



# Benevolence Ministry Guidelines

## **Benevolence Values**

1. Be careful to treat all people with genuine respect and dignity (James 2:1-9). Expressing worth starts with receiving God's love in our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5). Put words and actions to your heart's compassion to demonstrate to a person that they have worth.
2. Use emphatic phrases such as, "We care about you" and encouraging, faith filled words such as, "God is your strength."
3. If the church is unable to approve a request, offer an idea on where they can go or what they can do to be helped. Don't let them leave without some direction (James 2:16).
4. Always offer to pray with people; however, do not push prayer on people.
5. Offer some Christian reading materials or ministry, but never push materials or ministry on people.
6. Never speak negatively of people who come in for help.
7. Create an atmosphere of mercy, hope, and love.
8. Do not repeat or share private information.
9. Keep any distribution of funds confidential.
10. Do not show partiality in the consideration of funds.

## **Assistance Through The Benevolence Fund**

1. A person may request assistance by completing a Benevolence Request Form. All information must be fully completed to be processed. The form is for our own use as well as if needed for inquiry from authorities.
2. Applicants may be church members, nonmembers from the community, or travelers in need of lodging, food, or help with auto repairs.
3. Requests require 7-10 business days to process the request.
4. Requests considered are for mortgage or rent, utilities, medical, food, or transportation.
5. If you have a food pantry or clothing closet, have a system for people to go through to take a predetermined amount. Exceptions could be loss due to fire or other natural catastrophe. Consider including blankets in your clothing closet for emergency situations.
6. Meet face-to-face with the person making the request. If the applicant is a female who is married or in a relationship, ask for the man to be present.
7. All references must be checked.
8. The need must be verified by the vendor.
9. Verify with other local agencies that the person isn't cycling through the system. It's good to form or be part of a network for this purpose.
10. The request should be prayed over before making a decision.
11. To best help a person, the request may require action to be taken before funds are distributed, such as education, a mentor, counseling, etc.
12. If a request is approved, funds must go through the Finance Administration Department for distribution.
13. Final approval should be given in consideration of church needs and the requests made by church members.

14. Distribution is preferably handled with a check written to the vendor the money is due. If the need is for food or transportation, we prefer to use vouchers. Make sure the vouchers cannot be used for the sale of alcohol, tobacco, and magazines. Make sure the voucher cannot be used to offer a return of change. We never give cash.
15. Keep all Benevolent Requests and Verification forms on file. Keep a digital copy and a hard copy.
16. If you are prone to be emotionally driven, delegate this responsibility to someone with a different perspective who can make decisions based on the leading of the Holy Spirit, wisdom in consideration of church funds, and discernment for the best method of counsel.

#### **Tips for Verifying a Real Need**

- They can't provide a phone number for a reference
- They avoid answering direct questions
- They talk rapidly and continuously as they tell their story, giving you little or no time to interject questions.
- They insist they do not have a way to meet with you
- The man of the home refuses to be accountable
- The applicant refuses to take action before receiving funds
- The applicant needs the funds immediately. The urgency may or may not be a control tactic to get someone to act.
- They show up just before or just after a worship service.
- They show up at a church office before the end of the day at the end of the week.
- They seem nervous or agitated.
- They are driving a car with no registration or with registration in a name other than their own.

#### **Be Careful of a Pull on Emotion**

- When someone is hurting, behavior and attitudes can be rough. You can expect to sometimes see attitudes of entitlement, anger, or arrogance. You may see conduct that is pushy or threatening. These are often methods to control or manipulate to get what is desired. Remember some people are in survival mode.
- Some people have the opinion that others are responsible to take care of them. We sometimes observe this attitude of entitlement for the church like we see some citizens project on the government. Do not let that make you feel obligated. The church cannot solve every problem. Encourage people to put their trust in God.
- Some will demonstrate a complete disregard for God in conduct, morality, or interest. Don't let it shock you. Understand they could be far from God and are desperate for help.
- Be careful not to react to bad behavior with fear or defensiveness, but respond with love and wisdom. You want to try to defuse a situation from escalating. You may have cases where you need to call the authorities. The church should have a security plan to deal with problem situations.
- Lies or exaggeration about church participation or church attendance.
- Lies about relationships, employment, the actual need, etc.
- Be careful not to be "taken" but don't lose your compassion either. Some indicators that someone is trying to manipulate you include using their children or spouse for sympathy, wearing Christian clothing or jewelry to get an emotional response, and using Christian phrases or scriptures.

## **Church Accountability**

### **The Church**

When people give their offerings, they are giving to God, and they are trusting church leadership to handle the finances with wisdom, knowledge, and a leading of the Holy Spirit. The Bible teaches that in addition to taking care of the church's needs, we should also take responsibility to care for those struggling financially, individually and corporately. As the church we should be accountable to the board and to one another for the distribution of funds. The financial administrator is also accountable to the Lead Pastor.

### **The Lead Pastor**

The Lead Pastor should have freedom to obey God and give as the Holy Spirit leads. It is also good to have accountability to the Board of Directors so that the Lead Pastor doesn't get into error.

### **The Government**

The IRS has concern that some people make income from requesting assistance from churches, ministries, and other benevolent agencies without paying their fair share of tax. The IRS also is concerned of the misuse of a nonprofit to unfairly benefit relatives, family, or personal friends of the board or employees of the church. In addition, the IRS has concerns that people are improperly funneling funds through the church to get a tax deduction while attempting to direct where their funds go, especially if someone related to that person is benefiting. From a legal standpoint, churches should have a paper trail on people receiving assistance to avoid the accusation of misappropriation of funds or conflict of interest. Churches who are found to misuse contributions could lose their nonprofit status.

### **The Recipient**

The recipient should be checked as someone who is doing all they can to be responsible to meet their own needs. As a church we should be wise to know the best way to help a person, which may be another avenue rather than church funds. As a church we should also be wise not to give money to meet someone's need due to poor character, work ethics, or addictive behavior. The Bible says we are to "be wise as a serpent and innocent as a dove." In other words, we should keep our motives and our actions pure, yet use wisdom and discernment.

*"Now if anyone does not provide for his own relatives, and especially for his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." 1 Timothy 5:8*

## **Assisting Through Information, Counseling, and Ministry**

### **Community Resources**

The Benevolence Ministry should have a list of other community and church resources that work together to help those in need. Some ministries and organizations will specialize in an area of need. Why reinvent the wheel or One local church will not be able to meet every need; however, we can help inform people of other resources available to them.

### **Financial Small Group**

Sometimes the best way to help others is to teach instead of rescuing them from their consequences. Learning what the Word of God says on finances should be a requirement for people who repeatedly come to you for help. Many churches use an existing curriculum, or you may wish to use your own.

### **Budget Coach**

Another way to help someone is by assigning a Budget Coach. A Budget Coach will help a person to develop and maintain a monthly budget. The Budget Coach serves as a mentor and an accountability partner.

### **Financial Advisors**

A financial advisor is a licensed professional that has received education and experience in financial matters. Financial advisors may or may not exist in your church. If they do not, there are agencies that offer counseling services to those in financial trouble. Pastors do not have to have all the answers; there is wisdom in sending people to professional counselors.

### **Pastoral Care**

Because we genuinely care about people, our offer for assistance is more than financial. If there are other needs in a person's life, such as emotional, spiritual, mental, or physical, we want to minister to that person as the Holy Spirit leads us. Often a need in finances is an indicator of a need in a person's spirit or soul. If a person is hurting or lacking, it could show up in bad spending behavior. As representatives of Jesus Christ, our perspective is to minister His love and His power to see people set free and prospering.