

Three Steps to Develop Your Church's Counseling Referral List and Related Guidelines for Ongoing Pastoral Care

The Church plays an important role in helping people discover healing and freedom. When needed, churches should be ready to recommend the best professional care available. That's why we created this resource and encourage churches to establish a referral system (or review their existing system) and be ready to resource congregants with vetted counseling professionals.

NOTE: Your answers to the below three questions will depend on many factors, including your church's location and size. We encourage you to meet with key leaders to develop a plan for serving people who are hurting.

1. **WHO** are your recommended counselors?

Identify and interview prospective counselors and then build a list of those you feel comfortable recommending. Be sure it includes various areas of specialty (i.e. couples, adolescents, addictions) and consider diversity.

- [Click here](#) for interview questions to vet prospective counselors.
- Consider counselors in your church as well as counselors your church members recommend. Ask other area churches if they have referral lists they would be willing to share. You can also search online for Christian counselors in your area (www.aacc.net). Don't forget about counseling services offered virtually.
- Check out the following MercyTalk podcast: [Steps to Finding the Right Counselor](#)

2. **HOW** will your people connect to these counselors?

Here are some options to consider:

- Provide referrals in pastoral care conversations, either in-person or over the phone. [Click here](#) for an example of a process (including scripts and templates) based off another church's process for communicating with someone who requests help.
- Put your counselor referral list on the church website for everyone to access.

NOTE: Decide if the church can/will provide any level of financial aid to congregants for counseling services. If so, create a system for church members to access financial aid.

3. **WHAT** will follow-up and continued pastoral care look like?

Create a follow-up process for individuals who choose to pursue professional counseling:

- Evaluate ways your church can offer support during and after their counseling journey. This might include a small group, Sunday School class, Bible study, recovery group, or other ministry in your church or community.
- Train leaders how to follow up with those they refer to provide encouragement and accountability.
- Determine how your team will respond when someone you refer to counseling does not follow through. Effective follow-up may require setting and communicating appropriate boundaries, which is thoroughly discussed in the MPower training referenced below.

Mercy's [MPower training](#) can equip your leaders to provide effective care for people who are hurting and help them determine when people need additional support. MPower is available as a live workshop or an online ecourse.

Need help thinking through these details for your church? [Contact our Outreach team today](#) to schedule a call.

Systems and concepts were adapted from Christ Church of the Valley (CCV) in Arizona. Check out [this video of CCV's 2020 response to the mental health crisis](#), and [MercyTalk podcast episode with CCV staff members](#).