

Oblation in Canada



Procedures to Follow in Providing Oblation Assistance in Canada

Verify Recipient Qualifications

Verify the membership and/or association with the church of the person(s) seeking assistance.

- Consult with congregation recorder if there is a question about membership status of local persons.
- In the case of transient persons or members who have just transferred into the congregation, verify membership and previous instances of aid given by emailing the Canadian Headquarters at heather@communityofchrist.ca or calling at 1 888 411 7537 x 23.. Have transient person provide a name and phone number to verify identity and destination.
- As stated above, active membership is not required to receive oblation aid. If the person making the request is an inactive member or nonmember there should be an association and on-going ministry between the person and the church.

Determine the nature of the needs and attitudes.

- The CFO or MCFO should be personally involved with and in direct contact with the person(s) requesting aid to ascertain the facts in the case and to determine the attitude of persons involved. If the CFO or MCFO is not available in the area, then another minister may be designated to serve as the primary liaison between the person(s) requesting aid and the

CFO/MCFO processing the financial aid. Likewise if the CFO or MCFO does not feel gifted in providing oblation ministry, another minister may be designated to serve as the oblation minister for the jurisdiction to liaison between the person(s) requesting aid and the CFO/MCFO processing the financial aid.

- In most cases this ministry to persons in need will be in conjunction with the Pastor, members of the priesthood, or other local officers. Their counsel should be considered carefully with the understanding of the situation.
- It is the responsibility of the CFO to make the decision regarding the use of oblation or in making a recommendation to the MCFO. While the advice of the church administrative officers should be considered carefully, it does not remove the CFO or MCFO from responsibility to make the decisions.
- Providing financial aid is not always the best form of ministry for a person in need. Sometimes it is simply the easiest to provide. When a person in need approaches the church for financial assistance, our first goal is in discerning the deeper ministerial needs of the individual and seeking ways to provide ministry that is consistent with the message of Jesus. Even when financial aid is not provided, the CFO/MCFO should provide follow-up ministry, where appropriate, to insure that the persons still understands their value in the world as a child of God.

Determine the Kind of Assistance Required

Oblation assistance is provided in two distinct categories:

- emergency or one-time needs
- extended assistance

Emergency needs are defined as one-time assistance. If the financial requirement is within the limits authorized for CFOs, they are free to give the assistance based on their judgment and subject to the requirements of these procedures.

If the financial requirements exceed the CFOs' authorized limits, they should contact the MCFO. If the financial needs are beyond the MCFO's limits, please contact the Bishop of Canada at Canadian Headquarters at 1-888-411-7537 x34.

Whenever needed, CFOs should complete an Oblation Aid Worksheet form (OB-101) to assist them in gathering information and helping the recipient(s) understand their situation realistically.

Gather the Essential Facts

Form OB-101 has several purposes:

- It provides CFOs and MCFOs and administrative officers involved with an orderly and systematic procedure for gathering important information regarding the situation.
- It helps the prospective recipients understand their situation realistically.
- It exposes prospective recipients to basic stewardship disciplines, such as prayerful financial planning.

- It provides the Bishop of Canada with information necessary in making decisions that are referred to Canadian Headquarters.

Because Form OB-101 is a tool for the minister, under no circumstances should it be handed or mailed to the prospective aid recipient to fill out.

Because the purpose of oblation is to minister to those who may be poor and needy, the process of gathering information must be done in the context of ministry.

Because the primary objective is ministry, oblation should never be used simply to "get someone off our backs." The ministry given should assist persons to realistically understand their situation and take positive steps to effect lasting change.

Expenditures from Oblation

Whenever possible, oblation aid should be disbursed directly to the vendors or service-providers for which the person is requesting assistance. Every reasonable effort should be taken to avoid disbursing aid directly to the person requesting it, which can cause undesirable consequences including possible tax consequences. This may be accomplished by writing a cheque directly to third-parties such as a landlord or utility company, purchasing gift cards for a grocery store or gas station, or accompanying the person to the store to assist in making the necessary purchases.

Oblation aid is primarily a congregational ministry. If the Oblation Aid Worksheet (OB-101) indicates a one-time need, the CFO can either:

- Disburse aid according to the guidance above if the dollar requirement is within the CFO authorized limits.
- Make a recommendation to the MCFO if the dollar requirement is above the CFO authorized limit. If the financial needs are within the authorized limits, and the MCFO concurs in the decision to give assistance, the MCFO can either authorize the CFO to disburse the funds or disburse the funds directly from the mission center account. If the requirements exceed the MCFO's limits, the MCFO should make the recommendation directly to the Bishop of Canada at Canadian Headquarters.

If the Oblation Aid Worksheet (OB-101) indicates that an extended period of assistance is required, the CFO should forward the worksheet with recommendation to the MCFO.

- If the MCFO concurs with the recommendation, a copy is sent to the Bishop of Canada at Canadian Headquarters.
- Monthly disbursements will be made by the CFO or MCFO, depending on what is most convenient. This extended aid will be for a period no longer than three months. The situation should be reviewed during the third month.
- It will be the responsibility of the CFO/MCFO to initiate the three-month review and communicate, if needed, with the Bishop of Canada any further recommendations.
- Extended periods of aid beyond the normal three-month period may be granted when circumstances warrant. The Bishop of Canada's approval is required before the three-month period is extended.

Reporting

An Oblation Aid Report, form (OB-100), must be filled out in detail for every expenditure from Oblation.

- A copy of the OB-100 is attached to an OB-102 Reimbursement Form and sent to Canadian Headquarter at Heather@CommunityofChrist.ca for reimbursement.
- When an Oblation Aid Worksheet (Form OB-101) has been approved, an OB-100 form needs to be filled out for each disbursement, noting that it is the first, second, or third monthly disbursement approval.

Oblation Reports are maintained at Canadian Headquarters for the duration of the recipient's lifetime in order to facilitate evaluation of future requests for aid in light of established limits.

- This is particularly important in keeping up with transient persons who might make a habit of requesting aid.
- It is also important to provide oblation histories on members who move from one jurisdiction to another.

MCFOs may make general reports to their mission center conferences on oblation ministry in their area. They should not disclose any confidential or identifying information regarding specific situations.

Requests for reimbursement should be submitted promptly to Canadian Headquarters at Heather@CommunityofChrist.ca. Requests submitted more than one year after the aid was disbursed will not be reimbursed.

Follow Up Ministry

It is appropriate for the minister who evaluated the situation to make follow-up contact with the person(s) who received assistance. It is important for persons receiving aid to understand that they are persons of value and that requesting aid does not isolate them from the body. Likewise, it allows the minister to reinforce the incorporation of the principles of A Disciple's Generous Response into the life of the person(s) receiving aid.

In complex situations, it may be appropriate to develop an action plan that identifies all the actions that are going to be accomplished by the various participants in oblation ministry along with target dates for completion. There is no form for this. It is simply a list of what the recipient(s) and minister(s) have committed to and by when. Follow up ministry then allows for everyone to review the status of the action plan.

Where to Turn - Additional Assistance

Plan Before the Need Arises

It is very helpful if CFOs and MCFOs put together resource lists of agencies and services available in their community to help people in need. Then if a transient person stops by the church or if a member's need exceeds the capacity of the oblation program, the CFO/MCFO has options readily available to refer the person. The following sections provide some ideas for where to look to determine what is available in a specific area.

Providing assistance to those in need is often an excellent opportunity to work with other churches, religious organizations, and other not-for-profits in the community. Ministerial, ecumenical, and interfaith alliances providing social ministries should be considered as a possible option to extend the limited support available through oblation.

Provincial Welfare Departments

Consult provincial government pages of telephone book to find welfare or social service department numbers for your province.

Local counseling, crisis intervention, and short-term financial assistance

Alcoholics Anonymous: A fellowship of men and women who share their experiences to help each other overcome their common problem of alcoholism. There is no membership fee. Alateen is a similar program for teenage alcoholics. Alanon is a program to help family members of alcoholics learn how to help the alcoholic. It provides strength and support for family members who must live with an alcoholic.

Red Cross: Provides assistance to individuals and families in floods, tornadoes, fires, etc. Assists families burned out of their homes with relocation, and pays for furniture, clothing and rent. Helps military families and veterans with emergency communications between military personnel and their families, provides them with family counseling, assistance in securing government benefits, and financial and transportation for the handicapped.

Child Abuse Reporting: In several provinces everyone, including members of the public and professionals who work closely with children, is required by law to report suspected cases of child abuse or neglect.

In Ontario if you have reasonable grounds to suspect that a child is or may be in need of protection, you must report to a children's aid society (CAS).

In British Columbia if you think a child or youth under 19 years of age is being abused or neglected, you have the legal duty to report your concern to a child welfare worker. Phone 1 800 663-9122 at any time of the day or night.

Please check the requirements for the province you reside in.

Consumer Credit Counseling: A free service for people with debt problems. The program helps people set up a plan to repay debts which the person can afford, and which the creditors will accept. Most credit bureaus can refer you to this service.

Legal Aid (Assistance): Provides legal representation and services for low-income persons. Clients must meet financial guidelines to qualify. This service does not include fee-generating cases such as libel or compensatory suits.

Salvation Army: A Christian-oriented social service agency, which is found in most provinces. Services may include free or low-cost housing, food, clothing, and furniture. Their emergency shelters provide free room and board for one to five days for families in need. Many of their agencies have alcoholic rehabilitation programs.

Community Centers: Often these centers provide a wide variety of programs to youth and senior citizens, including an emergency financial assistance fund and a food pantry.

National and Provincial Programs

Programs are available from the Province and the National Government. See the "blue pages" in the telephone book for information about these programs.