

Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS): Tips for churches

For persons who want to respond sensitively to those with MCS:

- **Avoid using** perfume, cologne, breath mints, cough drops, gum, and scented personal care products.
- **Don't apply lipstick, hand lotion, or perfume** in a public place, including the sanctuary or classroom. (If you must wear these products, apply them before going to a meeting.)
- **Don't use hand wet wipes** in sanctuary or classroom. Wash hands and face in the restroom instead.
- **Avoid using aerosol spray products** at any time.
- **Don't use perfume** or other products with strong odors **to illustrate** a sermon or Sunday school lesson.
- **Avoid snuffing out candles** during a service. Wait until the sensitive people have a chance to leave.

*To think about: When asked for "practical tips," one person with MCS said, "I'm not sure any would be considered **practical** tips. They all seem **impractical** to people who can't believe how little it takes to set us off." Yet expressions of love often require us to go above and beyond the merely practical.*

For the church community as a whole:

- **Accept the accommodations** persons with MCS must make in order to come to church:
 - Do not be offended if a person with MCS can't hug or get too close. Warn a person with MCS if she wants to hug you and you are wearing fragrance.
 - Don't be surprised if a person with MCS can't come to church, can't stay for the whole service, or must come to church wearing a mask.
- **Keep in contact** with persons who can't attend church being aware, however, that some are so sensitive that even visits, phone calls, and emails are difficult.
- **When you visit** that person, be sure to be scent-free by taking a shower ahead of time, and refraining from using any chemicals (perfume, cologne, hair spray, hand lotion, fingernail polish, etc.). Even if you put on scented products hours before, they could still be too much for a person with MCS. If weather permits, meet the individual outdoors rather than entering their house.
- **Always serve water** (rather than only colored punch) at social functions. Chemicals in food coloring can be toxic to people with MCS.
- **Encourage insurance companies** to work with MCS patients and doctors.
- **Be sensitive to hardships** on the whole family due to extra expenses of MCS treatment. For example, volunteer to take the rest of the family on an all expense paid outing.

- **Make your church building fully accessible** by **raising awareness** of toxic and scented chemicals and establishing a **fragrance reduction policy**.

For all of us to consider:

Many of these suggestions come from the Multiple Chemical Sensitivities Task Force of New Mexico who point out that not only does reducing exposure to chemicals improve the health of those with MCS, better air quality also helps promote the health of everyone.

- Avoid **newly built** or **remodeled buildings**, including new **carpets**.
- Avoid **new paint** and solvent-based stains and transparent finishes.
- Use **least toxic, natural, and unscented** cleaning, laundry, and sanitizing **products**.
- **Avoid air "freshener" sprays**, incense, and fragrance-emitting devices
- **Ventilate buildings** with clean fresh air and/or use portable room air filters.
- Avoid **gasoline fumes** and **vehicle exhaust**.
- Avoid solvent, dry-cleaning, and tar **fumes**.
- Avoid **tobacco smoke**.

For persons in charge of church maintenance:

- Build new buildings with **less toxic materials**.
- Use electric utilities or **radiant heat**.
- **Eliminate the use of air "freshener" sprays**, incense, and fragrance-emitting devices. At least one restroom (perhaps the family accessible restroom) should have no air fresheners of any kind.
- **Advise the congregation** in advance and persons known to have MCS in particular about planned maintenance projects. Then, carry out those projects so as to **avoid or eliminate quickly** the smells of paint, finishes, new carpets, and other chemicals.
- Use **least toxic**, natural, and unscented **cleaning and sanitizing products** in restrooms, etc. Do cleaning early in the week so rooms have time to air out.
- **Ventilate buildings** with clean fresh air and/or use portable room air filters.
- **Avoid pesticides**. Use least toxic integrated pest management. If you need to use pesticides, once again advise the congregation in advance and persons known to have MCS in particular.
- **Declare a scent free zone** in a room with a window into the sanctuary and a door directly to the outside (but not right into the parking lot). No one who sits in that section would wear fragrances or use scented detergents in hair or clothes. Advertise to the community that this is available!
 - If a separate room isn't possible, try making a corner of the sanctuary scent free.
 - Provide alternative seating for those sensitive to pew cushions and metal chairs.

For persons with MCS:

- **Join a support group** if possible. It helps to know others experiencing the same strange symptoms.
- **Take a positive attitude** toward adjustments in lifestyle and appearance (i.e. needing to wear 100% cotton clothing, avoiding makeup and hair permanents, etc.)

- **Get a face mask or respirator** and don't be afraid to wear it in public. **Wash your hands** before taking off the mask, especially if you shake hands with others.
- **Arrive at church at a different time** than others. Crossing a busy parking lot can make a person with MCS too sick to function before even getting to the building.
- **Change clothes and/or take a shower** right after church. Scents which you are not aware of can be transferred to your clothes, hair, and skin.
- **Make your home a scent and chemical free sanctuary.** Anyone who enters the home at any time must respect this.
- **Assist doctors** with an assertive but friendly spirit in getting information about MCS. Many are uninformed about this illness and its symptoms.

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Additional Source: Multiple Chemical Sensitivities Task Force of New Mexico

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