

Developing a Lay Counseling Ministry

Have you created a safe, secure environment for your spiritual care ministry?

by the Editors

Use the following checklist to gauge how your church's lay counseling ministry is doing.

HOW ARE WE DOING	YES	NO	WORKING ON THIS
Have we determined lay counseling ministry goals within the parameters of our state laws with the guidance of an attorney?			
Have we obtained full support of ministry development from church leadership?			
Have we determined who will serve as manager of the lay counseling ministry?			
Have we developed a lay counseling policy and accompanying forms with the help of an attorney?			
Have the policy and forms been developed to ensure compliance with state law and the church's governing documents?			
Have we considered appropriate insurance coverage for the lay counseling ministry?			
Have we developed a communications plan to address the information needs of various audiences within the congregation, including potential lay counselors?			
Have we selected and screened potential lay counselors?			
Have we provided training for the initial group of lay counselors?			
Is the lay counseling ministry manager prepared to provide ongoing training and supervision to lay counselors?			

Creating a safe, secure environment for a spiritual care ministry calls for specific policies and procedures that protect your church, lay caregivers, and those who receive care. The effectiveness of any church program begins with the understanding and support of church leadership. That's especially true of lay counseling and spiritual care ministries.

For this reason, include church leaders in your planning process. Ensure that the governing body of your church not only understands the rationale for your ministry, but also fully supports and approves of spiritual care ministry policies and procedures before you implement a new program. It's also important to confirm that the policies and procedures you develop do not conflict with the church's by-laws or other governing documents.

Evaluate Risk Management Aspects of Any Spiritual Care Ministry

It's important that you consult with an attorney as you prepare a lay counseling policy and any related forms. Your attorney should give you a legal evaluation of the risk management issues of any spiritual care ministry program that your church develops. With the help of legal counsel, church leaders should consider how lay counseling policy elements discussed in this publication may apply to other spiritual care ministries that the church sponsors.

The attorney your church selects should be familiar with various federal and state laws that have an impact on churches with spiritual care ministries. Very few attorneys concentrate in "church law," so you may want to seek attorney recommendations from other churches or trusted sources.

Check with Your Insurance Provider

There are several insurance policy liability coverages that are potentially relevant to your church's lay counseling ministry and other spiritual care ministries. There are church specialty insurers that design insurance programs specifically for churches and other ministries.

Review Your Plan Regularly; Follow It Carefully

Laws change, as do the makeup and needs of a church. Review and update your lay counseling policy and forms annually, together with any other relevant spiritual care ministry policies and procedures. Church leaders should actively apply the church's lay counseling and spiritual care ministry policies and procedures.