

SETTING POLICIES FOR ASSISTANCE



Developing a philosophy and priorities for Diaconal ministry in the local church

**“Mercy is *compassion*
toward those
who are in need,
resulting in *action*
to alleviate that need,
through acts of *charity* leading
toward *self-sustainment*.”**

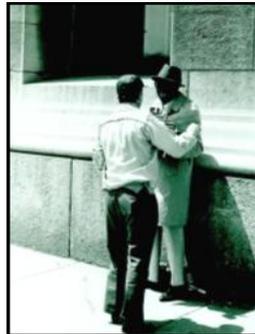
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If the purpose of the Diaconate is “To minister to those in need, to the sick, to the friendless and to any who may be in distress,” is it possible to develop plans to help people in the most productive and effective ways? This pamphlet says, “Yes, You can!”

A Philosophy of Mercy Ministry

The Scriptures teach us to do good to all men, especially to the household of faith. They teach us to love your neighbors as yourselves and to be “good Samaritans” to those who are in need. The Scriptures also teach us to do justice and to loosen the bonds of wickedness, to love mercy, to especially help the widows and orphans, and the



aliens. We start with our own families and we try to be good stewards of what we personally and then corporately have. We reach out to share and as we move forward with the Gospel, we encounter people beyond our own family and community who need help. We help them because God wants us to. We show love because that is the only way love is known to exist.

Who should have priority for diaconal assistance?

Galatians 6:10 teaches us to do good to all men, especially to the household of faith. This necessitates a prioritization of helping – especially to the household of faith. In order to use wise stewardship in dispensing help, priorities need to be established. Here are some suggestions:

1. **Church members who are in regular attendance.**
2. **Church members generally.**
3. **Regular attenders.**
4. **Families of church members.**
5. **People involved or associated with a specific ministry of your church, e.g. tutoring, Sunday school, Bible Studies, Children's Ministry.**
6. **People in your neighborhood and geographic proximity to the church.**
7. **Neighbors of church members.**
8. **Sister churches.**
9. **Referrals from other ministries supported by your church.**
10. **Referrals from other churches.**
11. **Referrals from Christian, government or other social service agencies.**
12. **Call-ins or walk-ins, with preference given to the poorest and neediest people within your geographic area after verifying the need and depending on funds availability.**

Principles for giving assistance

It is always appropriate and necessary to pray with any individual seeking assistance. Without God's wisdom and intervention no need will be adequately met.

- 1. Ask specific questions to determine the legitimacy of the need.**
 - a. Who is this person and are they eligible under your guidelines. If they do not qualify under your guidelines, try to refer them elsewhere.
 - b. What is the best way to help this person? Is it an emergency need? What is the underlying long-term problem?
 - c. Will a response to his or her immediate request create more problems for them, or the church?
 - d. Is this person's situation self-induced and should it be allowed to continue?
 - e. Is the nature of the situation serious enough that we should help even if the person brought it upon himself or herself?
 - f. Will the situation be immediately or soon repeated if no other than an emergency response is given? If so, what else can be done?
 - g. Does this person have resources that he or she should or could use before using yours? These resources may include:
 1. Their family
 2. Their home church
 3. A government or service agency
 - h. Is the person honest, can the situation be verified and are they willing to cooperate in your verification process?
 - i. Is the person hostile or threatening? (NO ASSISTANCE SHOULD BE GIVEN IF THIS IS THE CASE)
- 2. It is legitimate to help some people before they ask, or even if they don't ask. This applies specifically to active church families.**
- 3. It is appropriate to give financial or budgetary counseling when needed.**

- 4. It may be necessary to refer cases of church members to an Elder or the Session in cases of rebellion or sinful conduct.**
- 5. It is appropriate to deny assistance when the situation is against stated policy, when the Deacons corporately feel this should be so, or when instructed by the Session.**
- 6. It is appropriate to determine assistance limits for cases in general or specific situations.**
- 7. The Deacons should not be allowed to spend money beyond their budget unless supplemented by the Session.**
- 8. It is appropriate for the Deacons to appeal to the Session for additional help or broader support in specific cases.**
- 9. Chronic cases should be assigned to specific Deacons or Deaconesses for investigation, action, and follow-up. Deacons should seek to create “teams” where other church members with specific skills or knowledge can be brought in to advise with a person or case. Prayer support and team effort not only increases the possibility of a good outcome but it relieves Deacons of the burden of trying to solve a problem by themselves.**
- 10. In cases of emergency every effort should be given to either meeting the emergency or giving a speedy referral or judgment. It is better to say “no” quickly than to keep people hanging, waiting for help that won’t come.**

Suggested Standard Operation Procedures

- a. Food should be readily given upon request unless the person is in direct violation of a policy. You can provide a box of food from your food pantry. When someone walks in and asks for food they can be given an information sheet to complete. Their name is checked against your own database and those of your community if possible. A brief interview is given, where explanation is asked as to their circumstances and the Gospel is presented. On each visit a church brochure is given explaining your policy for assistance and welcoming them to your church.

Assigned personnel or volunteers can give food. A Church Secretary, the Diaconal Coordinator or specific deacons may have this authority. It is appropriate to set specific hours when this service is available.

- b. Food may also be delivered to the person's house or distributed at the church, depending on the circumstances.
- c. Food should not be given to someone who is drunk. A hot or cooked meal might be given if necessary and should be eaten on the premises of where it is given.
- d. When a church member takes in someone in need of shelter the Deacons may supplement that household up to a determined amount per week, depending on approval by the Diaconate.

- e. The Deacons may assign a W.I.C. Committee to provide meals to a church family in case of need.
- f. When financial aid is given it will be given as a gift and never as a loan. It is an excessive burden to put poor people in debt. When they cannot pay, they will avoid the church and the Deacons.
- g. People wishing to repay assistance are asked simply to put it in the general offering or designate it to the Diaconate.
- h. Individuals wishing to help other individuals through the Deacons, anonymously or otherwise, may do so with the strictest confidence. However, no funds can be legally designated (unless previously budgeted) and the donor must abide by the decision of the Deacons. The Deacons may, of course, decide to help anyone who might be in need, and welcome others to contribute, or bring to their attention, those who might need help.
- i. The Deacons should not pay school tuition bills. Other committees or agencies of the church can be created to meet this need.
- j. Phone bills will not be paid unless for extreme situations.
- k. Assistance might not be given to single individuals without requiring some labor; either at the church property or for work needing to be done that will help someone else in need.

- l. Cash should never be given if at all possible. Funds can be dispersed by check to landlords, food stores, agencies, etc.
- m. An individual Deacon may respond from his own pocket up to \$100.00 in an emergency situation, if they feel verifiable cause has been demonstrated. If possible, consultation should be made before action is taken. The Board of Deacons should agree to larger amounts.
- n. Individuals attending the church who take advantage of its members by asking for gifts or loans (asking lots of folks for the same problem, not paying the loan back) will be identified by the Deacons and counseled with. The Session will be advised. Members should advise the Deacons of such individuals.

- 12. The Deacons will keep the ministry confidential and other members of the congregation are not to know who has received assistance.**
- 13. Records must be kept for all those being helped, including the reason and amount or scope of assistance. A database is helpful and recommended. A list can be given to the Session on a regular basis. A generalized report as to the kinds of assistance given should be reported to the congregation on a regular basis.**
- 14. Individual church members should be challenged to help people they encounter in their daily lives if it is within their power to personally do so. Counsel should be given to help members decide when to personally take action. This can come from classes on mercy, sermons or personal training.**

- 15. Individual members should be encouraged not to run interference for people seeking assistance. Suggestions from members should be heard but they should not lobby for specific needs. People trying to escape accountability sometimes use others as a screen.**
- 16. Deacons should exercise their office with compassion and mercy. They should seek to give a witness for Christ whenever they exercise their office in the ministry of mercy. Prayer should always be offered whenever assistance is requested or given.**
- 17. It is appropriate to invite those who are helped to your church and/or to give them a Bible or some Christian literature.**
- 18. Deacons should multiply their ministry by recruiting members for special projects that result in helping the poor or suffering, e.g., block parties and house repair or yard work for the elderly and widows.**
- 19. Programs should be established that help the general congregation meet the needs of other members, e.g., bulletin board listing needs to be matched with opportunities, odd jobs, surplus furniture or equipment, pooling for tools, babysitting, etc.**
- 20. Special conferences or training efforts can and should be instigated by the Deacons for themselves and for the general congregation to be more effective in mercy ministry, financial management, and related topics.**

Addition Suggestions

- **Develop an Adoption Grant Policy - Matching Grant Funds for the adoption of special needs children is a project your Deacons might consider for helping a member family with such an adoption. Families willing to adopt handicapped or older children, African American and mixed race children can appeal to their Deacon Board for an adoption grant. If their church gives them such a grant, the presbytery could match it up to \$500.00 for a total of \$1,000.00. This is an excellent way to encourage your families to take care of “the least of these.”**
- **Check out what others are doing:
MNA—www.pca-mna.org
CCDA—www.cdda.org
10th Presbyterian—www.tenth.org**
- **Other resources:
Anything by John Perkins
“A Framework for Understanding Poverty”,
by Dr. Ruby Payne**

HOW CAN WE HELP YOU HELP THE POOR?

Feel free to call us for information and help

Order our PowerPoint seminar on

Mobilizing Your Church for Effective Mercy Ministry

MNA MERCY MINISTRIES VISION

The purpose of MNA Mercy Ministries is to encourage and equip PCA churches and members to become involved in a growing way with ministries to people who not only need the Gospel but who face circumstances of tangible need or difficulty. While these needs exist everywhere, they are often more prevalent in the concentrated populations of the cities. These concentrations of population offer great opportunity for ministry because city programs can address the needs of many people in close proximity.

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