

## **Benevolence at FPC**

First Presbyterian Church Spokane

Approved by Session August 2021

### **Guiding Principles:**

- We desire to reach out to those in need in the name of Jesus Christ, to offer hope and wholeness to those who come to us.
- We seek to be a people that will share our resources to those in need yet we also recognize that our best service to others is to support them in moving closer to glorifying God by living in right relationship with God, with self, with others, and with the rest of creation.
- Only through relationships can we effectively show Christ's love to others. Emergency assistance given where there is little potential for relationship is band-aid relief.
- Financial assistance (relief) should be seldom, immediate and temporary.
- We will not duplicate community services that are being performed excellently by other groups.
- We will support local mission outreach of other organizations with our income and the time and effort of our congregation.

[Further helpful reading may be found *When Helping Hurts*, as well as *Helping Without Hurting*.]

### **Response to Requests:**

There are two general categories of requests that FPC regularly receives from people in need.

- persons within (or affiliated with) our church community who need assistance due to unemployment, financial hardship, or some other urgent situation
- transient or homeless persons who are not attached to the worshipping community but request immediate financial assistance (often for travel, shelter or food)

Our response to the first category is to follow the Benevolence Guidelines.

Our response to the second category is to follow "The Stranger at the Door" Guidelines.

Both of these are outlined below.

## **BENEVOLENCE GUIDELINES**

*Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Acts 2:45*

At times people within our church community will come under financial hardship or face unexpected expenses. We seek to be a church family that will support one another during these times. We also seek to be a people that care deeply for one another, to look beyond the immediate need, seeking to assist others so that they may fulfill their callings of glorifying God by working and supporting themselves and their families with the fruit of their work.

**Source of Funds:** We will periodically take offerings specifically for replenishing the Pastors' Discretionary Fund. These offerings will occur when the fund balance drops below \$500.

**Eligibility:** The fund is meant to support people in relationship with this church community. This will mostly be current congregants but may include people in significant relationship with current congregants. It will be the rare exception that these funds will be used to support new people to us that come with a financial need (e.g. travelers).

**Identification of Need:** Anyone in the congregation may present a financial need within the congregation to the pastors or other staff. We will specifically ask Deacons and Stephens Ministers to stay aware of such needs.

**Understanding the Need:** Upon identification of need a pastor or staff member will follow-up with the individual/family to understand the situation, gain information, and fill out the Request Form. This provides the opportunity to offer care and prayer and to discern whether offering financial support is the best or only way to support them in their need. Benevolence Team members will keep in mind the helpful principles of need laid out in *Helping Without Hurting*.

**Financial Support:** The fund is intended to support one time or short-term needs, not on-going expenses, and should not be used if the financial support would discourage longer term solutions. Examples of needs which may be covered include but are not limited to: one month's rent, utilities, a plane fare, medical expenses, professional counseling (limited number of visits), funeral/cremation/memorial service costs. The short-term nature of our benevolence giving should be clearly communicated to the recipient.

**Disbursement:** When a pastor or staff person learns of a need in the congregation that warrants a financial gift, he or she will document the situation using the appropriate form and seek to have conversation with at least one other pastor or staff person on the Benevolence Team in the course of discerning the level of the gift. A check request will then be created to initiate payment. Whenever possible, the check should be made out to the owed organization (doctor, utility, landlord, etc.) and not to the recipient. It will be the rare exception that checks will be available on the same day as the request (i.e. we will not take shortcuts with this process).

**Documentation:** The summary record of the disbursements and the completed forms will be kept in the office of the Assistant to the Pastors and will be accessible only to the pastors and Benevolence

Team staff to maintain confidentiality. Accompanying Documents: form for documenting requesting and form for tracking disbursements

## **“THE STRANGER AT THE DOOR” — GUIDELINES FOR OUR DOWNTOWN CHURCH**

People who are homeless or transient or otherwise living on the margin are a daily presence on the streets of Spokane and on the steps of FPC. They raise difficult questions for our congregation. How can we both honor and obey our Lord Jesus to “love the least of these” and discern the boundaries of our church’s ministry? How can we minister and open our place of worship in grace to those we find strange, repulsive, or difficult? How can we discern what someone’s need is, at the deepest level, and respond to it? How do we both protect the vulnerable within our own church community and maintain genuine hospitality to anyone who knocks at our door?

In all humility and desire to serve, the pastors and staff at FPC have put together the following guidelines as a resource for training, a policy for managing requests, and a guide as we continue to think and pray through these questions.

### **Values that Guide Us**

- We desire to meet people where they are at and listen carefully to them, honoring them as a human being created in the image of God.
- All visitors to FPC are to be held accountable to behavioral standards to remain on FPC property, recognizing that firm boundaries, rules, and law can serve as tools of grace.
- Our best way as a congregation to meet urgent tangible needs is to support local organizations that minister in the name of Jesus explicitly to homeless and transient populations.
- We desire to protect those within the church doors and especially the children who participate in the school and the weekly ministry of FPC.

### **Specific Expectations**

Expectations for “the stranger at the door”

- Drinking and drug use is prohibited on church property.
- Panhandling and/or aggressive behavior on church property is always prohibited and must be confronted and the individual removed from the premises whenever witnessed.
- Those under the influence of alcohol or other substances are generally not allowed in the building particularly on Sundays.

- There may be times (e.g. winter) when compassion calls us to allow someone under the influence to remain inside under close supervision while waiting for services (Detox).
- Should someone under the influence enter a worship service, they may be allowed to remain if they are not creating a disturbance as removing them may become problematic.
- Individuals that demonstrate erratic behavior and/or disrupt the services/programs of FPC are to be gently removed from the building.
- Staff and dedicated volunteers are instructed to communicate these expectations with grace and firmness, and to call the police only if the situation gets out of control.

#### Expectations for the people of FPC

- We DO listen with charity and gentleness, to anyone who wants to tell their story.
- We DO pray with anyone who asks, and earnestly expect the Lord to hear us and work on hearts that are open to his will.
- We DO provide information on a wide range of community resources through the Community Resources document available at the front desk and elsewhere.
- We DO offer a quiet, warm place to sit and have a cup of coffee, and bathroom facilities (when there are not private events at the church that would prevent access).
- We DO occasionally make phone calls to arrange space at a shelter, etc.
- We DO offer a Care Kit with bottled water, a granola bar, new socks and a list of resources.
- We DO give away donated hats, gloves, scarves, blankets, and other cold-weather apparel.
- We DO NOT give cash.
- We DO NOT pay for lodging.
- We DO NOT give money for transportation.
- We DO NOT give grocery or restaurant vouchers.

#### **Other Guidelines**

- Recognize that the “presenting need” is not necessarily the real need. “I need \$40 to get to Seattle” may be more pressing, but less important than the need to receive respect, empathy, prayer, and the love of Jesus Christ.

- Those requesting immediate financial assistance (e.g. for food, shelter, or transportation) will be provided a copy of the Community Resources document that identifies many social services and mission organizations available to meet these needs.
- The Mission Committee of FPC is directed to target giving to the local organizations to whom we most often direct those who request financial assistance, and to do so with a communication of our intentions.
- Pastors are not always available for consultation on Sunday mornings as they have a host of other responsibilities. Anyone who insists on meeting with a pastor will be invited to make an appointment during the weekdays.
- On Sunday mornings we will seek to have people equipped and ready to listen, pray, and help anyone. These people will be trained on this policy and FPC security practices.
- During week days it will generally be staff members that will meet with these visitors.
- All are encouraged to normally keep conversations with transient/homeless people to 20-30 minute limits. That is usually enough time to convey grace and clarity about what FPC offers and does not offer.