



CHURCHES OF REFUGE

A MINISTRY OF CARE
AND COMPASSION



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HE IDEA OF A CHURCH OF REFUGE is based upon the scriptural concept of a place of sanctuary and protection. God Himself is seen as a place of refuge. “The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble” (Ps.9:9). “God is my refuge and strength, an ever present help in trouble” (Ps. 46:1). God is said to hide His people “under His wings” (Ps. 17:8) and in the “shelter of the rock” (Ps. 94:22). The very presence and glory of God affords refuge and protection. “It will be a shelter and a shade from the heat of the day, and a refuge and hiding place from the storm and rain” (Isa. 4:6). More specifically, when Israel came into the Promised Land, God commanded that they should establish six “cities of refuge” (Num. 35:12). These were places to which a person could flee to be protected from an avenger and to receive justice.

The term “refuge” is generally used in connection with a time of trouble, storm, oppression, or vengeance. The idea is to have a place of safety and security until the storm passes by, the trouble has ended, or justice is assured.





In the past, when troubles came and storms were raging, many Church of God ministers and their families did not feel they had a place of refuge to which they could flee. In some cases, resources, ministries, and positions were swept away in one tragic moment. In other situations, the sense of security and stability were undermined gradually, until one day nothing was left. When these things happened, the families felt alone, forsaken, and rejected.

With the new Church of Refuge ministry, no Church of God ministerial family need ever again feel alone and without resources. A place of refuge has been provided. Whether the troubles stem from moral failure, ministerial “burnout”, or physical/emotional/financial/spiritual difficulties, there will be a caring pastor and congregation ready to stand in the gap and to provide a hedge of protection until the storm has abated and the sun begins to shine again.

The following information is provided to give a better understanding of how the Church of Refuge ministry operates. It should be noted that these are only general guidelines. The eventual shape of each Church of Refuge program will be determined by the needs unique to the individual ministerial family and by the resources available to the host church.

A TEAM APPROACH

MUCH OF THE WORK of the Center for Ministerial Care (CMC) necessitates a teamwork approach in order to effectively care for clergy families. The Churches of Refuge program is not an exception. The primary team for facilitating a Church of Refuge placement consists of the clergy family, the mentoring pastor and host church, the state overseer, and CMC. Often a counselor is also involved. This team designs and facilitates a refuge period taking its example from the shepherding motif of Scripture (Ezekiel 34; John 10).



Once CMC becomes aware of a need or desire for a Church of Refuge placement, the program is thoroughly discussed with the perspective ministerial family and the state/territorial overseer involved. If interest continues, CMC contacts a pastor who has expressed a commitment to this type of ministry. CMC then works with the pastor and the church's council to design a plan which will work within the ongoing ministry of the local church and also serve the needs of the ministerial family. When it appears that a workable plan has been developed, CMC contacts the state/territorial overseer to explain the need, receive any instruction, and get approval for the plan and the transition of the ministerial family. Once these steps are accomplished, the ministerial family and the refuge pastor discuss the plan, refine any elements, and agree on the transition strategy. In most cases this is accomplished through a visit to the host church. Issues such as compatibility, employment leads, housing, schools, and



expectations of the pastor, the church council and the ministerial family are discussed. An initial time frame regarding the length of the program is also discussed at this time. A minimum of at least one-year is recommended.

Once the plan is finalized, a moving date is scheduled and the actual transition occurs. In most cases CMC helps in finding a counselor since the precipitating cause for a Church of Refuge placement is of a serious nature such as burnout, stress, or moral failure. CMC then monitors the progress of the refuge period and recommends any adjustments as the need arises. Each of the team members is kept apprised of the progress of all facets of the program.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

Following are step-by-step guidelines outlining how a Church of Refuge ministry should operate.

The refuge church under the leadership of the pastor:

1. **Initiates contact with the refuge couple, exploring the interests of the couple, issuing the invitation, and offering support.** This action expresses the interest and concern of the refuge church and facilitates the initial steps in providing this type of ministry.
2. **Communicates with the refuge couple (in person if possible) before a move is initiated to confirm the details and responsibilities of each party.** Given the stresses that surround such a transition, it is imperative that all parties involved be clear as to expectations and responsibilities. This is accomplished best with a meeting of the pastor and council and the refuge couple. In this manner, a plan is articulated that everyone understands and is in place even if there is a pastoral change during the period.



3. **Underwrites the family's moving expenses and assists with the move in once they arrive.** Part of the financial investment includes the initial moving expenses, as the refuge church understands the seriousness of a family's financial situation and responds to the call to shepherd those in need. The refuge family is welcomed as they arrive. Assistance with helping to unload a moving van creates an excellent way to get acquainted with the refuge family and to establish relational connections.
4. **Secures housing for the family by providing the initial household costs (rent and utilities).** Another aspect of the initial financial investment is locating, securing, and funding the first three-month's rent and utilities. By the end of three months the family should be employed and in a position to assume the responsibility for household expenditures. This assistance helps to alleviate some of the transitional stress.
5. **Assists the family with school aged children by orienting them to the school system.** A major concern when a family with children moves to a new community is school selection. This assistance enables the refuge family to make these very important decisions in an informed way. Unnecessary pressure is avoided when refuge church constituency can inform the family of a school's location, reputation, and program.
6. **Provides employment leads for the couple.** A critical concern for any family is regular income. An established church can offer invaluable assistance through job leads and interview introductions. Many times there will be business people who are part of the refuge church congregation who will be able to offer a job opportunity.
7. **Shares the costs of counseling as necessary.** When counseling is needed, the refuge church helps to underwrite its cost. The refuge church may assume the total cost, share the



cost, or be responsible until employment is found. Most refuge families will benefit from the opportunity of counseling. The refuge church ensures that costs will not prevent a family from receiving the counseling help they need.

8. **Introduces the family members to appropriate church leaders and integrates them into the life of the church.** Helping the refuge family to make connections and become a part of the local congregation is essential. Key leaders such as staff, council members, teachers, and small group leaders would be appropriate people to help further acquaint the refuge family with the church and community. Some refuge churches accomplish this through appointing a host family or host small group.
9. **Uses the couple in ministry activities not otherwise prohibited.** This opportunity for ministry is especially important for spouses who feel totally displaced from ministry. Most refuge couples will be people of talent and experience. Appropriate ministry involvement will be advantageous for the church and the couple.





10. **Remembers family members' birthdays and the couple's anniversary.** Most refuge families will be coming from settings where they received recognition and gifts on special days. Expressions of remembrance and celebration are most important, especially for the children.
11. **Facilitates the participation of each member of the family in special church functions at the local, state, and national levels.** Requests that fees be waived for youth camps, women's meeting, minister's retreats, etc. can be facilitated through CMC. In some instances the refuge church may help the refuge family raise the fees.



- 12. Hosts times of fellowship with the senior pastor and/or other staff members.** Refuge families are ministerial families. They need occasions to fellowship with and dialogue with those who understand ministry life from the inside. Inclusion of the refuge family in these times helps to remove the feelings of isolation and disconnection.

FAMILY FOCUS

Generally speaking, the Church of Refuge program is designed to shepherd the ministerial family in need. While the husband or wife may be of primary concern, the entire family receives attention and ministry during the refuge period. The Church of Refuge ministry functions best when a team is enlisted to help but its focus is on the family. Any need significant enough for a refuge placement also dictates a special concern for the entire family. Following are some general guidelines to help in this endeavor.

The Church of Refuge under the leadership of the pastor:

- 1. Receives the family and provides an overall covering for their well being.** There may be vocational and emotional needs that warrant attention but a spiritual covering is absolutely necessary. External events impinge on the family with internal consequences. Therefore, concern for the family's well being is of utmost importance.
- 2. Assists the family in their transition process and facilitates their adjustment to the new environment.** This is accomplished by providing transitional expenses, assisting with job placement, helping the children get established in school, and addressing other practical issues of setting up a new home.



3. **Monitors the overall welfare of the family on a regular basis.** The initial aspects of setting up a new home are very important but the refuge period is a process. It is a time for reflection, healing, and refocusing. Therefore, the pastor and those assisting him should monitor the well being and adjustment of the family so that the refuge period is as productive as possible.
4. **Encourages and makes possible involvement of the spouse and children in local and state church functions.** Such functions would include women's retreats, youth camps, Winterfest, men's retreats, marriage enrichment seminars, etc. Many times a family may feel cut off from friends and the life of the church when such a significant transition occurs. Inclusion in local and state events can help in reestablishing connections.
5. **Facilitates accountability of the family to the pastor and the refuge church.** Special needs do not go unmet when there is a regular checkup with those who are shepherding the family. Accountability also ensures that each member of the family is receiving attention.



6. **Establishes a mentoring relationship with the minister and his family.** Perhaps for the first time the refuge family will be in a position to receive rather than having to give. Such a mentoring relationship allows for personal evaluation, marital strength, and family health to be addressed in a safe, confidential manner.

7. **Updates the Center for Ministerial Care.** This is accomplished with written and/or verbal evaluation reports at least quarterly during the refuge period. This allows CMC to oversee the entire process keeping all team members informed.



MINISTRY TO THE MINISTER

RENDERING PASTORAL CARE to refuge families is a unique and rewarding experience. However, there is need for a specialized ministry to the minister himself (herself). These are colleagues in ministry. The following scriptural principles serve to guide caregivers through this unusual opportunity. Ministering to ministers requires an introspective look, as the following principles suggest:

Effective caregivers:

1. **Minister in humility because none are without needs or above falling.** Romans 6: 7,12; 1 Corinthians 9:27, 10:12; 2 Peter 1:5-7
2. **Minister with concern in making decisions about the welfare of others.** Exodus 28:29, 30; Matthew 10:42; Romans 14:21
3. **Minister with words that edify according to the need.** Job 4:4; 6:25; Proverbs 16:24; Isaiah 50:4; Romans 14:19; Ephesians 4: 29
4. **Minister to and with others before sending them out to minister.** Mark 3:14; Luke 24:15, 32; Acts 4:13; 9:19
5. **Minister comfort in proportion to level of pain.** Ecclesiastes 3:1-8; Isaiah 12:1; 40:1; 51:3; Romans 12:15; 2 Corinthians 1:3; 2:7; 1 Thessalonians 5:11, 14
6. **Minister toward reconciliation with God, self, and others.** Matthew 5:23, 24; Mark 12: 29-31; 2 Corinthians 2:7; 5:17-21
7. **Minister in the power of the Holy Spirit.** Galatians 5:22-26; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11; Colossians 3:14; 2 Timothy 1:7; 4:1,2



Principles for effective ministry must be allowed to enable the caregiver through the power of the Holy Spirit. Specific strategies for enacting the scriptural principles above include:

1. **Meeting on a regular basis for spiritual nurture and accountability.** Spiritual growth and accountability do not happen in a vacuum. Relationship with others wherein intimate sharing can occur fosters this kind of nurture. The refuge period is designed to be a time of personal and vocational growth. Therefore, regularly scheduled meetings for this express purpose are encouraged.
2. **Providing intensive pastoral care while leaving deeper therapeutic issues to be addressed by the counselor.** The refuge pastor functions best in this setting by providing pastoral care. This enables the relationship with the refuge couple/family to grow and develop. Staying away from deeper psychic wounds and intrapersonal issues which the mentoring pastor may not be trained to address is the best rule. Even when the mentoring pastor is trained in these areas there may be good reason to refer to a counselor so that therapeutic issues do not interfere with vital pastoral care.
3. **Monitoring the counseling process.** While the longer-term counseling may be referred to others, the mentoring pastor still should monitor the process. Inquiries about attendance, coming to terms with issues, payment, the involvement of spouse and children are all valid concerns for the refuge pastor to monitor.
4. **Evaluating family dynamics and alerting CMC to issues which may need to be addressed.** As relationships develop between the mentoring pastor and the refuge family, there may be issues or dynamics within the family that CMC needs to be apprised of so that special assistance can be secured, if needed.



- 5. Encouraging a deepening devotional and family life.** Spiritual renewal and family revitalization are two central concerns for a refuge family. These two concerns complement and impact one another. Encouraging and modeling a personal devotional life through Bible reading, prayer, fasting, and meditation leads to renewal. Personal renewal opens the door for the healing and strengthening of family relationships.



6. **Participating in appropriate ministry activities.** Ministers are called to minister. While all ministers need occasions to get away so they can be re-created, sooner or later the desire to minister surfaces again so that ministry involvement is essential. Refuge couples and some family members will be gifted in certain ministry areas and will have a desire to participate. These ministry opportunities should be discovered and encouraged.
7. **Noting church attendance and participation.** Corporate worship and participation within the life of the church is important for all members of the body of Christ. This is especially so for refuge families in light of the fact that they have been placed in a refuge church for a time of renewal and restoration. Indicators of spiritual health include worship participation and involvement in church programming. Noting the level of participation helps to evaluate the overall effectiveness of the refuge program.

RE-CREATION

THE GOAL OF THE CHURCH OF REFUGE EXPERIENCE

The Church of Refuge is a ministry whose time has come. Pastors and local congregations are being led to offer such shepherding ministries to other clergy families. CMC is working closely with state/territorial overseers as they become more and more aware of the need for this type of intervention. As contemporary society changes, stresses upon the ministerial family mount. CMC is committed to offer prevention and intervention programs whether for the cause of burnout, stress, chronic illness, or moral failure. The Church of Refuge ministry is one such creative strategy.



The healthier the clergy family, the healthier the local congregation. Therefore, the goal of the Church of Refuge ministry is personal re-creation which impacts all areas of the minister's life, including the spiritual, family, and vocational. So in consultation with state/territorial overseers and in partnership with generous local churches, the Church of Refuge ministry is enabling hurting ministerial families to be re-created to take their special place in bringing in the harvest and fulfilling the Great Commission.





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