

Benevolence Ministry Guidelines for a Church Deacon Board

Purpose

Our purpose is to provide counseling and material assistance in the Name and to the glory of Jesus Christ. Our intention is to keep this ministry as an explicit testimony to the love of Jesus Christ, not simply to provide services.

Scope

This ministry is designed to reach (1. Christians within our church (2. Christians *outside* our church and (3. those who are *not* Christians (Galatians 6:10; John 17:20-21). We intend to supplement existing channels of help, rather than to replace them, since every good source of help has God as the origin (James 1:16-17).

Help will take the forms of financial/spiritual counseling and/or material aid. Financial problems usually have a spiritual origin. We will try to present the Gospel and to give Christian literature to the unsaved, and to use biblical principles to direct both the unsaved and the saved. Those not attending church will be encouraged to attend.

Administration

1. Since deacons were given responsibility to administer the distribution to the widows in Acts 6:1-3, this is a legitimate expression of their office. We recommend that at least four be selected (including at least one deaconess, if the church has this office) with the following gifts represented: mercy, helps, administration. The Benevolence Ministry Director, upon the approval of one other Ministry member, will contact the church treasurer to disburse funds from the Benevolence Ministry account. Periodic reports of the work of the Ministry will be submitted to the Deacon Board, and forwarded to the Elders.

2. Record keeping is consistent with good stewardship, but nothing will be done to intentionally humiliate applicants or recipients of assistance. However, prudence and experience indicate that cash not be given to recipients (except possibly to transients to a maximum of \$_____), but to those providing goods and services.

Transients may be referred, upon approval, to a local gas station/motel/restaurant with which the church has an arrangement to pay, for a specific number of meals/nights of lodging/amount of gas.

3. A periodic review of the recipient's situation, in the case of short-term and longterm help, will be done by a debt/budget counselor to see if the same needs exist. This budget counseling is required, in order to give more than superficial care. Those trained within the church (not necessarily deacons) will be asked first to counsel, but other trained counselors will be contacted in case of need. If financial counsel is ignored or rejected, assistance will be terminated.

4. Termination of help will occur when the need is met, when a suitable job has been refused, or when deemed advisable by the Benevolence Ministry.

Screening

1. A genuine need must exist, as determined by the Benevolence Ministry, using whatever information is needed for an accurate judgment. This includes an interview and completion of an Information Form.

2. Transients are a distinct kind of applicant, since some make a living defrauding churches. The name of the transient will be checked against any available community database, and at least one valid telephone number of someone known to the transient will be called, to verify the identity and possibly the need of the applicant. Some transients claim to be hungry, but want cash and will not go to a restaurant. Pressure may be applied, but wisdom dictates that some kind of background check be made.

3. Widows are a special concern of the Church. 1 Timothy 5:3-16 clearly gives the qualifications for a widow to be helped by the Church. Among them, children and grandchildren are to bear the responsibility to help the widow, and the church should intervene if that assistance does not and will not exist. The wisdom of the Spirit is needed in many instances of single mothers with needs who are not widows.

4. When a person can work, even part-time, this is required by Scripture (2 Thessalonians 3:10). For example, if a doctor indicates that a person can work, it would be expected, and this work gives a greater sense of dignity.

Funding

1. Funds designed by individuals, by the Church or by other sources for the Benevolence Ministry shall comprise the funds available. No money will be borrowed to continue giving help, nor promises made for ongoing help without a certain assurance of funds being available. If funds are exhausted, the Church assumes no liability to continue giving aid (2 Corinthians 9:8-12).

Networking

James 1:16-17 shows that all good gifts come from the Father. A ruler is called “. . . God’s servant to do you good. . . .” (Romans 13:4, NIV). Therefore, from whatever source help is obtained, it is legitimate, except when the testimony of the Church is compromised. All funds belong to God (Haggai 2:8; Psalm 50:10-11). The Ministry may request help from community services, and provide help at their request and our approval.

Training

Since trained Christian financial counselors are crucial in situations of ongoing assistance, the Benevolence Ministry will try to recruit them and may provide for the costs involved in

training. Currently Crown Financial Ministries has a Counselor Self-Study Course that can be pursued at home at modest cost. These materials can be obtained at www.crown.org, or at 800-722-1976.

Procedures

[These procedures and guidelines have been graciously provided by Fellowship Bible Church, Dalton, Georgia.]

1. If contact is made through the church office during working hours, the secretary will obtain the name of the applicant, where and how communication can be made with them, the general nature of the need, and whether or not this person has contacted our Church before.
2. The Secretary will convey the information to a member of the Ministry and will contact a second member to be assigned to the need.
3. The Ministry members assigned will communicate with the applicant, either in person or by phone, to get a brief history and picture of needs, using the information sheet when possible. The history and need should be somehow be verified, possibly by contacting a relative or friend of the applicant. Some will probably hoodwink the Church. We are not trying to be private detectives, just good stewards.
4. If the person is a transient, they should be contacted after verifying some aspect of their need. If the applicant lives locally, a trained counselor should determine the needs and underlying causes, make a proposal to the Ministry, and arrange to see the recipient normally once a month.
5. If contact is made outside of normal working hours, or if no secretary is available, any Ministry member could make the initial contact, and with another available adult (very important), conduct the interview.

Guidelines

1. Present the Gospel, including giving a good tract and paperback Bible. The Gospel is the best solution for the needs of the unsaved, since it will have positive economic consequences.
2. Verify needs and some history. Ask for references and call them, even if only a one-time request. Contact a community-screening agency, if available.
3. More than \$_____ will not be expended on one participant (or family) without Deacon Board approval.
4. No cash should be directly given to applicants (except to the allowable limit for transients, when essential).

5. Do not visit an applicant alone. Interview the applicant with another Ministry member, both for protection from possible charges and because one will often discern issues that the other missed. The initial interview team should have at least one male, and if the applicant is a woman or a family, have one female on the team.
6. Give the recipient the opportunity to earn a contribution, perhaps by helping around the church, if there is not a security issue.
7. Require a degree of responsibility for those who receive ongoing assistance, such as following a budget. They should be responsible to a budget counselor.
8. Keep records, keep information confidential, except with those who need to know, with the consent of the applicant, and keep the records in a locked file at the Church. If the applicant does not consent to have pertinent information shared as necessary, then they will not be helped.
9. Assistance should not be given without the agreement of one other member of the Ministry.
10. Try to work with the applicant's home church, if this pertains, and try to encourage them to attend a church, if this does not.
11. Pray for discernment and wisdom, preferably with the applicant present.