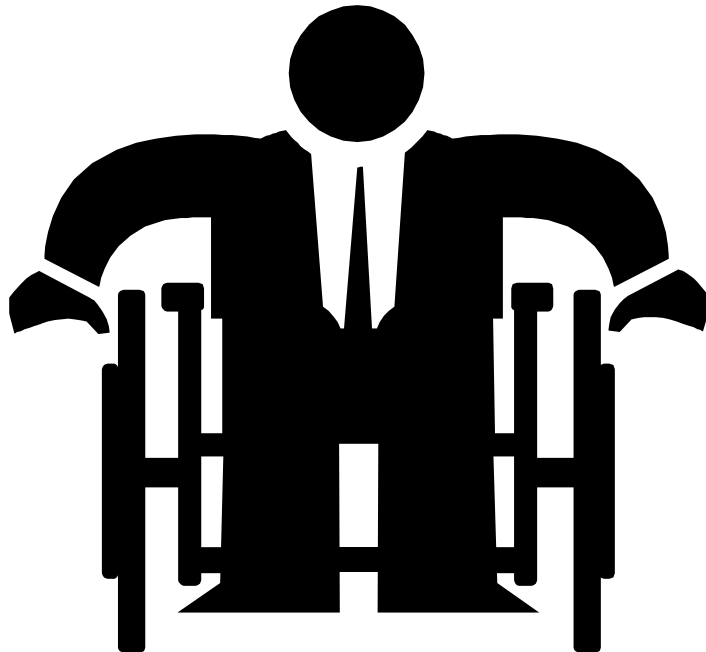


Benevolence Guidelines

Suggested Ideas on Managing Your Church Benevolence



A ministry Outline Provided by

Pastoral *Care* **INC**

Ways to Manage Benevolence or Needy Requests

During harsh and economic times, most of our churches in America are facing an increased demand for help and benevolence. Even though benevolence and reaching out to the poor has been an active part of the church, some are facing the dilemma of whether to continue such benevolence or to focus upon their own set of needs.

Many of our churches in America are struggling financially. While most have a strong desire to help the poor, they are under heavy pressures to keep their doors open, with reports of decreasing membership and giving along with the increasing cost of operating a church. Some are even at the point of dropping their missions support all together.

Today's church faces another dilemma: one of perception. Many pastors are asking themselves, "How can we meet the increased demand of supporting those in need within our community when we don't have the resources to do it? And how will they react if we turn them down?"

The National media is often critical of the church, expecting them to provide for those in need. If for some reason the church does not help, they are often quick to point out what Christianity should look like. At times, it seems like a no-win situation for the church!

Pastoral Care, Inc. understands the demands that our pastors and churches face everyday. We find that most churches do not have an organized plan for benevolence. If they do, they seldom modify it during tough economic times or when demands increase. Without a clear-cut set of guidelines to follow, benevolence is hit-or-miss, lacks vision and direction, and often gives out in-discriminately to those who approach their church for help. It is sad that most churches do not have any counseling guidelines in place to minister to those in need.

Another problem exists when a needy person approaches more than one person in the church, often times playing on the emotions and generosity of well-meaning Christians. Unfortunately, most Christians do not take time to question whether the need is real or whether they are supporting a substance abuse problem, gambling, or other types of habits. A **unified plan** is needed so that church members won't be used or approached in a manipulative manner.

Jesus expects us to be compassionate, *but He expects us to be wise*. Pastoral Care, Inc. suggests a number of different suggestions for every church to follow or implement when dealing with benevolence. These suggestions are more directed for benevolence outside of the church.

1. **Have a Plan.** Determine whether your church will participate in some kind of benevolence or to channel all requests to another party. If there are other resources within your city, it may be a good idea to keep informed in order to help those who are requesting help.

Some churches provide financial support to other resources in the community, such as community action center, as a way to detour individual requests from the church in an orderly manner. It will also help your staff, who may be less qualified to deal with requests, to refer to other agencies within your city.

2. **Benevolence Request Form.** If a church provides help/benevolence, it is strongly suggested that everyone making a request fills out a benevolence request form (see sample form below). Almost every church is guilty of not qualifying the need.

The person must write down his/her need, the reason for the request, his/her current address, church affiliation, etc. It should also be signed and dated. **A photo ID should be presented to reduce fraud.

Many churches also place a disclaimer at the bottom of the form to inform everyone how often the church can bless the same person, whether it is a one-time gift, monthly, first come/first served, etc.

This form should be kept on file to eliminate confusion and fraud of the same person coming back to the church, talking to different people, in hopes of gaining more benefits.

3. **Delegating.** Each church should select one or more people to be in charge of ministering with those bringing a request. The pastor may or may not be involved in this process. Be sure to ask the pastor whether he/she wishes to be included in this process. In all incidents, the pastor should be kept informed of the benevolence given/considered/spiritual needs.
4. **Type of benevolence.** What can the church supply? It can be for can goods (food pantry), financial helps (true benevolence), or for skills/trade helps (artisan help).

- a. **Food Pantry.** One person should be in charge of the pantry but many can assist in helping others. It should be maintained weekly and promoted each month for people within the church to provide the necessary needs for the pantry or obtain these from another sources. Note: One cannot promote such services if they are not maintained. It can be a negative reflection on the church.

One positive thing about having a pantry over supplying money is that the can goods cannot be sold or returned for money to support other types of habits, such as substances abuse.

- b. **True Benevolence.** It is suggested that a church have a list of things they will supply, such as gasoline, utility bills, prescriptions, overnight stay in a motel, etc.

****It is very important for the church to not give money to an individual, but arrange for someone to either accompany this individual to the gas station, druggist, or motel, etc. or the church can write a check to that business. It is also suggested that the church or individual in charge call the business ahead of time to let them know what the church is trying to do. Again, never provide cash or a check to the individual. **It should be clear with all motels, grocery stores, or other merchandise, no refunds are permitted back to the person seeking help but to return any credits/money back to the church.**

Utilities and other types of services: It is suggested that the individual bring a bill as proof that his/her need is real.

Another true benevolence may include food baskets or gift cards for those less fortunate during the holidays.

- c. **Artisan Help.** Many churches may utilize the talents and skills of those within the church to bring a blessing to those less fortunate in the community. This could be provided through a specific request to the church or the church could look for a special project throughout the year to bless someone.
5. **Counseling.** Counseling should be a part of providing benevolence. One or more people should be trained on how to deal with people. Some will come into the church expecting the church to drop everything to meet their need. They can become demanding at times and upset if their need is not met, many times not wanting to provide any kind of personal information, etc. This is an opportunity to help counsel/minister to these individuals in hopes of bringing a positive change in their lives.

Counseling should include going over church procedures/details on future requests as well as encouraging individuals to solve their issues rather than asking for benevolence over and over again. This may include encouraging one to seek employment, spiritual direction, and other types of services.

6. **Options.** Funding benevolence should be discussed to the church/church board on a regular basis. Some churches will budget a certain dollar amount for benevolence while others will specify a monthly offering to fund benevolence. Different departments of the church can also be involved in funding benevolence through projects/fundraising efforts.

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