



FOR THE WELS CONGREGATION:

Congregational Military Support Plan

Purpose: Increase awareness of the ministry being provided to veterans and veterans and those actively serving in the military and their dependents

The activities of the organization:

- Activities are aimed at providing Christ-centered support to active members of the military, veterans, and their families.
- Establish a small committee who will meet and review ideas of how we can provide Christian support to those impacted by the military.

Promotion Ideas

- Pamphlets displayed in the entryway of the church with resources available to veterans and active duty/reserve/guard members.
- WELS Ministry to the Military military duty station map
- WELS Ministry to the Military poster with QR code
- LMSG Ammo Can
- WELS Ministry to the Military media kit
- WELS Ministry to the Military special military worship services kit
- WELS Ministry to the Military guest preacher/presenter
- Adopt WELS Ministry to the Military for Sunday school/grade school mission project

WELS Ministry to the Military has a map, similar to the World/Home Missions maps, that displays the location of all military duty stations and the closest WELS congregation. This can be useful for pastors/elders to refer actively serving members who have frequent moves.

The Ministry to the Military poster displays a QR code which is linked to wels.net/military. This can be used to encourage actively serving members to register with Ministry to the Military wherever the poster is displayed. "Here, come over to this poster and sign up with WELS Ministry to the Military!"

Lutheran Military Support Group Ammo Can collections are used to support WELS Ministry to the Military, counseling sessions for veterans/active-duty members through Christian Family Solutions, retreats for combat veterans, Military Contact Pastor workshops, and grants for congregations looking to host an event or service project for veterans/those actively serving/military families.

Ministry to the Military is publishing special military worship service kits for congregations and grade schools/high schools, which contain sermon/devotion helps, prayers, media graphics for social media and worship screens.

WELS Ministry to the Military



Special Events or Projects

- Lutheran Military Support Group Ammo Can (twice a year, May and November)
- Veterans display in gathering space/narthex
- Veteran recognition
- Veterans service (modeled after Advent by Candlelight)
- Veterans service project
- Organization for WELS Lutheran Seniors (OWLS) rally
- Local newspaper interview highlighting military ministry
- Mission collection for WELS Ministry to the Military
- Guest speaker from WELS Ministry to the Military
- Create a counseling center on campus
- Speak at local high school (public or area Lutheran high school)
- Promote LMSG retreats for combat veterans and their spouses
- Actively encourage and equip veterans/active-duty members for meaningful service in congregation
- Promote wels.net/military
- Christmas Tree/Angel Tree for military families (reach out to the National Guard chaplain)
- Support for families when spouses deploy
- Create a family resource shelf at your church (devotional books for couples and children)

Choose one or two things and carry them out with excellence!

Ways to Support

1. Identify veterans in your congregation
 - This can be accomplished in several ways. While on a member home visit, you may notice military memorabilia, pictures displayed, "Do you have anyone in your family who served in our nation's military?"
 - Add these members/prospects to your congregational member database.
2. Understand that not all veterans want to be recognized
 - You will have your "proud to have served" vets who wear their branch's hat everywhere they go.
 - You will also find veterans who, for various reasons, don't openly share that they've served, who don't stand up at events when veterans are recognized, and that's okay.
3. "Thank you for your service . . . tell me your story . . ."
 - Some veterans are proud of what they did while they served and appreciate a thank you for the time they served.
 - Other veterans are not proud of what they did or experienced while actively serving and "thank you for your service" may be met with some hesitation.
 - Ask questions like, "Where/when did you serve? Were you enlisted or an officer? Where did you go to basic/officer candidate school? What made you decide to join the military? Where did you travel? What was your job?" Use statements like "Not many can do what you do," "We need more people like you," or "We are blessed to have you wearing the uniform." These will go a long way and show you are genuinely interested in their vocation as a member of our nation's military. Understand also that not all will open up because of traumatic events they saw or experienced.

4. Highlight Military Holidays

- On wels.net/military you will find a document which contains all of the military holidays, anniversaries, and birthdays. If your church is in a military community or has a heavy veteran presence, these are good dates to remember in church newsletters, social media posts, and Sunday morning prayers.
- Remember the difference between Veterans Day and Memorial Day! Veterans Day is for the living. Memorial Day is for those who have died. And don't forget Armed Forces Day for all actively serving military members!
- April is the Month of the Military Child. You can Google this for all sorts of ideas on how to recognize and support children of military parents.

5. Actively encourage and equip veterans/active-duty members for meaningful service in the congregation

- Actively serving military members want to get involved as soon as they land in your congregation. They won't be there for long and desire a sense of community and family. They are well-trained leaders and service minded. Ask them to serve shortly after they arrive in your church—and at the same time recognize that every active-duty military member has different responsibilities and work time commitments.
- Veterans have skill sets they learned in the military that can be used in congregational life/ministry. Find out how your veterans served while in the military and encourage them in using those gifts in meaningful ministry.
- Active-duty members transitioning into civilian life can often be stressed and full of anxiety. They are seeking community that they are losing. They are concerned about employment (making sure they have their daily bread). Use veterans in your congregation to set up an individual or group of veterans to help those who are transitioning from active duty to the civilian world. Reach out to veteran resource centers and other veteran organizations in your community. "Our church is here to help them transition from active duty to civilian life." Let them know that your church is a conduit through which veterans are helping veterans with finding employment, veteran services, and community. By building a bridge to the unchurched veterans, you have a natural way to build a bridge to Christ.
- Start with the American Legion and VFW. Contrary to popular belief, these places are not just all about drinking stale beer and telling old war stories (although some of that does happen). The local VFW and American Legion will have lots of retirees, veterans, and some active-duty members. Attend pancake breakfasts, Patriots' Day, or a spaghetti dinner to get started. These events are open to civilians and are a good place to connect with veterans and active-duty members. Oftentimes the American Legion and VFW will have a bulletin board where you could post a flyer for veteran friendly events, services, and counseling that your church offers.

6. Veterans Day "Service"

- Many churches and schools invite veterans to a "veterans' breakfast/lunch," with a prayer or special recognition of veterans. These are great opportunities to identify veterans, ask them their story, and encourage them in meaningful service.
- Many veterans have shared that they like to serve, rather than being served/recognized. Find service projects where veterans can work together to prepare and serve a meal, volunteer together at a local non-profit, or serve in ministries at your congregation. This gives veterans an opportunity to connect, share their experiences, and encourage each other.
- Use your veterans to serve as the military ministry committee of your congregation!
- Encourage your veterans to take one of several chaplain certification courses offered through Martin Luther College. They could serve as chaplains in hospitals, hospice care, extended care facilities, prisons/jails, schools, corporations, or with first responders, fire and police departments.
- Encourage a spiritually mature veteran to consider becoming a Distinctive Religious Group Leader (DRGL). Training is provided through the National Chaplain's office. The DRGL status allows lay people to lead worship

and facilitate Bible study on a military installation or among veteran groups. Contact the WELS National Chaplain to the Military for more details.

- Encourage your veterans to serve at the circuit, conference, or district level as lay leaders.
- Assemble a “pray for our troops” prayer kit. (E-mail Chaplain Horn’s office for kit.)

7. National Warrior Call Day

- Congress designated the Sunday after Veterans Day as National Warrior Call Day—a coast-to-coast call to action for the public and those who have served, to reach out and connect with service members and veterans. Ask a veteran or service member out for coffee/breakfast/lunch. They may not open up and share their “war stories” and that’s okay. Just be present and listen and establish a relationship. Build relationship bridges so that you might build a bridge to Jesus.
- Promote National Warrior Call Day during your Veterans Day weekend service or on social media. (warriorcall.org/warrior-call-day)

8. Counseling Center on Campus

Living Word Lutheran Church in Waukesha, Wis. set up a counseling center which is open five days a week on their campus. They partnered with Christian Family Solutions (CFS) and the Member Assistance Program (MAP) and received a grant from Christian Aid and Relief to provide counseling to their community as outreach. This may be a way to reach veterans and actively serving military members who need professional Christian counseling. Grants are available through WELS Ministry to the Military together with LMSG for CFS counseling sessions for our military.

9. Grade School and High School

Ask one of your veterans or actively serving members if they would consider being a speaker for your grade school or area Lutheran high school Veterans Day service. Encourage them to speak to high school seniors who are thinking about joining the military and share with them resources available through WELS Ministry to the Military for high school students. Encourage high school students to register at wels.net/military after graduation before they ship out to basic training.

10. Support for Deployed and the Spouse/Family

- “I can do my job effectively when I know my family is taken care of back home.” We have heard this from multiple deployers. Care packages, letters, e-mails, text messages, and providing livestreaming services show the deployed military member that you are keeping them in your prayers and care for them. Reaching out to the family members and saying, “What can I do to help? When can I babysit your children so you can go out? When can I come over to mow your lawn? When can we go out for lunch?” will get back to the deployed member and reassure him/her that their family is being taken care of.
- Care packages for deployed troops (We provide a list of approved or suggested items to ship in a care package.)
- Care packages for the family member(s) here in the States (Again, when the family is taken care of back home, the war fighter is able to carry out their duties downrange more effectively.)
- Use a veteran to lead the way in this ministry!

11. Adopt an Airman

There are some Air Force bases that offer an Adopt an Airman program. This program connects host families with airmen who are on their first assignment to a base. The program aims to match families with airmen who share similar interests and characteristics, such as hobbies, sports, and religion. Google your Air Force base and the words “Adopt an Airman.”

12. Basic Training Ministry

- There are some basic training installations that allow local congregations to adopt basic trainees during the holiday seasons. Pastor Andy Bauer and New Life Lutheran in Lake Zurich, Ill., have brought a busload of Navy recruits from Great Lakes Naval Training to their church over Thanksgiving/Christmas and fed them a nice holiday dinner. For more information, reach out to New Life Lutheran Church at www.newlife-wels.org.
- Basic trainees love receiving mail. If you would like names/addresses of new recruits so that your members might write letters, please reach out to our National Chaplain for more information at military@wels.net.

13. WELS Mission Journeys

- WELS Mission Journeys provides an opportunity for all WELS members to walk together in the Great Commission. Through service opportunities in WELS mission fields at home and abroad, members can engage in Christian service. While volunteering, the learning and sharing of outreach ideas will allow individuals and teams to explore how they can use their God-given abilities to engage in outreach activities in their local communities upon their return home. With the Lord's blessing, these trips will inspire a lifelong journey of service and outreach for all who volunteer. (wels.net/serving-others/missions/missionjourneys)
- Consider recruiting veterans to join other veterans in a mission journey to serve the kingdom.

14. WELS Kingdom Workers – RISE program

- Domestic abuse is prevalent in military communities. If your congregation is located near a military installation, this ministry might be a way for you to serve your community. Consider reaching out to the chaplains' office and let them know you have this ministry in your congregation.
- The WELS Kingdom Workers RISE program trains volunteer advocates in your congregation to support survivors of domestic abuse. Identify veterans who have a passion for the hurting, and encourage them to enlist as a domestic abuse advocate. (kingdomworkers.com/partner/rise/)

15. Purple Star School Designation

- If your congregation has a school associated with it, consider pursuing the Purple Star School designation. This designation alerts military families that your school supports military-connected children as they relocate to new schools due to a parent's change in duty station. As of November 2025, 44 states have Purple Star School designation programs or approved legislation. (militarychild.org/programs-and-initiatives/purple-star-schools)