



WATCH VIDEO 3: *Members whose needs were ignored*



REFLECTION: Jesus said that Christians will be recognized as his followers by our love (John 13:35). Fear, frustration, and ignorance can keep us from expressing the love that is the fruit of the Spirit. Sometimes members drift away because their serious needs are ignored.

Grieving members sometimes feel disappointed that no one in their church family helps them process their sadness or expresses sympathy. Members with disabilities who cannot worship without help are dismayed that their church declines to help them participate in worship. Those in the military or in jail need the Word during their great trials and hear nothing from their congregation. These are occasions where Christian love could bond church members to each other and to the Lord.

2 Corinthians 1:4 [The Father] comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

Romans 10:14 How can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?

- Why should Christian churches excel over secular grief support groups at providing comfort?

We have received Christian comfort that we can share. We know each other and often remember the person whom the grieving person misses. We are a church family, not just a group of strangers that meets.

- What unique problem do people who are deaf or hard of hearing, in the military, or in prison have when it comes to the means of grace?

They cannot hear the Word unless someone helps them. Similar problems face shut-ins or people with developmental disabilities.

- We often diagnose straying members as those who do not value the Word and sacraments. Why might our diagnosis be wrong in the case of a Christian whose needs have been ignored?

Love doesn't always know the answer—it's not a cure for cancer nor a solution for autism. But Christian love is interested in the individual and how the Lord wants to help that person. "How can we help?" is a more open discussion than "We can't do anything about it." The church does not depend on the congregation's budget but on the Lord and the body of Christ. God has the resources for his church! What's not in the budget might be covered by memorial gifts or one interested donor. Or a door to a

different solution might open when research and conversation explore how to help. In fact, when we examine what God might provide, we might see a mission opportunity!

Ephesians 4:7-8	But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says: “When he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people.”
Romans 12:15	Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.
Matthew 6:8	Your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

- Where should we look first for help, when we encounter an obstacle for God’s people?

God himself invites us to ask him, even though he knows what we need.

- It has been said that sometimes the church is looking for a committee solution when Christ has given one of his people gifts for this problem. Explain.

One church member may have the gifts of comforting or helping a person, and that’s all the situation requires. Committees can spend a lot of time talking without doing what needs to be done.



REFLECTION: What help can we find outside our congregation?

Our synod has resources to help carry out ministry despite barriers of ability or circumstances. The Commission on Special Ministries (wels.net/special-ministries) can help your church serve people with autism, hearing loss, vision loss, mental health needs, serving in the military, or living in prison. When you don’t know how to help, Special Ministries has suggestions and resources or may be able to refer you to a helpful person or organization. Also be aware of community resources. Sometimes you can help struggling members find the help that they need by helping them access or attend community programs .

Acts 1:8	“You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”
Isaiah 49:6	“It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.”

- God’s people have been called to spread the gospel beyond our church walls. How could the effort to serve one member with a special need or challenge spread the gospel beyond our walls?

If God has given you resources and you make the effort to serve the spiritual needs of your member, you can find others in your community who have the same challenges and need the gospel. This “compassion ministry” may be a bridge to a part of the community that is not served by most churches.

- Describe how addressing these needs of members might lead to serving more people in the community:
 - **Grieving member** – *Form a grief support group open to the community*
 - **A member in jail** – *Start a jail ministry, mentor released inmates*
 - **A member who is blind** – *Learn how to include the blind in the community in your activities and access WELS materials for the blind.*
 - **A member who is recovering from addiction or alcoholism** – *Start a recovery support group, learn from Special Ministries how to be a “recovery friendly” congregation.*
 - **Member in a nursing home** – *start holding services there and host activities for residents and their families.*
 - **Other ideas for your church** – *the leader may want to be ready with a suggestion or two—see the list of ministries at WELS.net/special-ministries.*