

Your Wellness Ministry

"Wellness" includes considerations for your physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health. A ministry that focuses on wellness, can be a tremendous asset to your church, business, or organization; but some key issues must be considered before such a ministry is put in place. The program should be organized so as to minimize the sponsoring organization's liability, while providing activities and giving its members opportunities to better themselves in regards to their wellness. This packet is meant to inform you of some basic considerations that should be addressed, so that your wellness program may be responsibly, safely, and effectively administered. This packet is not meant to totally eliminate the need for legal counsel! I still suggest that you utilize an attorney to review your plans for your wellness ministry before you put it in place.

An early step is to assemble qualified individuals to plan for the ministry. The first logical place to look for these individuals, is within your organization's membership. You also may be successful in enlisting the help of professionals from the community, at no charge. Some of the professionals that can be helpful are; various doctors, including specialists in alternative medical practices, sports doctors, dentists, psychologists, lawyers, personal trainers, fitness instructors of various types, athletic coaches, teachers, nutritionists, sleep experts, chiropractors, therapists of various types, those certified in CPR and first aid, and nurses. Brainstorm and record all the suggestions that are made regarding what your wellness ministry should consist of. Below is a brief outline of examples of five levels of involvement that a wellness program may evolve through:

Level 1- Have experts from the wellness industry to speak at your church and hold workshops. Consult the list of professions given above. Watch out for extreme opinions from your experts that differ greatly from typically accepted information, but in the worst case scenario, it should be the expert that is liable for the information in question, not your organization. A conveniently positioned table where wellness related materials could be placed for the membership to take, is another part of this level of involvement. Consulting the huge search engine, "google.com" can also be very helpful. Just enter "health information" or "health materials". Encourage members to use the internet for research. Materials can also be printed and distributed.

Level 2- Getting good deals for your membership. Your church may be able to use its collective purchasing power, to negotiate some very good rates for some health club memberships, nutritionist services, chiropractic care, etc... For your organization to protect itself legally, it should be sure to make it clear that it is not endorsing or recommending any particular product or service, but that it is merely making the membership aware that a particular rate or price is available.

Level 3- Join us for a walk. Many malls and shopping centers open its doors before the various stores are open for business, to accommodate walkers. Certain high school tracks and other outdoor venues offer safe areas for walkers, but I strongly discourage you from walking on the shoulders of roads. Your church could post sign-up

sheets for where and when certain groups of members will walk. Now, however; it is necessary to have your participating members to sign an "Informed Consent Waiver", that states the inherent risks of exercise, that the particular member is of sufficient health to participate, and that the individual accepts the liability for his/her participation. The sample waiver included in this packet came from the "American Council on Exercise Personal Trainer's Manual". This waiver should be more than sufficient for a walking program, but I still would suggest that you seek formal legal advice before adopting a form for use. Your church or organization should also bring extra waivers to the activity, in case some members show up that haven't signed the waiver. Before beginning your walking program, a very good idea is to have made one of your "Level 1" visiting expert speakers, a personal trainer or some other fitness professional that can address "exercise basics". Some basics are: How to dress properly, wearing clothes that will allow the sweat to evaporate, the need to intake fluids before during and after the walk, the use of the first 5-10 minutes of the walk as a warm up, the need for each individual to choose an appropriate intensity and duration of the walk, the use of the last 5-10 minutes of the walk as a cool down, and deciding how many times per week is appropriate. Having a qualified individual discuss and demonstrate "walking technique" can also be very valuable.

Level 4- The church hosting exercise classes. Have qualified instructors lead aerobic dance, pilates, and other exercise sessions. Require resumes from your prospective instructors for your review. I suggest using instructors that are certified by an organization that you are able to research it's credibility. A waiver like the one mentioned earlier would need to be drafted, and it must include that the participant also will not hold the instructor liable. Again, have a lawyer to review your waiver. Be sure to have the sessions in a safe area, because if anyone falls or otherwise hurts themselves because of a damaged floor, a leaky roof, etc..., the church would be liable, just as it would if someone tripped on their way up to an "altar call".

Level 5- Exercise equipment in the church. The waiver must include that if the participant has any doubts about how to use the equipment, that he/she agrees not to use the equipment until instructed in it's proper use, and that he/she realizes that injury can result from using the equipment, and that he/she is using the equipment at his/her own risk. There also must be some "gym rules", so to speak, in place, regarding the care and maintenance of the equipment and workout area. The sponsoring organization should also be able to show that it is properly maintaining the equipment; periodic lubricating, replacing of worn out parts, etc... At this level it certainly is necessary to consult a lawyer to address your liability issues, the formation of gym rules, how to construct a suitable waiver, and to help advise you as to whether your organization may require additional insurance coverage.

As a courtesy to your membership, I strongly suggest that you tell them that it is not in their best interest to blindly sign all of the waivers, but that it is a good practice to get a good "pre exercise health screen" before participating in any exercise program.

SAMPLE

Waiver of Liability/Informed Consent

"I, _____, have enrolled in a program of strenuous physical activity including, but not limited to, aerobic dance, weight training, stationary bicycling, walking, and the use of various aerobic-conditioning machinery offered by _____*.
I hereby affirm that I am in good physical condition and do not suffer from any disability that would prevent or limit my participation in this exercise program."

"In consideration of my participation in _____* exercise program, I, _____ for myself, my heirs and assigns, hereby release _____* (it's employees and owners), from any claims, demands and causes of action arising from my participation in the exercise program."

"I fully understand that I may injure myself as a result of my participation in _____* exercise program and I, _____, hereby release _____* from any liability now or in the future including, but not limited to, heart attacks, muscle strains, pulls or tears, broken bones, shin splints, heat prostration, knee/lower back/foot injuries, and any other illness, soreness, or injury, however caused, occurring during or after my participation in the exercise program. If I have any doubts, I will seek advice of my primary physician before engaging in this program."

Signature

Date

** name of organization*

I hereby affirm that I have read and fully understand the above.

Signature

This form should not be adopted for use without individual legal review and consultation. Rules vary from state to state, so do not expect this particular waiver to hold up in your state court.