

NOTE: This document contains policies that New City Fellowship in Chattanooga, TN, has found helpful in directing their diaconal ministry. By including it here MNA in no way is suggesting that all churches need to do their diaconal ministry in the same way.

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## **DIACONAL POLICIES FOR NEW CITY FELLOWSHIP**

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### **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 our neighbors as ourselves, to be good Samaritans to those who are in need. The Scriptures 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.

### **PRIORITY OF 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 the following priorities have been established.

- 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 our church, e.g. tutoring, Sunday school, Bible Studies, Children's Ministry.**
- 6. People in our neighborhood and geographic proximity to the church.**
- 7. Neighbors of church members.**

- 8. Sister PCA churches, locally through the Presbytery Diaconal Bank.**
- 9. Referrals from other ministries supported by our church.**
- 10. Referrals from other churches.**
- 11. Referrals from Christian, government or social service agencies.**
- 12. Call-ins or walk-ins, with preference given to the poorest and neediest people within our 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 our guidelines.
  - 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 ours? These resources may include:
    1. Their family
    2. Their home church
    3. Government or Agency help
  - h. Is the person honest, can the situation be verified, are they willing to cooperate in our verification process?

- i. Is the person hostile or threatening? (**NO ASSISTANCE IF THIS IS THE CASE**)
2. **It is legitimate to help some people before they ask, or even if they don't ask.**
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 are not 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. **Cases should be assigned to specific Deacons or Deaconess for investigation, action, and follow-up. Deacons should seek to create "teams" wherein other church members with specific skills or knowledge can be brought in to help with a person or case. Prayer support and team effort not only increases the possibility of a good outcome but also relieves Deacons of the burden of trying to solve a problem by them.**
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.**
11. **Standard Operation Procedure:**
  - a. Food should be readily given upon request unless the person is in direct violation of a policy. It is our current policy to use the services of the Chattanooga Area Food Bank or provide a box of food from our food pantry. When someone walks in and asks for food they are given a brief interview. Their name is checked against our own database and those of First Call for Help if possible. If this is their second visit a more in-depth counseling time is given, where explanation is asked as to their circumstances, the Gospel is (or should be) presented. Counsel is given as to strategies to help change their situation. On each visit a church brochure is given explaining our policy for

assistance and welcoming them to our church as well as a brief Gospel presentation.

Assigned personnel issue vouchers. 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 be taken 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 \$25.00 per week, or more, 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 money 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 will judge them as to dishonesty.
- 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. Money should 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 will not be given if at all possible. Funds will 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. All efforts at 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 in a careless or reckless manner (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 as to all those being helped, 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 members should be encouraged to help people they encounter in their daily lives who need assistance 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. Information and suggestions from members should be encouraged but not lobbying of cases and people trying to escape accountability should not use them 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 our 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, an effort on house or yard repair for the elderly and widows. Imagination should be employed for these kinds of things.**
  19. **Systems should be established that help the general congregation meet the needs of other members, e.g., bulletin board list of 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.**

**Adoption Grant Policy for New City Fellowship Deacons  
And the  
Mercy Committee of the Tennessee Valley Presbytery**

Matching Grant Funds for the adoption of special needs children is a project whereby the Mercy Committee (“MC”) of the Tennessee Valley Presbytery (“TVP”) matches dollar-for-dollar up to \$500.00 given by any TVP congregation to a member family in such an adoption.

Families willing to adopt handicapped, African American or mixed race children can appeal to their Deacon Board for an adoption grant. If their church gives them such a grant, the TVP will match it up to \$500.00 for a total of \$1,000.00.

Application for such a grant should come through the Deacon Board of the church to the MC. Checks will be made out to the specific church.