

AFFINITY™

Pastoral Care Eligibility Policy Manual

Universal Eligibility Standards for the AFFINITY™ Pastoral Care Program

Official Program Policy Document

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Document Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to establish a consistent process for determining eligibility for services and resources provided through the AFFINITY™ Pastoral Care Program.

This policy is designed to help churches make fair, consistent, and appropriate decisions about who may receive pastoral-care services, what services may be provided, and when a person should be connected with another resource or referred outside the church.

AFFINITY™ establishes the universal eligibility process. Each licensed church may determine which pastoral-care resources and services it has available and may establish additional requirements for specific resources when necessary.

AFFINITY™ establishes	The universal eligibility process and standard.
Each licensed church establishes	Which resources and services it has available and any additional requirements attached to specific resources.

1. General Eligibility Standard

A person may be considered eligible for services through the AFFINITY™ Pastoral Care Program when:

1. A pastoral-care need has been identified through the Pastoral Care Intake and Assessment process.
2. The identified need falls within one or more AFFINITY™ Care Pathways:
 - Emotional Care
 - Social Care
 - Spiritual Care
 - Relational Care
 - Practical Care
3. The requested or identified need falls within the scope of pastoral care and does not require a level of service that the church is not qualified, authorized, or equipped to provide.
4. The church has an appropriate service, resource, ministry, staff member, volunteer, partner, or referral option available to address the identified need.
5. Any additional eligibility requirements attached to a specific church resource have been met.

2. Church Membership

Church membership is not a universal AFFINITY™ eligibility requirement.

A licensed church may provide pastoral-care services to:

- members
- regular attendees
- visitors

- individuals connected to members
- community members

However, a church may establish membership or participation requirements for specific resources when appropriate.

For example, a church may make prayer support or pastoral conversation available to anyone while limiting certain financial resources to members or regular attendees.

Any such requirement should be established in advance and applied consistently.

3. Eligibility Based on Need

Eligibility begins with an identified need.

The Pastoral Care Intake and Assessment Form is used to determine:

- what concern brought the person to pastoral care
- which Care Pathway or Care Pathways apply
- whether there are immediate or urgent concerns
- what support the person is already receiving
- whether the concern appears appropriate for church-based pastoral care

A person does not need to demonstrate financial hardship, church membership, or another special status unless the specific resource being requested requires it.

4. Resource Availability

Eligibility for a specific service or resource depends on whether the church has that resource available.

Each licensed church must complete and maintain its Pastoral Care Resource Form identifying the resources and services it provides.

A person may have an eligible pastoral-care need even when the church does not have the specific resource necessary to meet that need.

In that situation, the person should not be considered ineligible for pastoral care simply because the church lacks the resource.

Instead, the church should determine the appropriate connection, collaboration, or referral.

5. Resource-Specific Eligibility Requirements

Some church resources may require additional eligibility criteria.

Examples may include:

- membership or regular attendance
- residency within a particular geographic area
- household or family circumstances
- demonstrated financial need

- limits on how often assistance may be received
- maximum financial or material assistance amounts
- availability of funds or supplies
- documentation needed to verify a specific need
- participation in a related ministry or support process

These requirements are established by the individual church and should be documented before the resource is offered.

Resource-specific requirements should be clear, reasonable, consistently applied, and directly related to the resource being provided.

6. Financial and Material Assistance

Income is not a universal AFFINITY™ eligibility requirement.

A church may choose to consider income, household circumstances, current financial hardship, or other factors when determining eligibility for financial or material assistance.

If financial criteria are used, the church should establish those criteria in advance rather than making individual decisions without a consistent standard.

7. Scope of Pastoral Care

A person may present with a legitimate need that falls outside the scope of what the church can appropriately provide.

Examples may include situations requiring:

- licensed mental-health treatment
- medical care
- emergency intervention
- legal assistance
- specialized substance-use treatment
- domestic violence services
- housing intervention
- intensive case management
- other specialized professional or community services

When the need exceeds the scope of the church's pastoral-care program, the appropriate response is connection, collaboration, or referral rather than denial without direction.

8. Immediate or Urgent Needs

If the Pastoral Care Intake and Assessment identifies an immediate safety concern, crisis, or urgent basic need, normal eligibility processing may be interrupted.

The church should follow its established immediate-response or crisis procedure before continuing routine eligibility determination.

Immediate concerns may include:

- immediate danger to the person
- danger to another person
- lack of a safe place to stay
- lack of food or basic necessities
- mental-health or emotional crisis

9. Eligibility Decision Process

The AFFINITY™ eligibility process follows this sequence:

Step 1: Complete the Pastoral Care Intake and Assessment

Identify the person's needs, circumstances, Care Pathway or Care Pathways, current support, and any immediate concerns.

Step 2: Determine Pastoral-Care Fit

Determine whether the identified need falls within the scope of the church's pastoral-care program.

Step 3: Review Available Resources

Review the church's Pastoral Care Resource Form to determine whether an appropriate internal resource or service is available.

Step 4: Apply Resource-Specific Requirements

If the identified resource has additional eligibility requirements, determine whether those requirements are met.

Step 5: Determine the Care Response

Based on the assessment, available resources, scope, and any resource-specific requirements, determine the appropriate next step.

The response may include:

- use of an available church resource
- connection with an appropriate church leader, ministry, or support
- collaboration with an outside professional or community resource
- referral to an appropriate professional or organization

Step 6: Continue the Care

Determine what continued pastoral support, communication, follow-up, or connection is appropriate after the initial service, resource, collaboration, or referral.

10. When a Person Does Not Qualify for a Specific Resource

A person who does not meet the requirements for a specific church resource should not simply be dismissed from the pastoral-care process.

The church should determine whether:

- another church resource is appropriate
- another Care Pathway should be considered
- an outside community resource is available
- professional collaboration is appropriate
- referral is necessary
- continued pastoral support can still be provided

Eligibility for one resource is not the same as eligibility for pastoral care as a whole.

11. Consistency and Fairness

Eligibility requirements should be established before individual cases are reviewed whenever possible.

Churches using the AFFINITY™ Pastoral Care Program should avoid changing eligibility requirements from person to person.

Decisions should be based on:

- identified need
- pastoral-care scope
- available resources
- established resource requirements
- safety and urgency
- appropriate professional or community connection when needed

12. Church Responsibility

Each licensed church is responsible for:

- identifying the resources it has available
- documenting any additional eligibility requirements for those resources
- identifying who is authorized to make eligibility decisions
- applying eligibility requirements consistently
- maintaining current referral and community-resource information
- ensuring staff and ministry leaders understand the eligibility process
- reviewing resource availability and eligibility requirements periodically

13. AFFINITY™ Standard

The AFFINITY™ Pastoral Care Program is designed so that eligibility is not reduced to a single factor such as membership, income, or attendance.

Eligibility is determined through a structured review of:

Need	Scope	Available Resources	Resource Requirements	Appropriate Care Response	Continued Care
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This process allows churches to maintain a consistent pastoral-care standard while retaining the flexibility to determine which resources and services they are able to provide.

AFFINITY™ Pastoral Care Program

Comprehensive in what it covers. Simple in how the church implements it.