

Diaconal Guidelines for Financial Assistance

The Diaconate

Dear Brothers,

On behalf of the Session I want to commend the labor that all of you perform for the congregation at AAPC. As you know the majority of the current Session is made up of men who served on the diaconate for several years. We know first hand the many behind the scenes sacrifices that you make to faithfully execute your calling and, for that, we pray that God would continue to bless and prosper each of you. We are blessed in having this current diaconate working for the good of our congregation and we sincerely thank you!

We have been made aware that there has been benevolent giving to some of our covenant family. Obviously there can be a number of reasons that some of our congregation may from time to time need assistance. In all of these cases however, we would like to be notified. First of all we want the diaconate to be assured, prior to disbursement, that there is no known unfaithfulness involved which may have contributed to the current financial distress. In addition, when we have families that are struggling, it is imperative that the Elders be informed so that we have the opportunity to minister to that family.

In light of that the Session proposes some guidelines for benevolent giving:

The scripture speaks repeatedly of the responsibility of every man to make provision for the future: See Proverbs 6:6-8, 13:16, 21:5, 25:28 and Luke 14:28-30.

We can't know the future for certain, but we can and do know that the future will hold unexpected expenses: not recognizing the need to budget for the inevitability of a negative financial event will likely result in some degree of a financial crisis.

The scripture speaks repeatedly of covenantal faithfulness as a source of prosperity: See specifically Deuteronomy 28:1-68.

God promises to bless those that bless Him and curse those that curse Him. In some cases a man's lack of faithfulness or his own sinful foolishness will bring all kinds of distress, including poverty, into his house. Such unfaithfulness doesn't automatically preclude a man from receiving benevolent help from the Church. However, the Diaconate might require financial counseling or a meeting with the Session.

When a man finds himself in a financial bind, he should see if there are there any assets that can be readily converted to cash that would bring immediate relief?

I know this seems obvious, but we have known men (formerly here at AAPC) who sought help from the church, but who possessed a literal arsenal of guns and ammunition, both of which are easily converted to cash. The caution here is to make certain that the applicant for financial assistance is not simultaneously protecting assets that could alleviate his distress through liquidation.

When a man finds himself in financial difficulty, he must examine his expenses and cut out all luxuries.

We should not use Church funds to maintain a brother's lifestyle. Alcohol, restaurants, cable, Netflix, iPhones, vacations, e.g., are not necessities. If a man is experiencing financial difficulty it is imperative that he reduce his expenses by the elimination of all superfluities. He would be better served by using that money to help build against a potential future crisis.

When a man finds himself in financial distress, prior to seeking funds from the Church, he needs to seek relief from his family: 1 Timothy 5:8.

Every parent knows that situations can arise that may require them to step in and provide financial help to their children. An unwillingness to provide relief from parental or sibling family members, when able, may indicate a negative circumstantial knowledge that we need to know about. In the event that the extended family is unable to help, at that point, he should seek help from the Church.

God requires of all of us a charitable disposition that is willing to help maintain a brother's basic necessities for a season. Luke 10:30-37.

We must keep in mind that being placed in binds, financial or otherwise, is one of the means God uses to teach us to be better stewards of our resources. It is a very *good thing* to have to go through seasons of difficulty, to struggle to make ends meet, and it produces good fruit in us. It's not our job to protect people from these times of difficulty, but to encourage them and help them grow in wisdom through them.

But, when there is a serious financial crisis; when expenses have been cut as far as possible, when the extended families of these facing hardship are unable to provide the needed assistance, and when it is clear that the hardship is not the fruit of impenitent rebellion against the Lord – then it is the job of the church to cheerfully and freely help to meet the need.

Ordinarily, we should wait until there is a request for assistance and when a request is made, we must insure that every other avenue of meeting the need has been exhausted. This must be done simply because we are to be faithful stewards of the Lord's tithe and so must seek to be sure that we are utilizing the funds as He has commanded.

Again, thank you all for your faithfulness. We are attempting to bring some guidance here for everyone's benefit and are not being critical of any past actions on the part of the diaconate. Please let us know if we can be of any help in clarification or reiteration.

For the Session,
Robert McBroom

In addition to the guidelines above, here are some general, scriptural guidelines in regard to giving to others in need:

- Church Members have priority over non-church members
- Christians have priority over unbelievers
- Unbelievers who have legitimate needs have priority over those who are in need because of irresponsibility.