

Community Care & Compassion

An Annual Matching Grant Program from WELS Christian Aid and Relief

When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.
Matthew 14:14

Dear coworker in Christ,

Our Savior's heart is filled with compassion. The Gospel writers often share with us passages like the one above, showing how Jesus' compassion led him to action. He saw broken sinners struggling in a broken world, hurting and helpless, and he did something about it. He reached out and touched; he helped and healed. Ultimately, his compassion for sinners led him all the way to the cross.

It is our joy, in thanks for his undeserved sacrifice, to imitate his compassion and reflect his love to others. The Spirit, through Paul's pen, commands us to **follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God** (Ephesians 5:1,2). We *get to* show compassion to others in the name of our compassionate Savior! What a privilege! What an honor!

With all this in mind, I am pleased to tell you all about our **Community Care and Compassion Matching Grant Program**. This is an annual program of matching grants to encourage, assist, and guide you as you carry out compassion ministry to the people of your community. Check out the details below.

What?

- A matching grant program to encourage compassion ministry in the local community of the congregation. Note: These grants are for *community* compassion ministry, not for assisting members of the congregation. If a member of your congregation is in need, please reach out to Pastor Sims as usual.
- Up to **\$4,000** of a congregation's commitment may be matched. Grants will be limited to a maximum of \$200,000 per year total synodwide.

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WELS CHRISTIAN AID AND RELIEF

Who?

- All self-supporting WELS congregations are eligible. Congregations on mission subsidy can request assistance for compassion ministry through our Humanitarian Aid grant program.

Where?

- This program is for WELS congregations in the US and Canada. Compassion ministry in the world mission setting is handled through our Humanitarian Aid grant program.

When?

- Matching grants are available year-round and can be applied for at any time.
- Congregations can apply for only one grant per calendar year.
- Grants must be utilized for compassion ministry within one year of grant approval. Unused grant money should be returned to WELS Christian Aid and Relief.
- Grant money should only be used for the plan that was approved during the application process. For permission to alter the approved plan, please contact the CAR Director.

Why?

- **Christ's love compels us** (2 Corinthians 5:14). His compassion and action for us moves us to act in compassion for others.
- God commands us to help our neighbors, both believers and unbelievers. Paul wrote to the Galatians: **As we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers** (6:10). Martin Luther explained the Fifth Commandment with these words: *"We should fear and love God that we do not hurt or harm our neighbor in his body but help and befriend him in every bodily need."*
- Compassion ministry is an important part of pre-evangelism. Years ago, Christian churches were almost universally respected, and Christians were generally held in high regard. Today, in the post-Christian era, many don't think a church is needed to have a spiritual life. Many more think of Christians as unloving, judgmental hypocrites. Compassion ministry gives us an opportunity to build trust with skeptical, unchurched neighbors so that we might eventually share the gospel with them. As Jesus said, **"Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another"** (John 13:34,35).
- Compassion ministry enhances and supports the church's main mission of proclaiming the gospel to all creation. It puts Christ's love into action in a way people can see. God can and often does use acts of Christian love and charity to open doors for gospel proclamation.

How?

- You can apply for a grant using the [online application form](#). Contact the CAR Director with any questions you may have (414-256-3204, daniel.sims@wels.net).
- Your grant request will be promptly reviewed by the WELS Christian Aid and Relief Director and Commission, and their decision will be reported to you in a timely manner.
- Once approval is given, funding will be sent as soon as possible.

What is Meant by *Compassion Ministry*?

You may be wondering exactly what is meant by “compassion ministry.” I think the best way to illustrate this is by sharing concrete examples:

A Detailed Example: “Christmas Store” Event

- Each year Intown Lutheran Church in Atlanta, Georgia, partners with a local non-profit to host a “Christmas Store” event at their church. The Christmas Store is an event where low-income parents and grandparents can come to peruse all sorts of donations (clothing, food, household necessities, and of course Christmas gifts.) They “shop” for free, while volunteers serve them snacks, wrap their presents, and help them load up their cars. This event provides benefits for many people:



- *Low-income kids* benefit from the event, because their parents/grandparents can provide for the household and give them Christmas gifts they wouldn't otherwise be able to afford.
- *Low-income parents/grandparents* benefit from the event, because it lets them provide for their family and give Christmas gifts while also preserving their dignity (locating the event at the church is important here—as a parent, it's embarrassing to have someone show up at your house with a box full of presents, clearly demonstrating to your kids that you don't have enough money to buy them presents yourself).
- *Community donors* benefit from the event, because it gives them the opportunity to do something meaningful around the holidays. The church cross-posts this over several neighborhood Facebook pages and get donations from all kinds of different people.
- *Volunteers* benefit from this event, because it is so rewarding to see the joy that it gives. Some volunteers are church members, and others are simply community members who want to help. Serving at a church can provide a key first step to more church involvement in the future.
- *Atlanta Leadership Club* (a local non-profit) benefits from this event because the church does the work of collecting and organizing gifts and letting them use their building for free. All that the Leadership Club has to do is contact their families and provide transportation.
- Finally, the church benefits from the event for many reasons. It gives members and prospects a meaningful way to serve. It gets dozens of community members into the church building. It gives members the opportunity to share the gospel through Christmas devotion bags that are given to every family in attendance. It gives the congregation "street cred" in a neighborhood that does not always view churches in a positive light.

Other Ideas for Compassion Ministry

- Partner with a local non-profit to assist and support:
 - A pregnancy counseling center
 - Teens in crisis
 - Victims of domestic violence
 - Those struggling with food insecurity
 - Those who are homeless or in danger of becoming homeless
 - *Note: Please be diligent in examining such organizations before partnering with them. They can have hidden religious connections and sometimes espouse values that conflict with our biblical confession.*
- Support local police officers, firefighters, veterans, first responders, teachers, or healthcare workers with small gifts or treats, encouraging cards/emails, and prayers.
- Sponsor a community toy drive at Christmas.
- Invite your community to a food drive hosted at your church.
- Try “Grocery Canvassing”—an outreach strategy that involves sharing a bag of groceries with those in need. For more information, go to praiseandproclaim.com.
- Partner with a local hospital to host and provide seminars on important health topics (exercise, diabetes, covid 19, etc.). Invite the community.
- Partner with Christian Family Solutions to provide seminars on important mental health topics (depression, anxiety, suicide, etc.). Invite the community.
- Partner with Christian Family Solutions to provide online counseling sessions to those who are struggling with mental health. Follow up with them and offer support through your congregation.
- Provide and help serve a meal at a homeless shelter or host a community Thanksgiving dinner at your church.
- Host an event at your church to collect items for those in need (food, clothing, etc.). Invite the community to participate. Consider hosting a community blood drive at the same time.
- Establish and operate a community food bank out of your congregation.



If there is something you have already done in your community that worked well, please get in touch with the CAR Director. We are always looking for more info for our idea bank.

Another way to look at this is by explaining the kind of compassion ministry we are *not* looking for. We will not provide grants that merely fund an existing compassion ministry being done by someone else, for example, a community food pantry. Why? It's not that a gift to the local food pantry wouldn't do any good. Such a donation

could provide tremendous blessings to those struggling with food insecurity. However, we want to encourage compassion ministries that point community members directly to a local congregation. This means events hosted at our congregations. This means our people personally connecting with the citizens of their communities and letting their light shine. When compassion ministry can be directly tied back to a specific congregation, community members are more likely to explore the other ministries of that congregation (worship, Bible study, etc.).

Some Thoughts on Hosting a Community Event at Your Church

A great way to do compassion ministry in your community is to partner with a charitable organization that is already doing it. Obviously, we are unable to partner with organizations that have a religious confession that conflicts with our confession. However, many community-based charities have no such confession. They know what they are doing and already have connections to those who are in need. Assisting them is a great way to help the hurting, provide a meaningful service opportunity for both members and non-members, make some positive connections in your community, and gain opportunities to share the reason for our hope.

So, you're ready to pursue a community compassion ministry event at your church. There are so many options—how do you decide where to start? Pastor Lucas Bitter from Intown Lutheran Church in Atlanta recommends narrowing down the possibilities using the following list:

1. Look for events that provide **community visibility** (so people can link your members back to the church).
2. Look for events that provide **clear, bite-sized commitments** that make it easier to recruit volunteers (for example, picking up trash for 2 hours rather than becoming a long-term mentor for a troubled child).
3. Look for events that are **organized by a local non-profit**. This allows you to recruit and provide manpower without having to create an entire program yourself.
4. Look for events that you can **host at your church**. Again, this helps with community visibility, making personal connections, getting people to see your church, etc.

We have an amazing Savior and an amazing message to share. We have the best reason of all to show compassion to those in need—a God who has shown unimaginable compassion to us in his Son. Let's get out there with this good news! Let's bring compassion to our communities trusting that the Lord will bless our efforts in his name!

I look forward to hearing from you. Put together your plans and submit your applications. If there is any way I can be of assistance to you at any point during the process, please don't hesitate to get in touch. God bless your labors in our risen Lord, never in vain!

In Christ, our Compassionate Savior,
Pastor Dan Sims
Director, WELS Christian Aid and Relief
414-256-3204
daniel.sims@wels.net