

Compassion Ministry Starter Checklist

*A practical first-steps checklist for churches, leaders, volunteers, and ministry teams
serving men, women, families, and people in need*

This checklist is designed to help you move from a burden to a wise beginning. It can be used for many types of compassion ministry, including food ministry, recovery support, jail or prison reentry, mentoring, job readiness, education, senior adult care, resource closets, homeless outreach, grief care, family support, or any ministry that offers Christ-centered care to people who are hurting or in need.

Do not feel pressure to complete everything at once. A healthy compassion ministry often begins with prayer, listening, one clear focus, a small team, and one faithful next step.

Scripture Foundation

“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works.” - Hebrews 10:24

How to Use This Checklist

Work through the sections in order. Check off what you have completed, write notes in the reflection spaces, and use the final page to choose your next 30-day action steps. This tool is simple on purpose. The goal is not to make ministry complicated. The goal is to help you begin with prayer, clarity, safety, and wisdom.

1. Pray

Every compassion ministry should begin with prayer before it begins with planning. Ask God to shape the ministry, purify motives, and prepare the people who will serve and be served.

- ☐ **Pray for confirmation.** Ask the Lord to confirm whether this burden is a ministry He is calling you to begin, support, or partner with.
- ☐ **Pray for wisdom.** Ask God for discernment about timing, leadership, resources, safety, and the real needs of your community.
- ☐ **Pray for humility.** Ask God to help you serve without pride, assumptions, control, or a rescue mindset.
- ☐ **Pray for the people you may serve.** Pray for men, women, families, children, senior adults, people in recovery, people in crisis, and others God may place in your path.
- ☐ **Invite others to pray.** Ask two or three trusted people to pray with you before you announce or launch anything publicly.
- ☐ **Write the burden clearly.** Put into words the need you believe God has placed on your heart.

The burden God has placed on my heart is:

2. Listen

Listening helps you avoid guessing. Before you design a program, learn from the people, churches, agencies, and leaders who already understand the needs in your community.

- ☐ **Talk with church leaders.** Share the burden with your pastor or ministry leadership and ask for counsel, prayer, and guidance.
- ☐ **Talk with community leaders.** Listen to school staff, nonprofit leaders, social workers, law enforcement chaplains, counselors, recovery leaders, or others who understand the need.
- ☐ **Listen to people with lived experience.** When appropriate, learn from people who have walked through poverty, addiction, incarceration, grief, homelessness, abuse, isolation, or other hardship.
- ☐ **Identify existing resources.** List churches, nonprofits, agencies, support groups, or ministries already serving in this area.
- ☐ **Look for gaps.** Ask what is still missing, overlooked, duplicated, or difficult for people to access.
- ☐ **Notice barriers.** Consider transportation, childcare, shame, distrust, literacy, technology, mental health, safety, food insecurity, and unstable housing.

What we are hearing from the community:

3. Define

A clear beginning helps protect the ministry from becoming too broad too soon. You do not have to serve everyone in every way. Begin with one clear focus.

- ☐ **Define who you hope to serve.** Men, women, families, children, senior adults, people in recovery, people reentering society, single parents, immigrants, neighbors in crisis, or another group.
- ☐ **Define the first need you will address.** Choose one primary need such as food, mentoring, education, job readiness, recovery encouragement, practical support, prayer, or resource connection.
- ☐ **Define the ministry format.** Will this begin as a class, support group, mentoring effort, outreach event, resource closet, prayer ministry, meal ministry, or partnership?
- ☐ **Write a simple mission statement.** Use one or two sentences that explain who you serve, what you offer, and why you serve.
- ☐ **Choose one first activity.** Decide on one simple beginning step rather than launching a full program immediately.
- ☐ **Decide what you will not do yet.** Healthy ministries know their limits. Naming what is outside the current scope can prevent confusion and burnout.

Who we hope to serve: _____

Our first ministry focus will be: _____

Our first activity will be: _____

4. Gather

Compassion ministry should not rest on one person alone. Begin gathering people who can pray, advise, serve, teach, mentor, organize, or help with practical needs.

- ☐ **Gather a prayer team.** Ask people to pray regularly for the ministry, leaders, volunteers, participants, partners, and decisions.
- ☐ **Gather a small leadership team.** Look for people who are faithful, wise, teachable, compassionate, and willing to work together.
- ☐ **Identify needed volunteer roles.** Possible roles may include greeters, teachers, mentors, drivers, meal helpers, prayer partners, childcare helpers, resource coordinators, or administrative helpers.
- ☐ **Seek wise counsel.** Invite input from people with ministry, counseling, education, nonprofit, financial, safety, or community experience.
- ☐ **Consider partnerships.** Look for churches, associations, nonprofits, businesses, schools, agencies, or individuals who may help without taking over the mission.
- ☐ **Communicate expectations early.** Make sure volunteers understand the heart, boundaries, time commitment, confidentiality, and chain of communication.

People to invite into prayer or planning:

5. Prepare

Preparation protects people. Even a small ministry needs basic expectations, safety practices, and boundaries before people begin serving.

- ☐ **Create basic boundaries.** Decide how your ministry will handle money requests, transportation, personal phone numbers, social media, home visits, emergencies, and confidentiality.
- ☐ **Create volunteer expectations.** Write a simple description of each role, time commitment, responsibilities, and who the volunteer reports to.
- ☐ **Plan for safety.** Think through building access, children, vulnerable adults, transportation, crisis situations, and who should be contacted in an emergency.
- ☐ **Prepare simple forms.** Create only what you truly need at first, such as a participant contact form, volunteer application, attendance sheet, or referral list.
- ☐ **Know when to refer.** Identify professionals and agencies for needs beyond your role, such as abuse, addiction treatment, mental health crisis, legal issues, housing emergencies, or medical care.
- ☐ **Estimate basic costs.** List likely expenses such as supplies, food, curriculum, printing, background checks, transportation help, childcare, or facility needs.
- ☐ **Prepare the physical space.** Make the space welcoming, safe, clean, organized, and easy to navigate.
- ☐ **Prepare the spiritual atmosphere.** Pray over the room, the volunteers, the materials, and the people God will send.

Boundaries or safety concerns we need to address:

Supplies or costs we need to plan for:

6. Begin Small

Small beginnings are not weak beginnings. Starting small allows you to learn, build trust, protect your team, and adjust before expanding.

- ☐ **Choose a pilot beginning.** Start with one class, one event, one outreach, one mentoring group, one meal, one resource day, or one prayer gathering.
- ☐ **Invite carefully.** Make sure the people invited understand what is being offered and what is not being promised.
- ☐ **Keep the first step simple.** Do not try to do everything on the first day. Focus on welcome, clarity, dignity, and follow-through.
- ☐ **Debrief afterward.** Ask what went well, what felt unclear, what needs to change, and what you learned about the people you hope to serve.
- ☐ **Celebrate small progress.** Notice faithfulness, connection, attendance, trust, conversation, prayer, and small steps toward hope.
- ☐ **Adjust before expanding.** Improve the plan before adding more people, more services, or more responsibilities.

7. Next 30-Day Action Plan

Use this page to choose practical next steps. Keep the plan simple and realistic. A compassion ministry grows best when leaders move prayerfully, communicate clearly, and follow through faithfully.

Action Step	Person Responsible	Target Date

Final Prayer

Lord, give us Your heart for people. Help us see needs clearly, listen humbly, plan wisely, and serve faithfully. Keep us from rushing ahead of You or trying to do what only You can do. Teach us to lead with compassion, truth, patience, and wisdom. Open the right doors, send the right people, and help this ministry become a place where hurting people are treated with dignity and pointed toward hope. Amen.

Remember

You do not have to begin big to begin faithfully. Start with prayer, take the next right step, and let God shape the work as you serve.