

Church Support for Families of Deployed Military Members

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Throughout the Kansas-Nebraska convention, men and women who serve in the United States military on active duty, in the reserves or National Guard, are being sent to foreign countries under threat of war. They leave behind spouses and families who need and deserve the support that the people of God are uniquely gifted to provide. Here are three ways the local church can be faithful in ministering to them:

-- Establish an intentional ministry.

The local church can establish a Military Family Support Group. The person(s) leading such a group must determine to find ways to show military families that the church will support them during this separation. Initially, making weekly "how are you doing" phone calls or personal visits is essential. Short personal notes will also encourage those left behind.

If the congregation has several deployed members, it may be helpful to begin monthly support group meetings to allow spouses time to share their frustrations and successes with each other. At such meetings, there should always be a time to acknowledge how God is working in the members' lives.

A new or separate organization need not be established if the church has an active deacon or family ministry organization, but one person needs to assume leadership for this ministry.

-- Educate church members about the emotional issues of military separations.

This can be done from the pulpit, in the church newsletter or any way your church uses to educate its members. The emotions experienced by spouses and family members of deployed soldiers are similar to those in the grief process encountered at the death of a loved one. Denial, anger, frustration and depression are the initial feelings expressed.

Within a few months most spouses finally realize that in despite the challenges they face, they are going to survive. For those individuals who continue to struggle, the church needs to patiently pray for and encourage the individual by finding ways to show concern and love. In some instances, seeking professional help may become necessary.

-- Utilize resources beyond the church family.

The designated minister to families of deployed soldiers should have a list of resources and information relating to military family members within the congregation. This information would include the military person's name and unit designation, the deploying unit's point of contact which can provide access to support and benefits offered to military families, the name of the nearest military community resource agency, and the nearest active duty Chaplain's office. The Office of the Command Chaplain -- (913) 684-2210 -- and Army Community Services -- (913) 684-2800 --

at Fort Leavenworth have partnered together to provide information, support and referrals to family members of deployed soldiers from any branch of service.

These are perilous days. However, Christians should encourage one another and those who are in the midst of the struggle. Do not be afraid. God will see us through.

"Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to his edification." Romans 15:1-2 (NASV)

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