

## Michigan District Help Team

*Purpose:* In order to live the love of Christ, the Michigan District Help Team exists

- to provide transitional spiritual assistance to called workers who leave the ministry prematurely for whatever reason, and to their families;
- to provide employment and financial counseling to such former called workers and their families;
- to provide emotional and family counseling, when necessary, to former called workers and their families;
- to educate the ministerium of the WELS on the ways in which they can demonstrate our Savior's love to men and women who are no longer serving in the ministry of our church.

### I. General Principles and Assumptions.

- A. Leaving the ministry is almost always the result of some difficulty or crisis in the life or ministry of the worker or his/her family.
- B. The culture and training of the WELS ministerium deliberately fosters the idea that pastors and teachers are "lifers." Nearly all called workers enter the ministry with the expectation that they will retire from our ministry.
- C. People in crisis need Christian love and support, but they are not always willing or able to ask for it. Therefore, we assume that the Help Team must take the initiative in contacting men and women who leave the ministry prematurely.
- D. Contacts will be most effective and will best demonstrate true Christian love if they occur as soon as possible after notification from the district praesidium (within 72 hours).
- E. The called worker is not alone in his crisis. Whether his marriage has ended or not, his spouse will be profoundly affected by his leaving the ministry, as will also his children. The Help Team must also consider all of their spiritual needs, even if they are no longer living together.
- F. The Team is a service committee. It does not have any authority within the district, other than the inherent authority provided to all ministers by virtue of the ministry of the keys.

### II. Spiritual Assistance of the Help Team

- A. *Definition:* Spiritual assistance includes all the efforts to address the spiritual needs of a former called worker and his family through the personal application of law and gospel to their situation.
- B. Purpose of Spiritual Assistance Contacts.
  1. Care of the Souls of the worker and his family. The member of the team who initiates contact will apply law and gospel, as appropriate, to the situation.
  2. Spiritual Care by the Help Team is directed toward the special circumstances brought on by leaving the ministry. For long term,

ongoing spiritual care, the Team will work to connect the former called worker and his family with a WELS congregation as soon as possible so that they can have local shepherding of all their spiritual needs.

3. The Scriptures call us to bear one another's burdens and to encourage each other. These contacts will specifically work to demonstrate real Christian love and support during these times of crisis.
  - a. *Stress due to change.* The worker and his family will need to adjust to the change in their lives. Going from a ministry or ministerial family situation to a lay or lay family situation involves many changes. The spiritual counseling will work to help fellow Christians deal with these changes and the stress and confusion and questioning of God's love that may result.
  - b. *Marital counseling.* Leaving the ministry can place enormous stress on a marriage and it is appropriate for the Help Team to seek to strengthen and aid marriages during this transition. Sadly, sometimes the workers leave the ministry because of marital problems or even marital unfaithfulness. In that case, the counseling would focus (with both partners) on God's will for them in their new situation, even if that includes a divorce. It would address all the spiritual concerns that emerge from this type of a situation.
  - c. *Financial changes.* Most called workers are unprepared to enter the job market. The realities of supporting a family may provoke intense questioning and spiritual challenges. Spiritual counseling will focus on God's promises to care for his children in every situation. It will encourage former called workers to accept God's will and to move forward in this area in a God pleasing way.
  - d. *Financial Relief.* Some called workers who leave the ministry may find themselves temporarily utilizing financial relief. Spiritual counseling will focus on temptations that this kind of assistance may provide, such as pride, dependence, etc.
  - e. *Limits of Spiritual Counseling.* Pastors and teachers are not psychologists or therapists. In some instances, the cause or the result of a called worker leaving the ministry may be emotional trauma that requires professional help. This trauma may not be limited to the former called worker. The spiritual counselor will maintain a list of competent professional counselors to whom he can refer these people to deal with these emotional and psychological issues.

### III. Material Assistance Provided by the Help Team.

- A. *Definition:* Material assistance includes all the efforts to address the temporal needs of a former called worker and his family, including the professional or

financial counseling that will be offered. All this is done out of a heartfelt desire to assist Christians who are in transition.

- B. *Financial counseling.* Called workers who leave the ministry face new financial realities. Counseling will again focus on God's promise to care for his children. It will also work with these men and women and their families to change the way they manage their finances to reflect their new reality. It would encourage them to make the decisions necessary to move off of any relief they receive as quickly as possible.
- C. *Employment Counseling.* Many called workers who leave the ministry are unprepared to enter the job market. They have very specialized educations and limited experience in finding a job that will support a family. Employment counseling will work to help them to seek gainful employment and to make educational decisions that will improve their ability to meet their obligations.

#### IV. Function of the Help Team.

- A. *Structure.* The Team would consist of two pastors and one teacher representing geographic areas of the Michigan District, and one chairman, who is a pastor. The Team will maintain a list of resource people who are willing to work with called workers who leave the ministry, which would include (but not be limited to) a financial counselor, an employment counselor, at least one professional counselor and at least one female teacher.
  - 1. The Team members are appointed by the District President.
  - 2. The Team members serve four year staggered terms, with a limit of three consecutive terms.
  - 3. The Team functions exclusively under the supervision of the District President or another member of the District Praesidium appointed by him.
- B. *Notification.* The District President or his designated representative will notify the chairman of the committee of a called worker who is resigning or has resigned.
  - 1. The notification will include the information that the DP feels is necessary (including the whereabouts of the called worker and his family, if necessary).
  - 2. The chairman of the committee will make the first contact within 72 hours of notification. If he is unable to do so, he will provide an explanation to the DP as to why no contact was made.
  - 3. The chairman will assign further contacts to other team members and resource people as necessary.
- C. *The Initial Contact.* The purpose of the first contact by the Team will be to arrange a face-to-face meeting with the worker and his family (separately if necessary). It will also be to inform the worker and his family of the availability of professional and financial counseling and to offer to arrange contact ("the Initial Call") with the appropriate members of the Team for those issues. Contact will continue for as long as is necessary.
- D. *Pitfalls to be avoided.*

1. *Interference with the appeals process/the former worker's standing.* The synodical and district constitutions place the responsibility of certifying candidates for calls with the Conference of Presidents. They place the responsibility for dealing with appeals in the hands of the district or synodical Appeals Committees. The Michigan Help Team cannot involve itself in any way with these activities.
2. *"Synodical ombudsman."* The Help Team does not exist to serve as an advocate or an "ombudsman" with the district or synodical administrative structure. It does not represent pastors or other workers to mission boards, boards of control, or other committees or bodies.
3. *Breaking the 8<sup>th</sup> Commandment.* In counseling, there is a fine line between dealing with emotional and spiritual issues, and engaging in "gripe sessions" that violate the 8<sup>th</sup> Commandment. The Help Team is not a part of the disciplinary process of the synod or district. It must avoid leading that worker into temptation by participating in discussions that break the 8<sup>th</sup> Commandment. It must also respect the confidence of the workers and their families.
4. *Secular counseling.* The Help Team is not constituted as a psychological or emotional counseling service. Its tools are law and gospel and Christian love. If a former worker or a former worker's family needs professional counseling, the Team should recommend that they pursue it with the appropriate agencies.

#### V. Educational Functions.

- A. *Definition:* Educational functions are those efforts to inform the ministerium of the district of the assistance offered by the Help Team and by the synodical Transition Assistance Team and to encourage them to make personal efforts to reach out in Christian love to their brothers and sisters who leave the ministry.
- B. *Efforts to inform.*
  1. There is a need to inform those who are serving in the ministry of our district that the Team is functioning, so that if they should find themselves in need of its assistance, they will be aware that this assistance exists.
  2. It must be recognized that under ordinary circumstances, our called workers don't expect to leave the ministry. That could make them less attentive to the work of the Team and less aware of the services it offers prior to actually needing its assistance.
  3. It is also important that the ministerium of our district has a clear understanding of what we are attempting to do. The ministerium has a healthy concern for the inroads that humanistic counseling and methods can make into our church body, and those fears are best put to rest by a clear presentation of what the Team is doing and what it is trying to avoid.
  4. The ministerium also has a right to be concerned that the Team not subvert the constitutional processes that we as a synod have set in

place. Again, clear education of the work of the Team is the best way to assure them that is not happening.

*C. Efforts to encourage.*

1. When a called worker leaves the ministry, he usually leaves behind a network of close associates with whom he has served and studied and formed many ties of close Christian fellowship. This is also true of his spouse and his children. But workers and their families who leave often feel that those ties have been severed, and this is particularly painful to them.
2. The Help Team will encourage all called workers to remember the love and fellowship they have shared with brothers who are no longer in the ministry and their families. Even if those workers or families have left due to sin or due to the severing of confessional fellowship with us, we are all still called to demonstrate the love of Christ to one another, as guided by the Holy Scriptures. The Help Team will encourage all called workers to demonstrate Christian love and concern by taking the initiative and reaching out to those people with whom they have shared those ties.
3. At the same time, we recognize that there are many reasons why called workers don't reach out to former brothers and sisters in the ministry. Valid concerns about interfering or ignorance of the circumstances will certainly affect what or how we communicate in these situations. The Team will work to encourage called workers to use the best Christian judgment in each situation and to actively consider the best way to express Christian love in each case.
4. The Team will work to make formal presentations at the district, conference or circuit level. These education efforts will seek to involve the spouses of called workers whenever possible and appropriate.



# **What Am I Supposed To Do?**

## **A Guide to the Ministry of the Michigan District Help Team**

Now that you have agreed to serve on the Michigan District Help Team, you're probably wondering what you've gotten yourself into. Are we going to expect you to have counseling sessions? How much time is this really going to eat up? What are you supposed to do for families that leave the ministry? These questions are natural. This training session will attempt to begin to answer them for you.

We don't claim to have all the answers. Only the Holy Spirit does. And we encourage you to approach every contact prayerfully, asking God to guide you. Approach each person you serve humbly, regarding that person as a soul for whom Christ died and as a brother or sister in faith in need of true Christian fellowship in the form of help and support. Trust that the God who called you by the gospel to be a Christian and who called you through the church to serve on this committee will work in you through the gospel and will accomplish what he wants in your efforts.

### **I. The Initial Contact.**

*(Reference: Michigan District Help Team [MDHT] I.B, IV.B-C)*

The "initial contact" is the first contact made by the team with a former called worker and his or her family. Usually, this will be done by telephone. Ordinarily, it will be done by the chairman of the team or by someone designated by him if for some reason he cannot make that contact.

The initial contact will be made within 72 hours of notification by the district praesidium that a called worker has left the ministry. In the event of a divorce, the chairman will make separate initial contacts with the called worker and his/her spouse.

The purpose of the initial contact is to inform the called worker and his/her family that the district help team is ready to assist them and to let them know that a specific team member is being assigned to them. Whenever possible, the chairman will inform them who that team member is and that the team member will attempt to schedule an appointment with them as quickly as is possible.

The chairman will notify the team member that he is making a specific assignment. He will pass along as much information as he has available at that time. The district president will ordinarily decide how much information to share with the help team, and that amount will vary from situation to situation. Don't expect to get detailed descriptions of situations that need to be protected under the 8<sup>th</sup> Commandment. Even if a called worker has resigned for cause, the praesidium will still work to protect the reputations of the worker and his family as much as is possible. This is how it should be. In every case, you should receive information on how to contact the called worker (and his/her spouse if there has been a divorce). It is especially important that phone numbers and addresses be transmitted accurately, so that timely contacts can be made. Once an assignment has been made, the team member should make a phone contact as quickly as possible in order to set up an initial meeting ("the initial call").

In the case of a teacher leaving the ministry, it is possible that the resignation will be announced, but that the teacher will continue in his/her position until the end of the semester or the academic year. Some months could conceivably pass between those two events. But the team will still make its initial contact within 72 hours of notification and

the team member assigned should still make the first phone call as quickly as possible. But the fact that the worker won't be leaving immediately may affect the scheduling of the first face-to-face contact.

When the chairman (or his designate) makes that initial contact, it is possible that the former called worker or his/her spouse will refuse to meet with the help team. In that case, it probably wouldn't be helpful to get into a debate about the merits of the services the team has to offer. However, a simple question may help you to proceed: *May I ask why?* In most cases, the reason will be a feeling of bitterness or anger over against the synod/district or the mission board/congregation that the worker is leaving. If the worker or the spouse expresses those feelings, be understanding. Without condoning bitterness or breaking the 8<sup>th</sup> Commandment, *let the person know that you understand why they might feel bitter.* It is a very difficult time for them – the word “crisis” probably wouldn't be too strong in many, if not in most, cases. But your work doesn't end there. *Let them know that you would still like to help.* This must be done gently; pressure won't accomplish anything. But neither will giving up at the first expression of hesitancy.

If the worker/spouse is still unwilling to meet with you, then you must respect their decision. However, before you hang up, *express your Christian love and concern and let them know that if they change their minds, you would be more than happy to meet with them.* After you hang up, *write them a brief letter expressing your desire to help them.* Wait a week or so, and then call back and repeat the offer.

## **II. The Initial Call.**

*(Reference: MDHT I, IV D)*

The initial call will be made by the team member assigned to the former called worker and his/her family. Whenever possible, it will be made at their residence. This will work best if everyone is prompt in fulfilling their responsibilities, i.e., the praesidium notifies the chairman promptly, the chairman makes his first contact AND informs the team member within 72 hours of receiving the name from the praesidium, and the team member makes the first phone contact to set up the meeting.

The purpose of the initial call is to offer assistance consistent with the goals of the Help Team. At some point during this initial call – preferably sooner rather than later – the following caveats should be explained to the former called worker and his family:

*You are not going to interfere/intercede with the district.* While you may need to talk to them about their struggles in leaving the ministry (see below), you must remember that you were not a party to whatever conversations and actions took place prior to the called worker leaving the ministry. Without evidence to the contrary, God's Word requires that you assume that district presidents, circuit pastors and mission boards have acted properly (see 1 Timothy 5:19). If a former called worker believes that he or she has not been treated fairly or in accordance with the Scriptures, there is an appeals process in place. You may encourage a former called worker to explore their options. But you must always remember that you are not a part of the district or synodical appeals process.

*You are not going to replace local shepherding by their own new pastor* (although you will help them as is appropriate). It is possible that you will be involved with the family early enough in the process that their membership status will be unresolved. During that period, you may well function as their shepherd. But your goal must be to get them transferred into a congregation where their day-to-day spiritual needs can be met by their own pastor. If you are meeting with them after they have transferred to a



congregation, notify the pastor, if possible, that you will be contacting this person. In most cases, the local shepherd will welcome your ministry to them.

*You are not going to promise return to ministry for them.* They must address that issue to the district praesidium.

You do, however have important issues to address:

1) Spiritual Assistance. The Michigan District Help Team considers this to be its primary responsibility. For that reason, it is composed of called workers. The main goal of spiritual assistance is to ensure that the former called worker and his family affiliate themselves with a confessional Lutheran congregation so that their life long spiritual needs are meant. *For that reason, in the initial visit, the team member will inquire as to the progress of this issue.* This can be particularly difficult if the called worker or his wife has left our fellowship, but it should still be addressed.

A called worker leaving the ministry presents a unique spiritual concern, so ministry directly from the district is appropriate on a temporary basis. At the same time, once a family joins a congregation, team members must respect the call of their shepherd and not interfere with his work. Team members will strive to strike a God-pleasing balance in this area.

The following challenges to the faith of a former called worker and his/her family should be addressed with law and gospel. In general, it will probably be more productive to ask leading questions about these things and listen to the responses before offering a “lecture” on a specific area. Ask **both** the husband and the wife (if meeting together) to answer the questions **in turn**. If older children are present, ask them, too. It may be helpful, in fact, for a male-female team to meet with them. In that case, after some initial conversation, it would be best for the men and the women to talk separately.

Stress due to change. *The team member should ask questions regarding the changes that are taking place.*

An example of the type of question you might ask: *I'm sure that you never really expected to leave the ministry when you entered it. How has leaving it challenged your faith?*

*How is your relationship to God today?*

*Do you have any resentment toward God or doubt about how he's taking care of you now?*

Listen carefully to their answers. Apply law and gospel appropriately. Don't be afraid to call sinful attitudes what they are. But emphasize the gospel and its promises in this time of loss. Recognize the hurt that will inevitably be a part of this situation, and remind them of God's infinite love in Christ and his guidance in our lives, even when personal sins and failings have hurt us and cost us opportunities to do work that we love. Remind them that the same God who gave Jesus to live and die for us will not abandon us even in the painful losses of this life. Be especially prepared to address guilt over personal sins that may be at the heart of this situation. Recognize that a pastor who leaves the ministry may feel that he has “let down” his congregation, his brothers in the

ministry, and his God. Be generous in applying Christ's atonement and God's forgiveness to the worker and to his family.

Marital counseling. Marriage is God's institution. Assuming that the marriage is still intact, *it is appropriate for team members to address the stress on the marriage caused by leaving the ministry.*

You might ask any or all of the following questions:

*Do you feel that your husband/wife was treated fairly? Are you angry/resentful about the way he/she was treated?*

*Do you feel that your husband/wife has brought a disaster on you/wronged you/failed to live up to their marriage vows to you in this situation? Are you angry/bitter with him/her?*

*Do you feel that your spouse supported you during this difficult time? How does that make you feel?*

*Do you feel that your marriage is stronger now or weaker than it was before?*

Another line of questioning that you might consider would go along these lines:  
*How are you helping each other deal with this situation?*

*How is your spouse encouraging you?*

*Are you worshipping together? Communing together? Studying the Scriptures and praying together, both in general and seeking comfort and guidance in this specific situation?*

Again, your job is to apply God's Word to the realities that you see. Law and gospel are your tools. It is very important to uphold the marriage when it is under stress and to apply God's promises in the gospel specifically to the pain and uncertainty they are feeling in their marriage. You may determine that they need more intensive marital/family counseling. If so, you should inform the couple of that conclusion. It should also be a part of the recommendation made regarding counseling by WLCFS in the next section.

If the marriage is over, it is appropriate to focus on what God says about their new situations and his promises for their lives as they have changed. Where repentance is called for, preach the law. Where repentance is expressed, proclaim the gospel. Be prepared to address serious questions and doubts that each former spouse may have about God's will for their lives.

Financial challenges. *Ask about the family's current financial situation.* Don't be afraid to ask specific questions. Especially in the early weeks after leaving the ministry, the family may have great fear in this area. They may need to talk about it with a fellow Christian who cares about them. Allow them to express their fears and worries without giving them the impression that "a Christian wouldn't feel like that."

It's useful to realize that after leaving the ministry of the WELS, extreme financial changes take place in most cases. Some or all of the following realities may be a part of the situation you are dealing with:

Loss of housing. Most congregations provide a parsonage or teacherage or at least a parsonage allowance. Leaving the ministry often means having to provide housing for the first time. This is complicated by the fact that almost always, the amount

of cash coming in is substantially less than what was coming in while the worker was serving his/her call.

Medical insurance. When a worker leaves the ministry, he/she also loses standing with the synod's health plan (WELS VEBA). By law, VEBA must provide an alternative form of health insurance called COBRA. COBRA is identical to VEBA, but the family has to pay the premiums. Although the cost of the premiums is identical to the cost of VEBA, the family has to assume the burden of paying those premiums. Since this information may change from time to time, it is best to contact VEBA directly if you have questions. (Under ordinary circumstances, someone will already have explored this with the worker and his/her spouse – this information is offered to prepare you for the conversation only.) Again, the loss of income will almost always mean that the family can only pay the premiums for COBRA for as long as synodical relief is available to them (see below). This can be the source of serious concern.

Very few WELS pastors believe that they have an education that allows them to readily pursue careers outside of the ministry. The older they are, the more difficult it will be to pursue gainful employment. For the most part, family situations are such that going back to school is not a viable option. Again, real anxiety may exist in this area.

Finally, the synod makes the following provisions for support:

- 1) In those circumstances where there is a resignation or the termination of a divine call for non-disciplinary reasons, the calling body will normally provide three months continuing support for the called worker and his family. The purpose of this support is to allow the former worker to expend his efforts in a full-time search for employment and housing. If employment has not been found in that time additional support is available through the office of the District President.
- 2) After the calling body's support ends, the former called worker and his family can apply for additional support through the office of the district president (you should not get directly involved in this process). Each month, the family fills out a request and sends it to the district president. The district president then approves all or part of it and sends it on to the synod president who then releases the funds (i.e., a check comes from Milwaukee).

If the resignation is for cause, this kind of support is NOT ordinarily available. However, the district president can make exceptions, especially when the family is suffering because of the called worker's sin.

In every case, the assumption is that the family will actively seek financial independence as soon as possible. This is the reason for the support.

Certain issues may come up due to this process (lack of understanding, frustration, feeling like you're being treated poorly, etc.). In all these areas, listen to the fears. Don't be afraid to point out that worry is sinful (they probably already know this). But above all, repeat God's promises to care for us in every situation of our lives.

The temptation toward bitterness. Whatever the reason for leaving the ministry, it can be such a traumatic experience that very often there will be a serious temptation toward bitterness, both on the part of the worker and his/her spouse. This is an extremely delicate issue, because you cannot play advocate with the district or synod. At the same time, you cannot leave your brothers and sisters to the devil's whims. *Ask about their*

*feelings toward the district/circuit pastor/their former congregation. Ask about their hope to return to the ministry.* Listen very carefully to their responses. Don't make promises you can't keep but do address this temptation. Help them to fend off the devil's attacks. Encourage them to live in love and to address issues that they need to with the appropriate people, in accordance with Jesus' words in Matthew 18:15-20. Remind them of God's call to forgive. Remind them also of the need for sinful human hearts to heal. You must keep in mind the real spiritual danger that comes from bitterness. Holding on to anger can only damage the person's faith. St. Paul says to all Christians, "Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." (Ephesians 4:31-32) These words have a special application for a person who is in crisis and who feels that he or she has been wronged.

If they insist that they have been dealt with unfairly or in an unchristian manner, remind them that you were not a part of that process and you cannot speak to it directly. But you may want to point out to them that an appeals process exists for all cases of discipline within our synod. The process is spelled out in the synodical by-laws in sections 8.00-8.60. It is covered under Article XXII of the district constitution. Do not get personally involved in their appeal.

If they express a hope of returning to the ministry, *it is appropriate to ask how that is affecting the way they are dealing with the current situation. Is it keeping them from seriously searching for work? Is it preventing them from dealing with other issues that must be resolved?*

If a person is holding out a hope of returning to the ministry, and it appears to be keeping them from moving forward in a God-pleasing way, it may be necessary to address that issue. The doctrine of the divine call teaches that the Holy Spirit chooses the man (or woman) he wishes to have serve. He calls that person through the church. It may be necessary to remind a former worker (or his/her spouse) of two realities in that teaching:

First of all, the circumstances of a person's resignation may leave them unqualified to serve again. The Scriptures lay out specific qualifications to serve. It is not your responsibility to determine if a person is qualified or not – we call the district praesidium to do that. But it may help with the transition process to gently remind a person of that reality and to ask them to examine the situation themselves.

Secondly, even if a person is granted CRM status,<sup>1</sup> it does not mean that God will ever call that person to serve again. The Holy Spirit may determine that a given worker will only serve in the public ministry for a limited time. A call is an undeserved gift of God's love. If he does not give us a call, Christians will accept his will and move forward confident of his love.

2) Material assistance. Material assistance refers to our efforts to address the physical and emotional needs that the family faces. The two main areas that we are dealing with are financial/employment counseling and emotional counseling. At this time, we are working with Wisconsin Lutheran Child and Family Service (WLCFS) to provide for those needs, under their Retention and Transition Counseling service. More details can be found in the information from WLCFS, but the following summary is

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<sup>1</sup> That is, deemed eligible and available for a call

provided here and in the hand out *Transition Counseling*. *Explain this material to the family. Give them a copy of Transition Counseling to keep for further consideration. Determine if they wish to take advantage of this program.*

Transition Counseling is done by a team of counselors at WLCFS. It is broken done into two areas or “steps.” Step one is called “Status Assessment.” It deals with three major areas: the emotional (mental health) situation, the marital/family situation and the vocational realities. The assessment is conducted through interviews and through standardized testing. This portion of the service can be completed in one day, if WLCFS is given enough notification to send the tests out in advance and if the worker and spouse complete them and send them back in time for them to be evaluated. Some of the testing cannot be evaluated by WLCFS – rather it is sent in to a central agency which generates a profile from the answers given. So some lead time will be necessary.

The interviews and testing will attempt to determine if there are significant mental health problems. They will attempt to evaluate the health of the marriage and family and begin the process of vocational training. It is possible that the professionals at WLCFS will determine that more counseling is needed. That will be communicated to the family member at the appropriate time by WLCFS.

Step two is called “Career Search Skills Training.” It focuses on four areas: 1) Understanding a called worker’s “transferable skills” – pastors and teachers are trained for more than one job. 2) Writing an effective resume. 3) Developing a network. 4) Developing interviewing skills. This portion of the work will provide the called worker with concrete steps to take and solid information they can use to begin the process of seeking gainful employment. It will help them to have realistic expectations about how long this process may take and about the difference between finding interim employment and beginning a new career. It should take about one full day.

Obviously, this work can be done in two days, but due to its intensity (both for the worker/spouse and for the counselor), three days is optimal. Ordinarily, both the husband and wife (if they are still married) should participate in step one. Step two is ordinarily reserved for the worker who has left the ministry.

The counseling takes place at the WLCFS Corporate Office in Milwaukee. Housing can be arranged through Luther Haven at a substantially reduced cost, paid for by the district. *Explain that ordinarily, WLCFS will need about a two week notice to be available for the family to come.* At this time, it is the intention of the Michigan District to pay for this counseling (with contributions from VEBA and special funding that the District and WLCFS are securing – WLCFS is heavily subsidizing this program). Since this is an expensive program, and since the goal is financial independence, the former worker and his/her spouse are asked to only submit their actual travel expenses (i.e. gas) rather than requesting a mileage payment for travel.

In connection with this issue, you need to make an evaluation of whether emotional counseling is needed in this situation. *Share your point of view with them, especially if you feel they are not taking advantage of something that would be worthwhile to them.*

### **III. Recommendation to the praesidium for WLCFS counseling.**

If the family decides that they wish to take advantage of the counseling offered by WLCFS, the Team member must make a recommendation to the chairman for funding.

The chairman, in turn, approves or disapproves the request. If he approves it, he submits it to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice president for funding. *Explain to the family that you will make a recommendation to the chairman and ask them to sign a release authorizing you to discuss this with the chairman, the praesidium, WLCFS and their local pastor.* No authorization can be given without a release. The procedure for obtaining final approval is explained in more detail in the document *Michigan District Help Team Procedure for Approving Transition Counseling with WLCFS.*

*Inform the former worker and his or her spouse that you will notify the team will notify their local pastor if a referral is made to WLCFS.* If this is an issue for them, try to determine why. If you feel they have a valid point, inform the chairman of the situation and he will determine whether or not to wave that procedure.

*Within a week of the meeting, submit a request in writing to the chairman.* He will keep you informed as to the status of the process for approval. He will be responsible for communicating disapproval with the family or former called worker.

#### **IV. Follow up**

Your initial call isn't all of your work with the family, although it may be most of it. In some cases, you may not be able to get through all the ambitious agenda set forth here. *If you need a second visit, schedule it.* But be wary of being drawn into a situation in which you alone are providing spiritual guidance for a family that would be better served by their local pastor. Your job is to help with a transition, not to take on a new spiritual responsibility. However, it is appropriate after your visits to make an occasional phone call and ask how the family is doing. Express the love of Christ.

In your follow-up efforts, you should be aware that the passage of time can greatly affect a person's view of the events that took place. If we are successful in dealing with a situation in a timely manner, you may be pleasantly surprised by the relative lack of bitterness expressed during the initial visit. However, as time passes and the former called worker or his/her spouse reflects on the issue, their view may change dramatically. Bitterness often grows in secret and only flowers when it is well established in the human heart. Satan doesn't give up his fight, just because we sinners act in a spiritually mature fashion on a particular day. Added to that is the reality that in the first weeks after the worker has left the ministry, the situation may be very much in flux. Months later, the realities of the new situation will be much clearer and this may also affect how the former worker and his/her family view the events that took place.

*It would be appropriate for you to make a contact, at least by phone, 3-6 months after your initial visit to gauge how the family is progressing in their transition out of the ministry.* However, by this time they should have transferred their membership to a congregation of our fellowship and be under a pastor's spiritual care. *Prior to making this kind of a follow-up call, a courtesy call to the local pastor would be in order.* Explain that you are trying to serve a special need, not to interfere with his shepherding. *Ask his permission to follow-up with the family now under his care.* In most cases, the local pastor will be glad to have this kind of interest expressed in a member family. However, if he objects, respect his wishes.

*The questions you will ask in your follow-up conversation will be determined by the issues you identified in your initial visit.* Hopefully, you will be able to deal with anything that arises by phone. However, it is possible that you will realize that a more

serious spiritual issue has arisen and it may require a second visit. *If so, inform the family of your desire to make that visit and be prepared to schedule it before you end the conversation.* Again, be wary of the temptation to take over spiritual care of this family. You are only involved because one or more of them was a called worker in our synod. Your role is to assist with the transition out of the ministry. Your goal is that they would have a healthy spiritual life in a confessional Lutheran congregation. Limit your contacts to those which are necessary to accomplish that fact.





## Procedure for Approving Transition Counseling with WLCFS

*Purpose:* To define the manner in which the Michigan District Help Team will secure transition counseling for former called workers and their families.

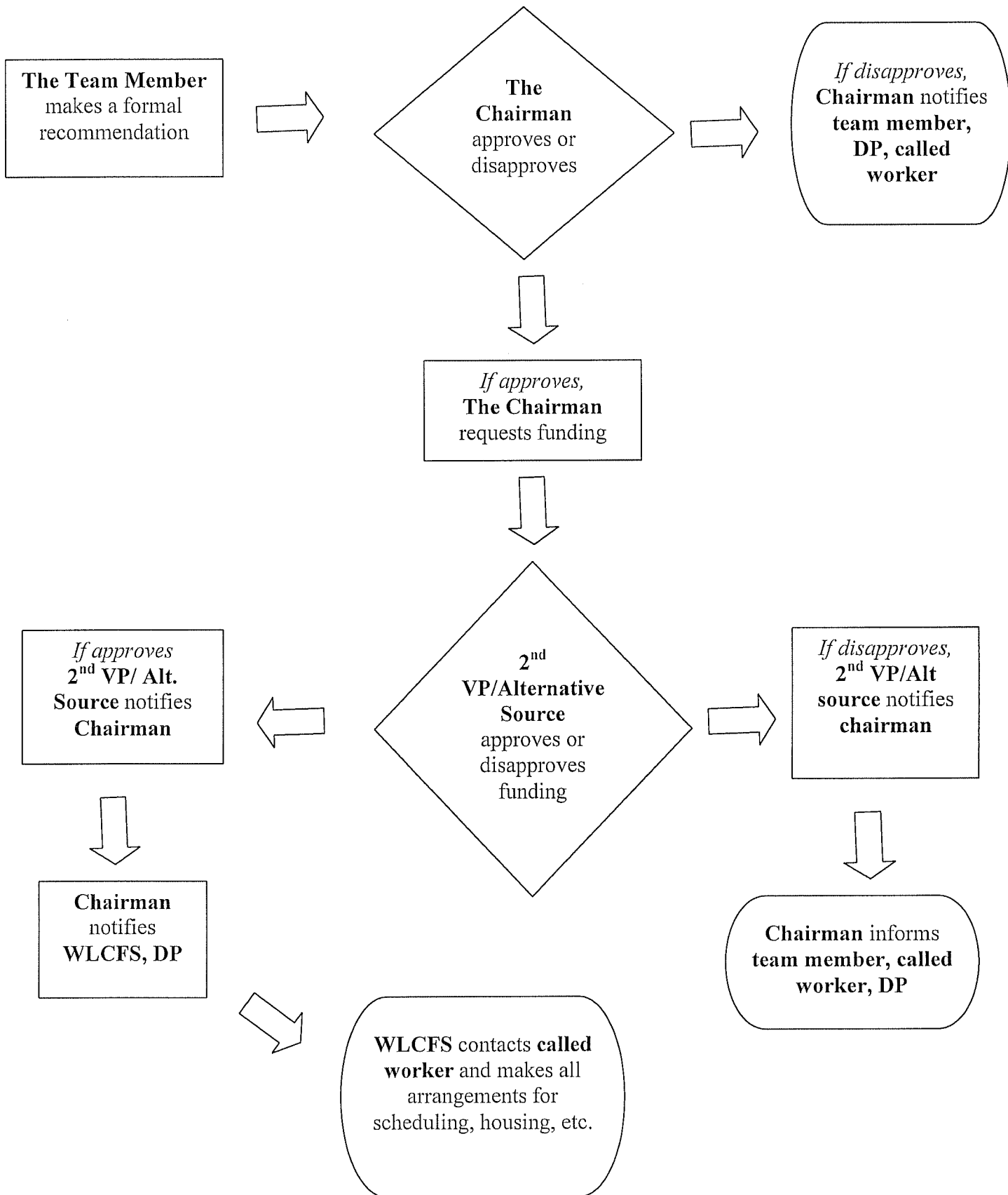
*Objectives:*

- 1) To do everything decently and in order.
  - 2) To insure prompt and efficient communication among the team members, with the District Praesidium, WLCFS and above all else, with the former called worker and his/her family.
  - 3) To encourage follow through and responsibility by the chairman, the team members, WLCFS and the members of the District Praesidium.
1. **Help Team member makes an assessment.** This is done at an initial call. The team member will attempt to make an evaluation as to the need for vocational, emotional and family assessment through WLCFS. He may determine that the people he is ministering to would be helped by all of the counseling offered by WLCFS, or only by certain parts of it, or by none at all. The team member should share his evaluation with the former called worker and/or his family at that meeting and explain the transition counseling program, using the hand out, "Transition Counseling." He should leave the hand out with the called worker/family. If the called worker or family member desires to pursue the counseling, the team member should request them to sign a release and proceed with the next step.
  2. **Help Team member makes a formal recommendation.** Ordinarily, this recommendation is made by the team member to the chairman. It should be done in writing (e-mail is acceptable) and the release should be mailed to the chairman (keep a photocopy for your records). The communication should include any updates as to how to contact the people being ministered to.
  3. **The chairman makes a formal determination.** Based on the recommendation of the team member and his own evaluation of the goals of the program, the chairman will approve or disapprove the request.
    - a. *If he disapproves*, the chairman will notify the team member, the district president and the called worker or family member in writing.
    - b. *If he approves*, the chairman will request funding from the 2<sup>nd</sup> vice president or from the appropriate alternative sources of funding.
  4. **The 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President/Alternative Funding Sources approve or disapprove funding.** They will inform the chairman of their decision.
    - a. *If they disapprove*, the chairman will inform the team member, the district president and the called worker or family member.
    - b. *If they approve*, the chairman will contact WLCFS and communicate the approval for what specific areas of counseling and where the funding will

come from. He will forward a copy of the release to WLCFS. He will keep the original. He will also pass along all available information regarding how to contact the people in question. He will also inform the district president that a referral has been made.

5. **WLCFS assumes responsibility for administering the transition counseling.** This is to simplify the system.
  - a. *They make contact with the former called worker or family member.* This is to schedule the counseling at a time and place that works for their staff and the person being served. It assumes some work on their part prior to the phone call and that they have all the necessary information for contacting the person.
  - b. *They mail all testing, forms, etc.* They will determine how best to carry this out.
  - c. *They arrange housing, if necessary.*
  - d. *They report to the chairman.* This is NOT to share any information about the “success” or “failure” of the counseling. Rather, it is to inform (the team and the district) that counseling has been scheduled and that it has been completed.

## Summary of the Procedure for Approving Transition Counseling





## Transition Counseling

A Service of the Michigan District Help Team in Cooperation with  
Wisconsin Lutheran Child and Family Service, Inc.

### What is Transition Counseling?

Transition Counseling is a process aimed at helping a called worker and his family adjust to the realities of leaving the ministry. It is administered by trained mental health professionals. Wisconsin Lutheran Child and Family Service (WLCFS) offers this counseling as a service to men and women who have offered their lives to serve Christ's Church either through full time ministry or by being the family support network of men and women in the ministry. Transition Counseling is done out of the love for Christ and for the exclusive benefit of called workers and their families.

### *What Kinds of Issues Does It Deal With?*

Transition Counseling addresses three major areas:

- Your emotional state (mental health)
- Your marriage and family situation
- Your vocational aptitudes

### *How Does It Work?*

Transition Counseling consists of two steps, Status Assessment and Career Search Skills Training.

**Status Assessment** means that professional counselors from WLCFS will try to help you determine where you stand in these three areas. They use two tools for this. One is an interview. The called worker and his/her spouse will meet privately and together with their counselors to learn more about the state of their family, their mental health and their vocational skills. This may lead to recommendations for more substantial counseling to address real issues that exist, both as a result of leaving the ministry or even some that may have contributed to leaving.

The other tool is written assessments. This is done in advance of the interview. You will receive the assessments by mail and be asked to fill them out and return them to WLCFS. The interview cannot be scheduled until the assessments are returned to WLCFS.

**Career Search Skills Training** helps the former called worker to seek an alternative career (that is, what are you going to do with the rest of your life) and to actually find a job. This service is ordinarily offered only to the person who is leaving the ministry. The counselors will work with you in four areas:

1. Understanding your **transferable skills** (what you have to offer)
2. Writing an **effective resume**
3. Developing a **network**
4. Developing **interviewing skills**.

The goal is to give you the skills you need to find a job and to help you develop a plan with concrete steps to follow to pursue that job and your future career.

#### *Where and When Is It Offered?*

Transition Counseling is offered at the WLCFS Corporate Office at 6800 N. 76<sup>th</sup> Street in Milwaukee. It is scheduled on an individual basis. Once you submit the assessments, WLCFS will work with you and their staff counselors to set up the necessary meetings. If you take advantage of the full program, it requires about three (3) full days.

#### *What About Housing and Transportation?*

Housing is available for those who need it through a local hotel. WLCFS will make the arrangements for you. We do ask all participants to be patient and reasonable in their expectations for this option and to deal with the hotel staff in a Christian manner.

#### *How Is It Paid For?*

The counseling is paid for by a combination of funding from the synod and claims to the synod health plan, WELS VEBA. In some cases, we may ask a family to contribute a portion of the costs. In all cases, the costs and responsibilities will be discussed and established with you prior to committing yourself to partaking this program.

The District will assist with transportation. Since the purpose of this program is to help you move toward greater financial independence, we ask you **not** to submit mileage to the district. Instead, we ask you only to submit your actual expenses (i.e., gas, etc.).

Housing will also be paid for by the synod, unless another arrangement is made with you in advance.

#### *How Do I Apply For Transition Counseling?*

You inform the Michigan District Help Team member assigned to you of your desire to participate. You must also sign a release form permitting him to discuss your situation with those who need information to approve this request.

## Consent For Release of Confidential Information

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ D.O.B. \_\_\_/\_\_\_/\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I HEREBY AUTHORIZE: \_\_\_\_\_  
of the Michigan District Help Team

TO RELEASE TO AND EXCHANGE WITH: Rev. John C. Seifert  
President, Michigan District,  
Wisconsin Ev. Lutheran Synod  
907 Mattes Drive  
Midland, MI 48642-3708

AND: Rev. Geoffrey A. Kieta  
Chairman, Michigan District Help Team  
2585 Shettler Road  
Muskegon, MI 49444

AND: Ministry Support Services  
Wisconsin Lutheran Child and Family Services  
6800 N. 76<sup>th</sup> Street  
Milwaukee, WI 53223-5095

Requested Information

General Evaluation

Other (Specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Purpose Of Information:

To Facilitate Transition Counseling

Other (Specify) \_\_\_\_\_

I understand that this consent is revocable at any time prior to the release of this information. If not previously revoked, this consent will expire one year from the date below.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Release of this information is voluntary. However, refusal to authorize the release of information by the Michigan District Help Team to the District President and Wisconsin Lutheran Child and Family Services will prevent the Help Team from providing further support through this program.





## Instructions for Filling Out A Release

- Purpose:*
- 1) To ensure that releases are properly filled out by members of the Michigan District Help Team.
  - 2) To ensure that the people ministered to by the Michigan District Help Team fully understand what they are authorizing the Team to do.
  - 3) To explain to members of the Michigan District Help Team why a release is necessary.

### Rationale – Why Fill Out A Release?

There are really two reasons for filling out a release. One is spiritual, the other is practical. A third, legal, reason could also be mentioned.

*The Spiritual Reason.* Very often, when people leave the ministry, they are very concerned about their reputations. Often, events have taken place that can be misinterpreted or that simply put an individual in a bad light. When a member of our Team meets with a former called worker or his/her spouse, this kind of very personal information may be shared with the Team member. In order to pursue the counseling options available to us through Wisconsin Lutheran Child and Family Services (WLCFS), we must share a certain amount of private information with other people. But we don't want to do that in a way that undermines their trust in us or that presents further challenges to their faith. Therefore, we ask them to sign a release. When they sign it, they are giving us permission to share that information. Later, if they continue to struggle with the reality of their situation and they are tempted to believe that the Team has acted in an unchristian manner, we can point to the release that they signed and encourage them to resist those temptations.

*The Practical Reason.* The counseling with WLCFS is costly. To be responsible stewards of the gifts of love that God's people offer to our synod, we have to have certain procedures in place to approve expenditures. The release is a part of the way that the Team approves spending the money necessary to get our brothers and sisters in Christ the help that they need. If a person is NOT requesting Transition Counseling through WLCFS, you do NOT need a release.

*The Legal Reason.* This reason might be the first that you would think of, but it is deliberately placed last. We recognize engaging in ministry always carries the risk that your efforts will be misunderstood or even rejected. Sinful human beings may always try to make you pay for reaching out in love. In our society, there is always the possibility that someone could sue you for releasing private information. The release is designed to protect you from that lawsuit.

You are not the only person who may be sued. As a part of the Help Team, you have been called by the Michigan District and through them, by the Wisconsin Synod. Any lawsuit that would be brought against you would probably also name the synod and the district and even the Help Team. The release also protects those bodies.

As ministers of the gospel, we may not feel comfortable seeking legal protection, since the essence of ministry is self-sacrificing love – love that willingly runs the risk of a misunderstanding or even a lawsuit. For that reason, you may not be comfortable asking someone to sign a release to ensure your own legal protection. But even if you aren't, the first two reasons listed above are still valid. The need to protect the synod from liability also still remains.

### **A Natural Concern – What's Going To Happen To This Information?**

Filling out a release naturally causes some concern on the part of the person signing it, especially if they've never done it before. It's very important that you calm those concerns. The best way to do that is to explain to them what information they are releasing and to whom.

Note that the form calls for the release of "General Evaluation." That information is released only "To Facilitate Transition Counseling." Practically, that translates into their name, date of birth, an address/telephone number and a brief synopsis of your work with them. You are not going to spell out the details of your meeting to anybody. You are not going to break their confidences. You are only going to inform the chairman of the Help Team (and through him, the district president and WLCFS) of your assessment that transition counseling is warranted. The chairman will not have any more information than what you tell him when he speaks with the district president and WLCFS. No one else will have access to the information you provide.

Make sure that they understand that this is a "one way street." They are NOT authorizing WLCFS to release any information to the District President or the Help Team or to you personally.

### **Instructions – How Do I Fill Out the Release?**

In most cases, it would be best if the Team member actually fills out the release, in the presence of the person being ministered to. Each individual should have their own release (i.e., one for the husband and one for the wife).

**Name, D.O.B., Address.** These refer to the person seeking assistance through WLCFS. Get the address where they will be in the next few weeks.

**Authorization blank.** This is where **the Team member's name** should be written.

**Requested Information.** Check "General Evaluation" unless some special circumstance exists. If you check "Other" you must fill in the blank explaining what is authorized.

**Purpose of Information.** Check "Transition Counseling" unless some special circumstance exists. If you check "Other" you must fill in what the purpose is.

**Signature and date.** This is the signature of the person who will be seeking counseling and the date signed.

**Submitting – What Do I Do With the Release?**

Send the release, along with a written request for transition counseling, to the chairman of the Help Team. Keep a photocopy for your records. The chairman will forward it as necessary.

