

How to Start and Maintain a
**HOMEBOUND
MINISTRY**



Administrative Guide

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WHO ARE HOMEBOUND ADULTS?

Homebound adults are adults age 18 and older who have short-term or long-term limited ability to attend church activities, plus those people who become the *primary care-givers* of homebound adults. This means that a homebound adult is any adult whose mobility is confined or limited due to medical or health reasons, regardless of age.

There are many opportunities for ministry to homebound adults. The United States alone has approximately 8 million adults who are either homebound because of illness, handicap, or disability, or are responsible for someone in these circumstances. Some estimates suggest that as many as 50 percent or more of these adults are not Christians. And since the average age of the American population is growing older each year, you can see how important ministries to the homebound will become!

One of the foundational assignments of the Sunday School is to engage all people in Bible study. Without a ministry to those who cannot attend Bible study because they are homebound, the Sunday School falls short of achieving its assignment. Your Homebound Ministry is a bridge between the Sunday School, your church, and people who cannot come to the church facilities.

As you consider starting a Homebound Ministry, probably the first people you think of are elderly adults who have served the church faithfully for years, but are presently unable to attend because of declining or failed health. Another group that readily comes to mind is elderly adults who are confined to a nursing home or intermediate care facility. These two groups traditionally have been the target for churches with Homebound Ministries.

Limiting this ministry only to “senior saints” will hinder one of the greatest evangelistic, teaching, and ministry opportunities available.

Your Homebound Ministry can reach adults of all ages, including:

- a man in his 30s who is out of work for 18 months because of a back injury;
- a woman in her 40s with chronic fatigue syndrome;
- a woman in her 20s confined to bed for several months because of a difficult pregnancy;
- a father who cannot care for himself alone, and now lives with his son;
- a stroke victim in her 50s who must move in with her brother and his family;
- people in long-term or short-term health facilities;
- people receiving extensive rehabilitation.



The scope of the Homebound Ministry should not be limited only to those who are elderly or have suffered serious illness. The primary caregiver essentially is confined as well, taking care of the homebound person. This caregiver may need Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, and also needs discipleship, fellowship, ministry, and worship. The caregiver often has sacrificed opportunities to be with others, including his or her Sunday School class, to care for the homebound person. Though many caregivers are institutional health professionals, others are family members who faithfully dedicate their time and energy to another's care.

Consider the enormous possibilities for Bible study, fellowship, and ministry when your church targets people like these!

HOW DO I ORGANIZE A HOMEBOUND MINISTRY?

Every church, large or small, can organize a Homebound Ministry. A Homebound Ministry is a part of the Sunday School and functions as a separate department. Even if your church has only one Adult Sunday School class, a Homebound department still may be needed. The Homebound Ministry is assigned to the Sunday School primarily because the Sunday School is responsible for engaging people in evangelism, discipleship, fellowship, ministry, and worship. As you think about the possibilities, ask your pastor, staff members, and Sunday School director for their vocal support and ministry support for starting and maintaining a ministry to homebound adults and their caregivers. The Homebound Ministry must be understood by the church as a legitimate part of the Sunday School—not as a separate ministry.

Starting a Homebound Ministry is much like starting any other ministry in the church. An organization must be established, leaders must be enlisted and trained, members and prospects identified and enrolled, and leaders empowered to do their work. The basic organization for a Homebound Ministry essentially is very simple (see fig. 1). Note that the Homebound Ministry usually is part of the Adult Sunday School ministry. If your church has a Homebound Ministry, the Homebound director can work directly with the Adult Division director. If your church is not organized with division directors, the Homebound director can work directly through the Sunday School director. However, all adult leaders should communicate regularly with Homebound leaders concerning people who could be added to the Homebound Ministry.

Homebound leaders/teachers should be good listeners, dedicated, dependable, and able to express concern. Homebound leaders/teachers also should be aware of various needs that come up in the lives of homebound adults. Just as leaders in a regular adult Bible study group must have a heart for evangelism, so also should Homebound leaders/teachers. Homebound workers should be sensitive to the discipleship, fellowship, ministry, and worship needs of the adults for whom they have accepted responsibility. This may require more than one visit each week by leaders/teachers in the Homebound Ministry.

Homebound Ministry workers should be sensitive to opportunities to reach out to other adults who may have regular contact with the homebound adult. When visiting a

Homebound member in a nursing home, for example, are there other people who might be influenced by your ministry? Roommates, neighbors, and institutional staff members may be prospects for the ministry of your Sunday School or the Homebound Ministry.

Your church can begin a Homebound Ministry with as few as one worker. Perhaps your church has only one person with a heart and passion for homebound adults. What can this one person do?

- Discover homebound adults.
- Make teaching/ministry visits to homebound people and their caregivers weekly if possible. Monthly visits are an option.
- Enlist additional workers with a heart for ministry with homebound adults and their caregivers.
- Maintain accurate information and attendance records.
- Represent the work of Homebound Ministry on the Sunday School Council.

As additional leaders are enlisted, this individual would assume the responsibility of coordinating the ministry as the department director.

Leaders for your Homebound Ministry include:

Homebound Department Director

- Coordinate the work of a department with as many as 25 residences.
- Represent the Homebound Ministry on the Sunday School Council.
- Work with the Sunday School director and Adult Division director in selecting and enlisting Homebound workers with a heart for discovering, visiting, praying for, and ministering to homebound adults and their caregivers.
- Conduct a weekly or monthly leadership team meeting.
- Evaluate the work of the ministry.
- Serve as a Homebound leader/teacher as needed.

Note: Enlist teachers from all age groups. Women who do not work outside the home and men who work evenings/nights may be excellent prospects for Homebound Ministry leaders/teachers.

Homebound Leader/Teacher

- Accept responsibility for one to five homebound adults and their caregivers.
- Make a teaching/ministry visit to the residence of members weekly (monthly is an option). Make additional visits as necessary for ministry.
- Teach the Bible to meet the needs of

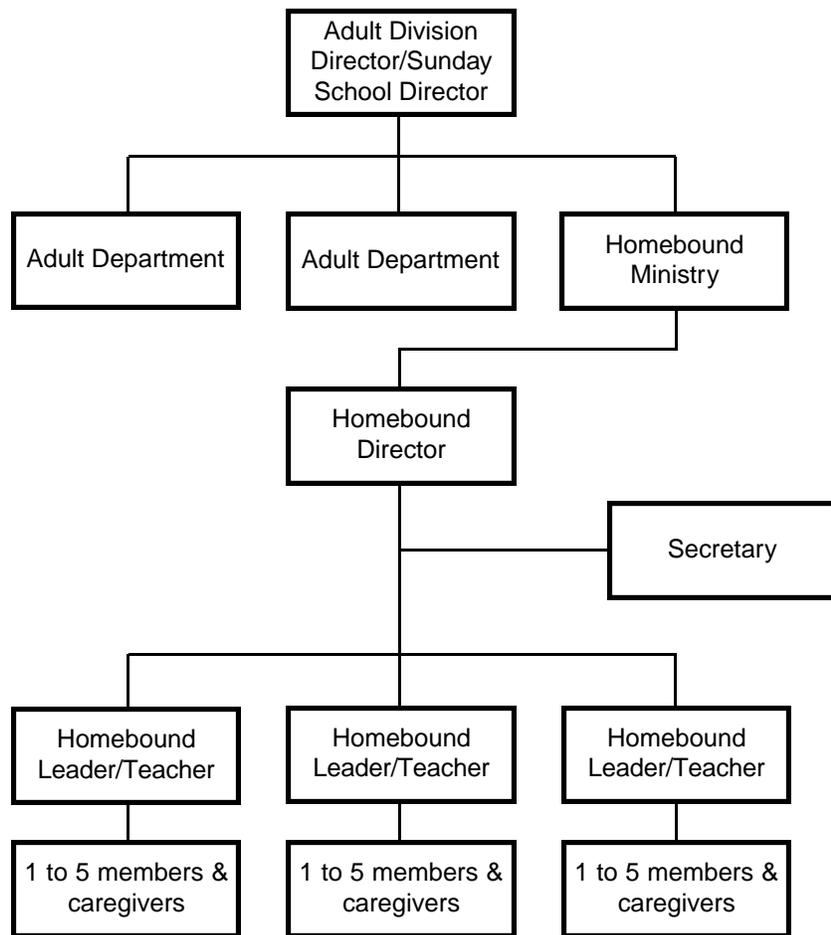


Figure 1

the homebound person and caregiver.

- Provide a weekly or monthly attendance report to the Homebound secretary.
- Attend weekly or monthly leadership team meetings as scheduled.

Note: Homebound leaders/teachers *should not* be assigned more than five members and their caregivers. Visits to a home may require 45 minutes to an hour. With travel and planning/preparation time and the number of visits to be made, providing quality ministry to more than five people on a weekly basis becomes very time-consuming.

Homebound Secretary

- Maintain an up-to-date, accurate master information file on all Homebound members and their caregivers.
- Train Homebound leaders/teachers to use the appropriate attendance record system.
- Receive attendance/ministry reports from Homebound leaders/teachers and submit a compiled report to the general Sunday School secretary for inclusion in the weekly Sunday School report. Homebound leaders/teachers are not counted in these teaching visits since they generally are counted in the regular classes they attend week by week.
- Deliver offerings received by Homebound leaders/teachers to the church office for proper handling.
- Order resources and supplies as needed.





WHERE DO I FIND HOMEBOUND ADULTS?

Homebound adults are not hidden or deliberately secluded from the world. In fact, most homebound adults yearn for contact from people beyond their caregivers and immediate family. Out of sight describes most homebound adults, but they *can* be found.

- Review the church/Sunday School rolls for all adults who are unable to attend a class at the church.
- Survey classes for names of members and prospects who may be confined with a temporary but lengthy illness or disability or have a permanent health concern.
- Ask the congregation to identify temporary and permanent homebound individuals near their homes. Provide information cards in the pew racks or inside bulletins. Ask that members return the card to the church office or place it in an offering plate. Suggest that members think of neighbors, friends, and work associates who are homebound.
- Consider going to a nursing home, extended care facility, or retirement village for individual or group Bible study. *Note:* Coordinate this with administrators before starting a Bible study in these locations.

HOW DO I MAKE A HOMEBOUND VISIT?

To involve homebound adults and their caregivers in consistent Bible study, weekly visits should be made whenever possible, or monthly at least. Everyone needs the consistent spiritual nourishment and fellowship available through an on-going Bible study, regardless of physical limits.

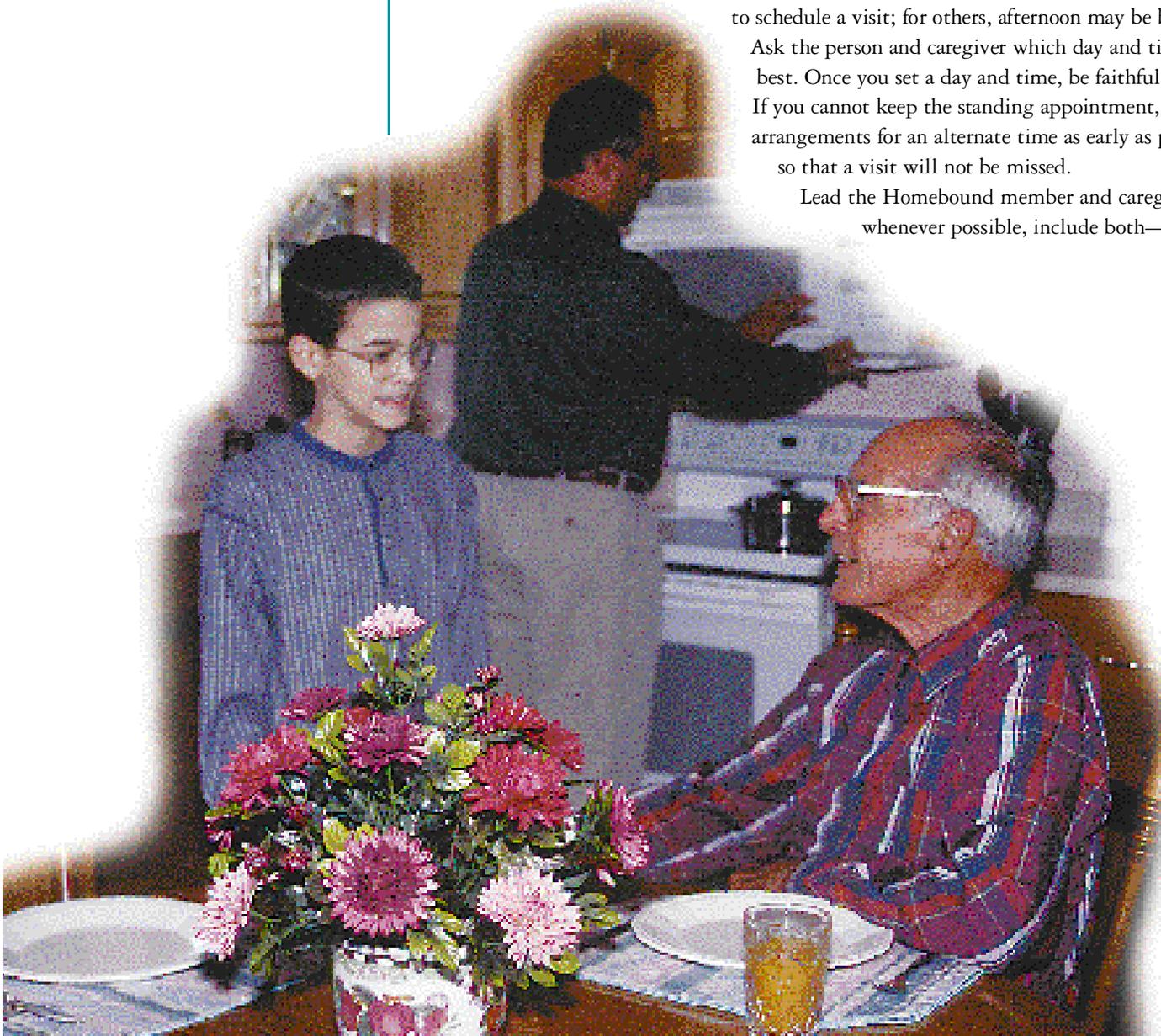
The length of a Homebound teaching visit will vary. Homebound visits can be 45 minutes to 1 hour in length. About 15–18 minutes should be spent in Bible study and the rest in listening and ministry. Visits can be made during the day or early evening. If possible, take a partner/apprentice with you, someone who is willing to learn the skills necessary to serve as a Homebound teacher in the future. A second person with you also allows for discretion when visiting someone of the opposite sex or can help minimize distractions.

Be flexible. Your schedule will dictate when you can visit; but remember, the reason the Homebound Ministry exists is to meet the needs of a specific group of adults. Homebound teachers often must work around doctors' appointments, medical treatments, and so forth.

For some homebound adults, mornings are the best time to schedule a visit; for others, afternoon may be best.

Ask the person and caregiver which day and time is best. Once you set a day and time, be faithful to it. If you cannot keep the standing appointment, make arrangements for an alternate time as early as possible so that a visit will not be missed.

Lead the Homebound member and caregiver—
whenever possible, include both—in



reading, discussing, and studying a Bible passage. Teaching homebound adults is different from teaching an adult Bible study group at church. For example, you cannot make small-group assignments when teaching homebound adults. Use conversational teaching. Consider the individual needs of members as you prepare. Some members may be able to participate only for a brief time, while others may desire a complete lesson. Only the Homebound leader/teacher can determine which approach is best. The teaching visit also should include prayer, fellowship, ministry, and often updating the member on events at church.

An important part of the visit is time spent listening. Listening to a homebound person should be on a deeper level than just hearing the words being spoken. Listen to the person with your heart as well as your ears. When the leader/teacher takes the time and effort to probe, question, and encourage the member or caregiver to explain and clarify comments, the leader/teacher will begin to understand him or her and what he or she really feels, thinks, and experiences.

Many homebound adults will have periods of depression or deep emotional solitude. They need an empathetic, listening ear. Caregivers, especially family members of the homebound person, may have bouts with depression or anger at the loss of freedom, or may suffer stress due to the constant needs of the homebound adult. Listening with the heart adds a whole new dimension to ministry.

WHAT RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE FOR HOMEBOUND MINISTRY?

Bible study resources for homebound adults and their caregivers include *Special Delivery: Homebound Member Leaflets*¹ (0-7673-2270-3) and *Special Delivery: Homebound Teacher's Packet*¹ (0-7673-2269-X). These provide 52 interactive, conversational Bible study lessons and ministry resources. Evangelistic lessons, as well as lessons to be used during Easter and Christmas, are included. The lessons are written to be used with adults of all ages and their caregivers, and do not have to be used in sequence. Both resources are suitable for group settings, such as nursing homes, group homes, and intermediate care facilities.

A church will need to purchase only one copy of the *Special Delivery: Homebound Teacher's Packet*. Permission is granted the church to copy the lessons and distribute to their Homebound leaders/teachers. One set of the *Special Delivery: Homebound Member Leaflets* should be purchased for each Homebound member/caregiver.

The Homebound leader/teacher should deliver each leaflet for that day's study, although mailing the leaflet prior to the teaching visit also is appropriate. The member/caregiver then would be encouraged to read the leaflet and complete the learning activities prior to the visit. Leaders/teachers may suggest that a family member or caregiver read the leaflet to the Homebound member and work together on the activities.

Dated curriculum materials for adult Bible study groups are available from LifeWay Church Resources. These resources can be adapted for Homebound teaching visits. Tips for adapting this material for homebound adults are found online in the *EXTRA!* resources through www.lifewaysundayschool.com. Additional resources may include a Bible and leisure reading materials.



WHAT ABOUT MINISTRY?

There are plenty of possibilities for ministry to homebound adults and their caregivers. Here are a few ideas.

- *Provide tapes of the Sunday morning/evening worship service.* Many churches tape their worship services. Consider duplicating and distributing the tapes each week during a teaching visit.
- *Send cards on special occasions as a reminder that someone cares.* A birthday, anniversary, or other special days provide excellent opportunities to send cards. Notes received on the day of important events, such as a much-anticipated doctor's visit, go far in encouraging homebound adults.

- **Telephone calls.** Call the Homebound member or caregiver periodically between visits. A call to the caregiver just to talk or encourage is a great way to show concern.
- **Furnish transportation as appropriate.** Homebound adults without a caregiver at home may need periodic rides to stores, doctors, or just for a change of scenery.
- **Arrange for assistance with yard or house work.** This does not necessarily mean that the Homebound leader/teacher does the work. A leader/teacher may see a need and work with other people or groups to help meet the need.
- **Provide for time away for the caregiver.** The caregiver often is as homebound as the individual with health problems. If the caregiver is not needed by the homebound person for an hour or two, consider extending your visit to allow the caregiver free time. The caregiver may use this time to run errands, tend to family business, go to a child's school event, or simply rest without disturbance. Some illnesses require the caregiver to be up often during the night. To have someone offer them two hours of uninterrupted sleep can help them tremendously.
- **Celebrate Homebound Day.** Traditionally, Homebound Day is celebrated in June. The purpose of Homebound Day is to recognize Homebound leaders, members, and their caregivers, and to strengthen your church's awareness of the ministry. The morning worship service includes recognition of Homebound leaders/teachers and testimonies from Homebound members (taped or "live"), caregivers, or family members. A Transportation Team most likely will be needed to transport members to the church. Other helpers may be needed to assist members after they arrive. Make arrangements for medical personnel if needed. Special parking and a reception should be provided to Homebound members and their caregivers as they arrive.

An effective Homebound Ministry can meet many needs in the lives of adults who are physically unable to come to your church's Sunday School or worship, as well as to their primary caregivers. In so doing we are fulfilling the Great Commission to go and make disciples of all people. Think of what God can do through you and your church as you seek to discover, reach, teach, fellowship with, pray for, and minister to homebound adults.

HOMEBOUND MINISTRY— IT'S NOT JUST FOR OLD PEOPLE ANY MORE!

¹ Available from the Customer Service Center by calling 1-800-458-2772.

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