to accept our efforts, being known to the military members, their families, and veterans before a need arises aids in opening doors to understanding how we can support them.

We encourage every WELS congregation is to develop a culture that loves, appreciates, and supports its military members, their families, and veterans.

How do we get started?

Strive to make sure your pastor and congregation are aware when their member:

- 1. Joins the military.** Encourage or help the member to register at wels.net/military.
- 2. Will deploy.** Verify that the member is registered and has provided updated information at wels.net/military.
- 3. Is deployed.** Express concern for the member's family and a desire to help them while the military member is away from home.

It is important to track the movements of a member in the military for continued spiritual support. When a service member moves, please provide updated information at wels.net/military so that an MCP or the national civilian chaplain can maintain contact. This is helpful, even if the home pastor remains the service member's primary pastor.

Get to Know Your Military Families

Getting to know your military families soon after meeting them aids in learning how to support them and building rapport and trust. Because of the military mission, one spouse may deploy, leaving the other spouse and children in unfamiliar surroundings. The following are suggestions that congregational members can follow when military members come to your congregation:

- **Prepare a "Yellow Pages" of recommended doctors, dentists, and auto repair shops.** Military families move more often than most American families, and having recommendations from the local congregation goes a long way in building relationships.
- **Take the first step and invite them out for coffee.** One month after the family arrives, take them out for coffee and welcome them to the community. Allowing a short amount of time to pass gives them time to unpack and decompress after their transition but doesn't allow too much time to go by before the welcome gets cold.

- **Introductions are key.** It's essential to introduce the new family to others with similar interests. Remember, especially the children and the spouse need to have friendly support. They are most likely in need of friends and need help getting to know people.

Supporting Military Families During Deployments

Here are some critical Do's and Don'ts when the military member deploys leaving the family at home:

Do:

- offer to babysit for grocery shopping or a night out or appointments.
- offer to mow their lawn or help with simple household tasks.
- offer dog-sitting if you know they are going to visit family or when a single military member is deployed.
- sit by them in at church so they know you care and offer to help with small children.
- pray for the military members and their families.

Don't:

- ask questions about where the spouse is deployed or what they are doing.
- ask for specifics about when the military member is leaving or coming home.
- be pushy about offering help, just listening is always helpful.

Ideas for Volunteering

Volunteering time and talents to service opportunities is an excellent way for congregations in any community to support military members, their families, and veterans. It's also a fun way for congregations to connect with the community and demonstrate Christian love in action.

Service opportunities that fit the skills and time availability of most congregational members can be discovered in a number of ways. A significant first step is to ask the military members, their families, and veterans in your congregation and local community how you can give of your time and talents. Additionally, established service organizations offer many service opportunities.

Before committing to an activity with an organization, check with your pastor or staff minister to make sure that the organization's beliefs are in agreement with yours. (charitynavigator.org)

Lutheran Military Support Group (LMSG) is a non-profit organization providing Christ-centered support to WELS/ELS military service members, veterans, and their families. The group is a national-level organization, designed to have national reach, but local impact. In many WELS and ELS congregations, LMSG has liaisons who share information received from LMSG with their congregation. Some of their responsibilities are to make the congregation aware of the difficulties military service members and their families face every day. This includes identifying projects and situations that may assist in providing God's Word to deployed service members. Check their website for more information. (lutheranmilitary.org)

Fisher House Foundation is best known for its network of 87 comfort homes where military and veterans' families can stay at no cost while a loved one is receiving treatment. These homes are located at major military and VA medical centers nationwide and in Europe, close to the medical center or hospital served. Each location has many ongoing and special event volunteer opportunities. Check their website for more information. (fisherhouse.org/get-involved/volunteer)

United Service Organizations (USO) is an American nonprofit-charitable corporation that provides live entertainment, such as comedians, actors and musicians, social facilities, and other programs to members of the United States Armed Forces and their families. Most volunteers will greet guests, assist with center activities and programs, and support staff members as needed. Volunteering with the USO offers an opportunity for individuals and congregations to directly

serve military members. Check their website for more information on how to become a volunteer and for locations near you. (uso.org/take-action/volunteer)

Ideas for Military Care Packages

Care packages are the best way for loved ones to send a little piece of home to deployed service members. They're also a fun way for families to stay connected while apart. Always check with your service member or their family before purchasing any items. Some items may not be allowed in the area they are serving, or they may already be receiving too much of an item. Here are some ideas to get you started:

- **Contact the post office.** Before you can create a care package, you need shipping supplies. The United States Postal Service (USPS) offers a free "Military Care Kit" with the necessary supplies for sending packages overseas, including boxes, packing tape and customs forms. Visit the USPS website to get your free kit, which will be shipped to you and arrive at your doorstep within 5 to 7 business days. The USPS website will also state what you can and can't ship overseas.
- **Strike a pose.** What better way to send a little piece of home than to send pictures from home? Take pictures of the kids, the pets, the house, friends, anything you think your service member is missing. How should you send them? You can send them the old-fashioned way by simply mailing prints of the pictures. If you plan to include a large number of photos, load them onto a USB flash drive. Join a photo-sharing site like Snapfish or Shutterfly and make albums, calendars, and other gifts. Or, you can load images on a digital picture frame so they can be easily displayed and viewed like a slideshow.
- **Bake goodies.** Now that they've seen home through pictures, give service members a taste of home by baking some homemade yummys. Keep in mind that not all baked goods will survive the transit time and temperature changes en route to the care package's final destination. One way to overcome that is by baking a cake in a jar. This is basically a mini cake made inside a jar that promises to still be moist and delicious by the time it arrives on the other end. The recipe can be found at military.com/spousebuzz/blog/2013/07/how-to-make-military-care-package-cake-in-a-jar.html.
- **Provide entertainment.** Service members can always use entertainment when they have a chance to enjoy some down time. Include books, sudoku, and crosswords puzzles. Go to your local store and use their price matching policy for new ear buds, DVDs, and iTunes gift cards. Also check out JoAnn Fabrics, Michaels, and A.C. Moore for pens, notepads, stationary, and envelopes, the perfect hint for them to write letters back to you.
- **Personalize the package.** Homemade artwork from the kids is always a big care package hit. Not only is it a morale boost for your service member, but it also helps the kids stay connected with the parent they're missing. Don't forget to decorate the inside of the box!
- **Pack non-perishables.** The best food to send is usually of the non-perishable variety, especially those snacks in cans or jars to prevent crushing. Beef jerky, tuna, trail mixes, Pringles, candy that won't melt, and well-packaged cookies and crackers are safe bets.
- **Include necessities.** Service members may have the ability to get toiletries and other necessities, but it might not be their favorite brands. Head over to a drug store and load up on travel size shampoo, body wash, hand sanitizer, deodorant, sunscreen, toothpaste, lip balm, foot powder, throat lozenges, and baby wipes. While you're there, put some Ziploc bags in your shopping cart to house any items that could leak.

Have you encountered other opportunities or ideas that would help congregations serve those in the military and their families? Contact the Military Services Committee of Special Ministries at military@wels.net so that they can improve this document.