

COMPASSION MINISTRY RESOURCES

Compassion Ministry Starter Checklist

A simple first-steps guide for moving from a ministry burden to a wise beginning

Pray clearly. Listen well. Begin wisely.

www.compassionministryresources.com



How to Use This Checklist

This checklist is designed for churches, ministry leaders, volunteers, and small planning teams who sense that God may be leading them toward a new compassion ministry. It is not a substitute for a full community assessment or ministry plan. Its purpose is to help you take the first wise steps before you invest heavily, recruit broadly, or make public promises.

Work through the sections in order. Some churches may complete the checklist in a few weeks; others may need more time. A healthy beginning is more important than a fast beginning.

Where This Fits

Use this Starter Checklist near the beginning of the discernment process. When the ministry idea becomes clearer, move into the First Meeting Agenda, Community Listening & Ministry Opportunity Guide, Church Ministry Assets & Readiness Assessment, and Compassion Ministry Planning Guide.

Before You Begin

- ☐ Do not announce a launch date yet.
- ☐ Do not promise services the church has not approved or prepared to provide.
- ☐ Do not assume the need is understood until you have listened to people in the community.
- ☐ Do not build the ministry around one person, one donor, or one volunteer.
- ☐ Do begin with prayer, honest listening, leadership alignment, and one realistic next step.

1. Pray and Confirm the Burden

Every compassion ministry should begin with prayer before it begins with publicity, programming, or fundraising. Ask God not only whether the need is real, but whether this is the ministry your church is being called and prepared to pursue.

- ☐ Pray for confirmation. Ask whether this burden should become a ministry, a partnership, a one-time response, or simply a matter for continued prayer.
- ☐ Pray for wisdom about timing, leadership, resources, and the people who may be served.
- ☐ Pray for humility. Ask God to protect the team from pride, assumptions, control, or a rescue mindset.
- ☐ Pray for the people involved before you know their names.
- ☐ Invite two or three trusted people to pray with you.
- ☐ Write the burden in one clear sentence.

The burden or need we believe God has placed before us:

2. Listen Before You Launch

Listening protects a ministry from solving the wrong problem, duplicating services, or creating a program that people cannot realistically use.

- ☐ Talk with your pastor or appropriate church leadership before organizing a ministry team.
- ☐ Listen to people who work close to the need: schools, nonprofits, recovery programs, community agencies, healthcare providers, employers, or other churches.
- ☐ When appropriate, include people with lived experience of the issue you hope to address.
- ☐ Identify services that already exist and ask what they do well.
- ☐ Look for repeated gaps rather than building a ministry around one isolated story.
- ☐ Notice practical barriers such as transportation, childcare, work schedules, disability access, language, literacy, technology, cost, trust, safety, or unstable housing.
- ☐ Write down what you still need to verify rather than treating assumptions as facts.

What we are hearing repeatedly:

3. Define One Clear First Focus

New compassion ministries are usually stronger when they begin with one clearly defined group, one primary need, and one manageable way of responding.

- ☐ Define the people you hope to serve first.
- ☐ Choose the primary need the first ministry effort will address.
- ☐ Choose a simple ministry format: class, mentoring group, meal ministry, resource support, care team, outreach day, referral ministry, or another focused response.
- ☐ Write a one- or two-sentence purpose statement.
- ☐ Name what the ministry will not provide at the beginning.
- ☐ Choose one small activity that could test the idea before a larger launch.

Who we hope to serve first:

The first need we hope to address:

A simple first ministry activity could be:

4. Confirm Church Alignment and Approval

A ministry should not operate beside the church without clear ownership, oversight, and agreement. Before volunteers are recruited publicly or money is spent, clarify who is responsible for the ministry.

- ☐ Confirm that the ministry fits the church's mission, values, and current priorities.
- ☐ Identify who must approve the ministry, use of space, spending, publicity, and volunteer participation.
- ☐ Identify the staff or ministry leader who will provide oversight.
- ☐ Clarify how decisions will be made if a problem, complaint, or safety concern occurs.
- ☐ Confirm whether the church's insurance, policies, and facility rules apply to the proposed ministry.
- ☐ Identify a backup leader so the ministry does not depend on one person.

Church leader or team providing oversight:

5. Gather a Small Core Team

Begin with a small, dependable team rather than a large list of people who have expressed interest. Look for faithfulness, maturity, humility, teachability, and the ability to work with others.

- ☐ Gather a prayer team.
- ☐ Identify a ministry coordinator or point person.
- ☐ Identify two or three people who can help with planning and decision-making.
- ☐ List the volunteer roles the first ministry activity will actually require.
- ☐ Identify skills already present in the church: teaching, mentoring, hospitality, administration, technology, counseling background, trades, transportation, childcare, or community connections.
- ☐ Communicate expectations early: time commitment, boundaries, confidentiality, training, attendance, and who volunteers report to.
- ☐ Plan how volunteers will be supported, encouraged, and relieved when they need a break.

People to invite into prayer or planning:

6. Check Basic Readiness

Before setting a launch date, make sure the church has enough capacity to begin safely and consistently. A 'not yet' answer is useful information, not a failure.

Readiness Question	Yes	Not Yet
Do we have an approved place and workable schedule?	☐	☐
Do we have enough dependable people to begin small?	☐	☐
Do we understand the likely start-up and ongoing costs?	☐	☐
Can people with disabilities reasonably access the ministry?	☐	☐
Have we considered transportation, childcare, language, literacy, and digital access?	☐	☐
Do we have the equipment, storage, technology, and supplies the ministry actually needs?	☐	☐
Can we protect participant information, photographs, stories, and digital records?	☐	☐
Can the ministry continue if one key volunteer, donor, or leader steps away?	☐	☐

Readiness areas we need to strengthen:

7. Prepare Boundaries, Safety, and Referrals

Preparation protects participants, volunteers, the church, and the future of the ministry. Important decisions are easier to make before a difficult situation occurs.

- ☐ Decide how volunteers should handle personal money requests, rides, home visits, personal phone numbers, texting, social media, gifts, and after-hours contact.
- ☐ Determine whether volunteer applications, references, screening, background checks, or training are needed.
- ☐ Clarify child-safety and vulnerable-adult expectations when applicable.
- ☐ Know who handles medical emergencies, threats, disruptive behavior, suspected abuse, or other serious concerns.
- ☐ Create a simple incident-reporting process if the ministry will involve meaningful safety risk.

- ☐ Collect only the participant information you truly need and limit who can access it.
- ☐ Create a referral list for needs beyond the ministry's role, including housing, mental health, addiction treatment, legal help, medical care, domestic violence, and emergency assistance.
- ☐ Confirm any church, insurance, or legal requirements that apply before opening the ministry.

A Healthy Boundary

Compassion does not require the ministry to become responsible for every need a person has. Sometimes the most loving and responsible response is to listen, explain the ministry's limits, and connect the person with a better-qualified source of help.

8. Plan a Small Pilot

Instead of treating the first effort as a permanent program, use a small pilot to learn. A pilot might be one class, one resource day, a short mentoring group, several meal deliveries, a listening session, or another limited beginning.

- ☐ Set a clear pilot length or date.
- ☐ Invite only the number of participants the team can serve well.
- ☐ Make sure people understand what is being offered and what is not being promised.
- ☐ Walk through the experience from a participant's point of view before the first day.
- ☐ Make the environment easy to enter, welcoming, respectful, and private where needed.
- ☐ Prepare volunteers to explain the ministry clearly and respond consistently.
- ☐ Debrief soon after each pilot activity.
- ☐ Ask participants, volunteers, and partners what worked and what created difficulty.
- ☐ Adjust before expanding.

What we want to test through the pilot:

9. Decide What Happens After the Pilot

The goal of a pilot is not to prove that the original idea was right. The goal is to learn what kind of response will serve people faithfully and can be sustained by the church.

Possible Decision	What It Means
Continue	The need, ministry approach, leadership, and capacity appear to fit. Move into fuller planning.

Possible Decision	What It Means
Adjust	The need is real, but the schedule, format, location, volunteer model, or service needs to change.
Partner	Another organization may be better equipped to provide the service, while the church supports, refers, or contributes.
Pause	The idea may be sound, but leadership, funding, safety, volunteers, or church readiness need strengthening first.
Stop	The pilot showed that this is not the right ministry for the church at this time.

10. Next 30-Day Action Plan

Choose only the next actions that genuinely move the ministry toward clarity and readiness. Three to five completed actions are better than a long list that no one finishes.

Action Step	Person Responsible	Target Date	Follow-Up

Starter Checklist Completion

Before moving into a full ministry plan, can your team say yes to most of these?

- ☐ We have prayed and sought wise counsel.
- ☐ Church leadership knows about the ministry idea and has given appropriate direction.
- ☐ We have listened to people outside our planning team.
- ☐ We can describe the people and need we hope to address first.
- ☐ We know what is already being offered locally.
- ☐ We have identified one small, realistic way to test the ministry idea.
- ☐ We know the basic people, space, funding, accessibility, and technology needs.
- ☐ We have discussed boundaries, safety, privacy, and referral needs.
- ☐ The ministry will not depend on one person alone.
- ☐ We are prepared to learn and change the plan based on what the pilot reveals.

Recommended Next Step

If the ministry idea is still broad, continue with the Community Listening & Ministry Opportunity Guide. If the need is becoming clear, complete the Church Ministry Assets & Readiness Assessment. When both the community need and church capacity are clear, use the Compassion Ministry Planning Guide.

Closing Prayer

Lord, give us Your heart for people and Your wisdom for this work. Help us see real needs clearly, listen humbly, prepare responsibly, and serve faithfully. Keep us from rushing ahead of You or promising what we cannot sustain. Send the right people, open the right doors, and give us courage to change direction when wisdom requires it. May every person we encounter be treated with dignity, truth, compassion, and the hope of Christ. Amen.

Remember

You do not have to begin big to begin faithfully. A clear need, a prepared team, healthy boundaries, and one wise next step are enough for a strong beginning.