

NOTE: This document contains policies and information 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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Five Common Questions on Evaluating Need

1. Shouldn't the Church help only needy Christians?

- a. On the one hand, we are told to help all people in need. The point of the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25ff) is that we are to give mercy to anyone who we find in our path, even our enemies!
- b. On the other hand, we are told to give aid "especially to the household of faith" (Galatians 6:10). We are to give Christians the priority in our help.

2. How poor must a person be before the church helps him?

- a. "Poverty" can be defined as a limitation of choices. The richer you are, the more choices you have as to travel, eating, leisure activity, clothes you wear, and so on. Wealth and poverty is a relative matter. Every individual knows persons with more economic options (who are "richer") and with fewer (who are "poorer".)
- b. Luke 3: 11 tells us if we have two coats, we should give to him with no coats so we both have one. In 2 Corinthians 8:13-14 Paul says the richer church should give to the poorer "that there may be equality".
- c. This does not mean we must force a kind of "economic leveling" on all church members. It means that when a person expresses a need, if he is "poorer" than you, he is a proper object of your diaconal concern! We do not help people only when they are destitute. Anyone with less choices than you should be aided (cf. Lev. 19:18. Do we wait until we are "in the gutter" to help ourselves? Neither should we wait until our brother is!)
- d. In a middle-class church, look for members who are elderly, single-parent families, families with chronic illnesses, and the unemployed. There will be plenty of needs there.

3. Should we give aid to people who brought their poverty on themselves or by their own sin or laziness?

- a. The basic answer to this question is: "Yes, we should aid them." Romans 5:7-10 reminds us Christ did not only give his mercy to those whose misery was not their fault! He died while we were enemies. If we offer spiritual help to those whose trouble stems from sin, why not offer economic help to the same? From God's perspective, all of us have done deeds worthy of (not just poverty but) hell!
- b. Yet mercy must limit itself if a person continually uses our aid to further his irresponsible behavior. 1 Tim. 5:8-14 tells us widows who were idlers or gossips were not to receive regular aid. If a person rejects financial counseling or other counseling, the church may have to withdraw aid, but always for the needy person's own good. Only mercy can limit mercy.

4. Should we help strangers and travelers, persons whose sincerity we cannot judge?

- a. Yes, we should give to strangers and sojourners (Hebrews 13:2). Nabal refused David aid because he was a stranger, but this act is not seen in a favorable light (1 Sam. 25).
- b. We are likely to be sometimes "ripped off" by travelers, but we are to be kind to the ungrateful and the selfish and to those who borrow without repaying. (Luke 6 :27-36)
- c. Nevertheless, we are not to make it easy for people to sin against us. We need to learn how to aid travelers without using cash, how to check with local welfare agencies and police departments, etc.

5. Should we only aid those who ask for economic help, or should we offer it?

Answer: .Jesus did not wait for us to ask for his mercy! "You have not chosen me, I have chosen you," he said. He offers it - so should we!

Discussion and Application: Using the criteria listed on this sheet; make a list of persons inside the congregation and outside the congregation who need your aid.