

BENEVOLENCE PHILOSOPHY

CHRIST 
Community Church

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About this Document

Our benevolence philosophy is a brief statement that captures the overall approach we will use to help those experiencing poverty. It embodies our basic DNA, i.e., our foundational convictions about what we are trying to accomplish and how we will get there. We will use this philosophy both to shape our standing policies and to guide us in making wise decisions in each particular situation.

FOCUSING OUR PURPOSE

What Are We Trying to Accomplish?

1. What is the problem to be solved? In particular, what is poverty?

We believe poverty is not merely material lack, but is rooted in the broken relationships each person has with God, self, others, and the rest of creation. These relationships are broken due to some combination of the individual's own behaviours, abusive or exploitive people, oppressive systems, and demonic forces.

2. What is the goal?

The Bible indicates that human beings are called to be image-bearers of the triune God. In this light, the goal of our poverty alleviation efforts is to empower both the materially poor and non-poor to move closer to image-bearing: living in right relationship with God, self, others, and the rest of creation. For able-bodied people, this includes their being able to glorify God through work that enables them to support themselves and their families. We don't want to be merely treating symptoms - we want to be focused on addressing the underlying causes.

3. How will we try to achieve our goal?

The key principles that will guide us as we seek to address the causes of poverty in order to achieve our goal are:

- Because humans are relational beings, we will seek to provide material assistance in the context of long-term empowering relationships.
- Because Jesus Christ is the ultimate solution to poverty, we will seek to enfold people as full participants into His body, i.e., our church family.
- Because the goal is restoration to image-bearing, we will use approaches that build on people's own gifts, resources, and abilities.


FOCUSING OUR MINISTRY

Whom Will We Help?

The purpose of benevolence assistance is to support and encourage low-income people to improve their lives, building on their own actions, gifts, and resources. Every policy must be run through this filter.

4. How do we prioritize those seeking assistance?

Prioritization might sound callous, given that every person is created with equal dignity and worth as an image-bearer. However, prioritizing different categories of people can help our church to engage more deeply with those whom we are truly positioned to help. Because poverty is deeply rooted in broken relationships, lasting and sustained progress usually requires a longer-term, focused effort, not a quick-fix, shotgun approach. Hence, given limited human and financial resources, determining



where our resources can truly make a lasting difference is part of sound stewardship. Therefore we will prioritize, in roughly this order:

- Those in real danger of physical harm and whom our church is in the best position to assist
- Fellow believers in our church - "Although we are to express Christ's love and compassion to all people, the Bible does indicate that our first priority is to assist fellow believers (Gal 6:10)
- Fellow believers in other churches, in consultation with their church (2 Cor 8-9)
- People who are engaged with our church body in some capacity - For our congregation is in a good position to accurately ascertain the assets and needs of such people and to provide them with the support, encouragement, and accountability that they need
- Others requesting assistance

We also want to consider:

- Receptivity to change - prioritising those who are expressing and demonstrating receptivity to making lasting changes in their lives
- Those who live close enough to our church to enable us to enter into the long-term relationships (suggest 5km boundary except if strong personal relationship with an attendee and likelihood of engagement with the church).

5. Do we have a special opportunity with a specific target group?

? Come back to this after asset mapping / community engagement.

FOCUSING OUR RESOURCES

What Type of Help Will We Give?

Relief is the urgent and temporary provision of emergency aid to reduce immediate suffering from a natural or man-made crisis. Relief can range from assisting someone whose house has burned down to providing immediate shelter and resources for a woman experiencing domestic abuse.

Development is a process of ongoing change that moves all the people involved—both the materially poor and the materially non-poor—closer to being in right relationship with God, self, others, and the rest of creation than they have been in the past. Development expenditures might include subsidizing counselling for somebody who has experienced personal trauma, providing childcare while a person gets job training, or helping someone purchase a suit for a job interview.

6. What percentage of the benevolence budget will be used for relief and what percentage will be used for development?

We will aim to spend the majority of our benevolence budget should be devoted to development, not relief. Nominally, we will spend 30% on relief and 70% development.

7. Are there any types of assistance we will not provide?

- We will never provide assistance in the form of cash - instead gift cards or direct payments to suppliers will be made.

- We will not pay for non-essential items.
- We will not duplicate the financial assistance provided by other organisations in our community (i.e. if someone else assists with electricity bills we will link with them *as part of our overall support offering*, rather than duplicating this, or merely referring them). To support this, we will keep an up to directory of community services in our area.
- For great need, we will provide gift rather than loan. We recommend *not* providing low-interest loans - because they are hard to enforce repayment, teaching irresponsibility and can result in widespread defaulting.

8. How often and how much will we consider giving to people in various categories?

Our policies and decisions will try to avoid creating unhealthy dependencies that undermine the overall goal of moving people toward living in right relationship with creation by being able to support themselves through their own work.

Relief situations should typically involve one-time aid. Assisting with rent or utility bills multiple times in a year without that person truly committing their own time, energy, gifts, and resources to an overall process of change is generally a bad practice.

Development situations, the frequency of the assistance will vary. Our assistance might be needed to fill financial gaps multiple times along the way, but such assistance must complement people's use of their own gifts, abilities, and resources.

For a detailed breakdown of our *Financial Assistance Grid*.

If there is no evidence that people are taking action to use their own gifts, abilities, and resources, we may need to withhold assistance to avoid enabling them in persistence of unfaithful stewardship.

It may be necessary to make exceptions to the policies we adopt. But such exceptions must be approved by a majority of Deacons.


9. How will we respond to people who are capable of working but who are unwilling to work fulltime?

If a capable person simply **chooses** not to work at a "normal" level in order to provide for themselves and their families, it is unbiblical and harmful to provide financial assistance to them (2 Thessalonians 3:6–15; 1 Timothy 5:3–16).

We will **not** provide assistance to those who do not want to work because the work is too hard or too menial or because they do not like the workplace environment. Unless the person is too physically or mentally impaired or the workplace is dangerous or abusive, these reasons do not justify being wilfully unemployed or underemployed. Instead we will encourage the person to work and then also help them to improve their skills and abilities so that they can obtain "better" work.

10. How will we seek to incorporate all adult household members in the process of assistance and long-term change? Specifically, how can we honour and uphold family units—including the relationship between husbands and wives—in the intake and action plan process?

Many churches see a pattern of husbands wanting to remain on the fringes in the process of asking for assistance and creating an action plan, whether out of pride, shame, or passivity. As much as possible, all of the household members who are contributing to its income and expenses need to be on board



with any plan for making positive, long-term change, as all their attitudes and actions will impact whether or not the plan is successful.

We will seek to bring all of the relevant people—spouses, adult children, or cohabitating adults—into the process.

We will need to show great concern for how the wife is feeling, ensuring that she does not feel confused or belittled by our deliberate efforts to involve her husband.

This would be an excellent time to assign a married woman from our benevolence team or church to be the point person for walking with the wife who is presenting the request for assistance.

Further, we must be sensitive to the situation that she is in, which could be abusive. In these cases, contacting her husband could put her in danger, and we will need wisdom to ensure her safety, in addition to providing any financial assistance.

FOCUSING OUR PROCESS

What Procedures Will We Follow?

11. How will we design the intake process?

Walking with people developmentally requires that they commit to a longer-term process of participating in their own change. Therefore, we will use an intake process, so we can work with the person to create an asset-based, participatory action plan that helps them to set their own goals, identify their abilities and resources, commit to taking steps to improve their lives, and describes what our church will do to support them in the change process. A person's receptivity to completing the intake process is a gauge of their receptivity to change.

12. When will we not require an intake form to be completed in order to receive assistance?

Where there is immediate and serious danger or in crisis situations. If a person is not ready to disclose the relevant information, it may be necessary to skip parts of the form, or warmly invite them to come back to come back when they're ready to complete the form with us.

13. What sort of fact checking will we do?

If necessary, we will seek to corroborate a person's story to help discern how to use our limited benevolence funds. This may also assist in forming a more complete picture of the person and their situation in order to be able to help them more effectively. Such fact-checking could include references, other churches and agencies, community databases.

14. When will we not require an action plan to be completed?

In relieve situations in which we are providing one-time assistance to a person in crisis. Action plans needn't be developed in one sitting and will be completed at a comfortable pace for the person in question. This also assists in helping people to be thoughtful in identifying their gifts, abilities and resources in order to embark on a long-term process of change.

15. When and how do we want to utilize other ministries or agencies?

In many cases, we will not have the skills or expertise to provide the help people require, such as situations involving severe substance abuse or long-term trauma. In these cases, we will seek to refer people other agencies that specialise in helping people overcome these obstacles, while at the same time seeking to develop a longer-term empowering relationship with the those that have sought help.

16. Will attending church and/or listening to an explanation of the gospel be required in order to receive any assistance?

Ultimately, we desire that the people we help will become part of God's family. Therefore, while not required, we strongly encourage benevolence team members to invite people to hear the reason we are motivated to help people in need, which is the gospel. We also want to take are create opportunities to enfold people into our church community.

17. What will we do to address abusive or exploitive individuals who may be contributing to the person's poverty?

In situations where we encounter victims of exploitive people, such as spouses, relatives, friends, landlords, employers or lenders, we will talk to the police department, local government services, and other agencies that deal with these situations to determine the best course of action, including how we should work with them to resolve such situations.

18. What will we do to address oppressive systems that may be contributing to the person's poverty?

While we cannot change the past, developing a greater understanding of historic injustice and its lasting effects are important to helping all of us to develop greater patience with low-income people. In addition, asking the person seeking assistance about any family history with respect to injustice and truly listening with an empathetic heart can contribute to their healing and to developing deeper trust with one another. In fact, a failure to listen and empathize will often prevent us from being able to truly walk together in a trusting relationship. In addition, as we work with people over time, we will be on the alert for oppressive systems that may be currently contributing to people's poverty, especially historical oppressive behaviours that have contributed to intergenerational poverty.

19. What will we do to address the demonic forces that may be contributing to the person's poverty?

As Satan is at war with God and God's image bearers, our benevolence ministry will be saturated in prayer. Some ways prayer may be included in the assistance offered to people is:

- Benevolence teams and volunteers praying with every person who asks our church for assistance;
- Benevolence teams praying over each action plan during regular meetings;
- Volunteers praying in the adjacent room while a financial education or jobs preparedness class is being offered;
- Visitation teams praying in the homes of those receiving assistance.



FOCUSING OUR MESSAGE

How Will We Share and Solidify Our Guidelines?

20. How will we publicize our policies to the church?

Conflict can erupt if someone in our church expects assistance that is outside of the bounds of our policies. To alleviate this, we will:

- Place brochures at the Church Information table
- Publish information on our website
- Make them easily available in our church office
- Give information/training to members of the Welcoming team and the Hospitality team
- Include these policies in church membership classes

21. How will we publicize our policies to the community?

People outside our church who might approach us for assistance also need to understand the basic guidelines. This does not entail spelling out every policy and every detail. It does mean communicating how we are willing to help people—and what will be required of them. We do this primarily by posting some policy information on our website.

Our goal in posting basic policy information is not to scare people away, doing so communicates that receiving assistance from our church requires time and commitment. As a result, it increases the likelihood that people who do go through the intake process will be receptive to change.