



NEW LIFE CRC DEACON'S HANDBOOK
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BENEVOLENT FUND POLICIES

This Benevolence Policy should be treated as a living, breathing document. It is intended as a resource for the present and future deacons of New Life Christian Reformed Church. All deacons must come to their own individual and collective decisions on the matter of benevolence. Criteria and considerations can and should be amended, added or deleted at any time, and from time to time.

**Benevolence Policy – Part 1
Selection of Offering Causes and Cause Disbursement**

Introduction

Each year the Diaconate of New Life CRC must set out the Offering Schedule for causes for the next following year. This schedule will, of course, suffer a number of scheduling changes throughout the year; however the causes that are originally selected tend, by and large, to remain unchanged from the original schedule. In addition, the New Life CRC Diaconate will at any given time, and from time to time, receive requests from various people (in person or by mail) for offerings, donations or support for causes.

For the purposes of this Benevolence Policy - Part 1, “cause” or “causes” shall refer to any charitable or religious organizations, causes, agencies, missions, camps or programs, whether they are part of New Life, the CRC denomination or otherwise.

It is important for the deacons to appreciate that a person requesting an offering, donation or support in respect of a cause may be an individual or an organization, and may or may not be from New Life or the CRC denomination. Furthermore, an individual may be requesting an offering, donation or support for the cause itself or for him/herself in relation to his/her involvement in a cause (see “Other Considerations” herein below).

The Purpose of this Benevolence Policy - Part 1

The world is full of innumerable worthy causes, all of which are deserving of both prayer and financial support. No person and no church can possibly give a meaningful amount of financial support to all such causes, and there are a limited number of Sundays in the year on which to schedule offerings. Therefore, this Benevolence Policy - Part 1 is intended to address and set down the practical criteria on which we shall base our decisions for financial support by way of our offerings at New Life CRC and through disbursements from diaconate funds.

Our Benevolence Policy - Part 2 addresses how we shall support individuals in our church and geographic community who are in crisis and who approach us for financial assistance.



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The Charge to the Deacons

From the Charge to the Deacons in the Form for Ordination of Elders and Deacons, we find that Deacons are charged with carrying out various forms of ministry. The more salient charges when considering an offering schedule or disbursement for a cause include the charge to show mercy to the needy, and the charge to weigh the needs of causes and to use the church’s resources discerningly. In addition, it is also hoped that the offerings or disbursements themselves, along with our related actions as Deacons, will also assist in part to fulfilling a number of the other charges to the Deacons, such as inspiring faithful stewardship in the congregation, reminding the congregation that much is demanded, providing opportunity to worship God with our financial offerings, inspiring compassion and prophesying as to the waste, injustice and selfishness in our society.

Fulfilling the Charge to the Deacons – The Criteria

New Life CRC Diaconate has set down the following practical criteria (in no particular order) on which we base all of our decisions for financial support of causes by way of the offering schedule and disbursements:

1. We shall support the agencies and offices, and the denominationally related agencies and nondenominationally related agencies of the Christian Reformed Church of North America (the “CRCNA”).
2. We shall support our community Christian schools, which include Guelph Community Christian School and Woodland Christian High School, and their respective Tuition Assistance Funds. The Christian Reformed Church denomination and New Life CRC each have a history and a heritage of building schools and promoting education taught and administered from a Christian perspective by Christian teachers and administrators.
3. We shall support the ministries and programs of New Life CRC (i.e. GEMs, Cadets, New Life Summer Youth Projects, Collective Kitchen, Clothing Closet, etc.). Offerings may in certain cases be taken for the benefit of a specific ministry of New Life CRC.
4. We shall support those unrelated ministries, missions and agencies operating within and/or providing services or relief to the people of the City of Guelph and its immediate surrounding area who are in need. We shall assist such organizations in helping the people in our own backyard.

Fulfilling the Charge to the Deacons – Other Considerations:

1. The Role of Offerings in the Worship Service

In respect of the selection of causes for the Offering Schedule, we believe that, in order to fulfill the charge to the deacons, it is necessary to make the offering a meaningful part of the worship service. It is our prayer that we find success in making the offering a meaningful part of the worship service through our scheduling of specific causes for offering, through the announcements made of upcoming offering causes, through our Deacons’ bulletin, through our



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write-up of each specific cause in the weekly bulletin and through our prayer of dedication after each offering.

2. Offerings vs. Disbursements

When considering the support of various causes, it is important for us deacons to appreciate the differences between listing a cause for offering and simply providing a disbursement to a cause.

Firstly, offering proceeds do not get deposited in the deacon's bank account and do not form part of the Diaconate funds or Diaconate budget. Offering proceeds are placed in the church safe by the deacons, counted by the official counters, and then given to the church treasurer. The church treasurer then deposits the money into the church bank account and delivers a cheque to the designated cause. Disbursements for causes, on the other hand, come directly from Diaconate funds/budget.

Secondly, an offering provides more public attention to a particular cause than does a disbursement. Congregation members read the cause on the bulletin; the cause is announced before the collection; the cause may be made known through an announcement or bulletin board; and the cause is prayed for after the collection. Such promotion creates familiarity, education and a connection to the cause amongst congregation members, which cannot be achieved by a simple disbursement from Diaconate funds. Thus, we should consider which causes are important to promote through the Offering Schedule, and/or whether to rotate certain chosen causes on and off the Offering Schedule from year to year.

3. The Denominational Causes

New Life Christian Reformed Church is part of a denomination that requires our support to study and examine God's word and to spread God's word, love and support throughout the world through its own agencies and offices and through its related agencies. The agencies and offices of the CRCNA and the related agencies of the CRCNA can be found at the CRCNA website at www.crcna.org. In respect of the Offering Schedule, as there are too many of such agencies, offices and ministries for each year, our offering schedules for certain of such causes may be rotated from year to year. Our offering schedule typically includes offerings as and when suggested on the CRCNA church calendar (also found on its website). Consideration is then given to the fact that certain agencies and offices already receive ministry shares. Consideration is also given to the geographic location of those agencies and offices that are community based, with a preference given to such community ministries operating in Canada and in Ontario.

4. Support of Mission Work and Our Missionaries

New Life Church is a support community for specific missionaries through World Renew (formerly CRWRC) and CRWM (Christian Reformed World Missions). Support of World Renew or CRWM may be directed to these organizations' general funds, which are then directed to areas where needed; to a specific field or project, such as Free a Family or the Canadian Food Grains Bank; or to directly support a specific missionary or missionary family. As long as New Life covenants to support specific missionaries, our donations for World Renew or CRWM that are not designated specifically for a special field project or project should be directed to the



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support of such missionaries. Missionaries may receive monthly donor reports that list the names and amounts of an individual donor or church. This gives the missionaries the opportunity to monitor their support and acknowledge the support of their donors.

5. The Congregational Connection to the Cause

It is always important to consider both the wishes of the congregation and the historical connection of the organization with New Life CRC and/or the CRC denomination. Having said this, it is equally important that we as deacons appreciate our leadership role in fulfilling the charge to the deacons, and that we not be unduly influenced by such wishes or historical connections.

6. Discernment

We are charged to use the church's resources discerningly.

Firstly, consideration should be given to whether *the work* of an organization is in line with our own calling as servants of God for the benefit of his created people. Further, discretion is used to consider how much of the financial resources reach the people of the community, and to determine which organizations are better equipped than we to meet certain needs of people in our community are. Additional consideration may also be given in favour of those organizations with which we as a Diaconate have partnered to provide services to the people in our community.

Secondly, in seeking to fulfill our commitment to our Benevolence Policy - Parts 1 and 2, we must ensure that we use the monies entrusted to us by the congregation wisely and that our budget remain balanced.

7. Requests for Support of Individuals

As indicated hereinabove, our Benevolence Policy - Part 2 addresses how we shall support individuals in our church and geographic community who are in financial crisis, seeking counseling assistance, seeking tuition support and seeking mission support. With the exception of missionaries sponsored by our church through World Renew, CRWM and Christian Reformed Home Missions, offerings shall *not* be taken for the benefit of any specific individual; however those proceeds given by members in the offering to the work of the Diaconate shall, in addition to being used in part as the need exists for those ministries, agencies, organizations and offices indicated hereinabove, be used to assist such individuals in financial need in accordance with our Benevolence Policy - Part 2.

8. Sometimes the Answer is "No"

As noted above, the world is full of innumerable worthy causes, all of which are deserving of both prayer and financial support, and no person and no church can possibly give a meaningful amount of financial support to all such causes. After having considered the criteria and other considerations set out herein our Benevolence Policy - Part 1 and 2, sometimes the agonizing truth is that the answer must be "no". In such instances, you may be justified in feeling sorry for the result on behalf of the individual, but you are also justified in making no apologies for the necessary decision to say "no".



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Benevolence Policy – Part 2

Guidelines on Providing Financial Assistance to Individuals

Deacons are to show compassion and care for the needy, both for those within and those currently beyond our church community. Deacons are to “*realize that benevolence is a quality of our life in Christ and not merely a matter of financial assistance*”. To do this, deacons should listen and hear with caring, respect and compassion the struggles of those in need and not focus just on the presenting problem, respect personal information, pray for those they assist, and point beyond one’s self to God.

The deacons are encouraged to regularly report to each other on financial and other assistance provided to families or individuals in need, and to seek the advise and involvement of the other deacons in responding to those in need.

In cases where there is ongoing financial need, the deacons are encouraged to work with individuals or families to develop a Plan of Action. See Appendix IV. In developing a Plan of Action the individual or family should agree that there are problems with the present situation, and that they want to address them. If the person or family is satisfied with the ways things are, a Plan of Action process will probably not be helpful. For those willing to work through a Plan of Action process, financial assistance may be contingent upon whether the individual or family is working to achieve the agreed upon goals.

The diaconate is encouraged to participate in CORE (Guelph Churches’ Outreach Program) or other community-based programs to keep up-to-date on the services available through other churches and service agencies.

Whenever possible, the deacons will encourage people to use the Clothing Closet and participate in the Collective Kitchens, and will offer Garden Fresh Boxes (available the third Wednesday of each month through the Guelph Community Health Centre), at a reduced cost. The diaconate will encourage and support involvement in the Collective Kitchens program by offering to pay up to half of the participant’s costs. Through their leadership of the Clothing Closet and Collective Kitchens, the Deacons should ensure that these programs can help meet the needs of individuals that request financial assistance from New Life Church.



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Providing Financial Assistance to People beyond the New Life Church Community
(Updated March 2013)

If a person contacts New Life Church for assistance, the responding church staff will first ask: "How did you hear about our church?" and "Where do you live?" If the person requesting assistance has a connection to the church or is from the Brant or Waverley neighborhood, church staff will pass on the name and number to the deacons. Other requests will be met with a referral to an appropriate agency in Guelph (usually the Drop In Centre), since in many cases these agencies are better equipped to handle the needs of those requesting assistance from New Life Church. The deacons will be responsible to keep an updated list of these agencies by each phone at New Life Church and will meet with church staff once a year in September to talk through its use. Deacons will also supply make sure that Church staff has a supply of bus tickets on hand for anyone that comes to the church and needs help to get to the referred agency.

For referrals that do go to the diaconate, the following guidelines apply:

Within 24 hours of the initial call to the church, the responding deacon(s), will meet the person requesting assistance at the church when the Clothing Closet is open and/or one of the Collective Kitchen groups is meeting. Otherwise, the responding deacon(s) will meet the individual in some other public place.

The deacon will begin by responding to that person's outstanding need (e.g. bus tickets, gas, and groceries). If possible, any assistance should be given a form that is non-refundable. If the outstanding need is unique, see the next section ("Providing Assistance to People in the Church Community") for guidelines.

If a deacon is not sure about the legitimacy of a need, the deacon will contact staff with the Drop-In Centre, Royal City Church or Brant Neighbourhood Group for advice.

When requests for assistance are repeated, the deacon should assess whether a Plan of Action is warranted, and if so, further assistance may be contingent upon such a plan.

As noted above, the services of a counselor or financial planner may be useful in helping a family define its problems, set goals and identify tasks and opportunities that will get them beyond their current crisis and toward achieving their goals. If the services of a financial planner would be useful to the family or individual in need, the diaconate may engage and, as necessary, pay for these services.

Groceries and Food Vouchers

- In response to requests for food assistance, groceries will normally be provided on a **one-time only basis**.
- This will be based on the guideline of up to \$50 for a person living alone, plus \$25/person for each additional family member, to a maximum of \$150 the first time that a family or individual is provided with assistance.



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- Whenever possible, responding deacon(s) are encouraged to purchase groceries for an individual, rather than supply food vouchers (which are too-easily converted to cash). The amount spent on groceries should be roughly equivalent to that which would be spent on food vouchers.
- The responding deacon(s) will promote the Clothing Closet, Collective Kitchens and Garden Fresh Program, and may encourage their involvement in these programs by subsidizing the costs as outlined above.
- If the recipient of the groceries or food vouchers lives in the Brant neighbourhood, the responding deacon(s) will also make them aware of the services available through the Brant Neighbourhood Group.
- If the individual or family requests assistance with groceries or food vouchers again, the deacons will assess whether a Plan of Action is reasonable, and may provide further assistance contingent on the development and implementation of such a plan. Otherwise, the deacons will respond by offering Garden Fresh boxes and will encourage and support involvement in the Collective Kitchens program.

Deacons may also provide assistance to people beyond the New Life community through referrals from other agencies, such as the Women in Crisis organization. Occasionally a request may come to the church from a support worker to contribute toward helping a woman get into transitional housing. Normally this assistance is not more than \$200. Cheques should be made directly to the housing corporation involved.

Finally, since many people seeking assistance will be referred to the Drop In Centre, the diaconate has included within the Compassionate Ministries budget support specifically for this organization. The Deacons will also encourage members of New Life to volunteer there.

Providing Financial Assistance to People in our Church Community

(not yet updated – to be done in 2013/2014)

Financial assistance to those within the church community will be given at the discretion of the diaconate. Assistance may be provided on a one-time basis, in the form of groceries, food vouchers, and assistance with rent, utilities, medication, transportation, personal care or counseling services.

- In response to requests for assistance with medication, transportation, utilities, rent or other needs, any deacon may spend up to \$100 to support a family or individual in need once.
- In response to requests for medication, transportation, utilities, rent or other needs, any deacon, with the agreement of one other deacon, may spend up to \$250 to support a family or individual in need once.
- In response to requests for assistance with medication, transportation, utilities, rent or other needs, any deacon, with the approval of the full diaconate, can spend more than \$250 on a family in need once.
- In response to requests for assistance with rent or utilities, the responding deacon is encouraged to contact the Drop In Centre for advice. If the person requesting



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assistance is referred to the Drop In Centre for assistance, the rest of the diaconate will be informed.

- Rather than writing cheques to individuals, whenever possible, cheques will be made out to the landlord, utility or telephone company, or medical agency indicated by the person in need.
- At the time that assistance is provide, the responding deacon(s) will promote the Clothing Closet and Collective Kitchens programs, as well as the Garden Fresh Box program.

If assistance is required on a longer-term basis, the deacons are strongly encouraged to complete a Plan of Action with the recipient(s), to guide them how best to assist the family or individual. See Appendix IV.

The services of a counselor or financial planner is often helpful in assisting a family define its problems, set goals and identify tasks and opportunities that will get them beyond their current crisis and toward achieving their goals. If the services of a financial planner would be useful to the family or individual in need, the Diaconate may engage and, as necessary, pay for these services.

Confidentiality is extremely important in assisting those within our church community. In certain circumstances, and **only** with the recipient's consent, the congregation may be made aware of a need for prayer and financial support.

The church community should be regularly reminded that they should not hesitate to approach the Diaconate when there is a financial need in their life or in the life of someone they know in our church or wider community.

Counseling Assistance

When counseling is needed, the recipient will be encouraged to call CAP and will be given a brochure with information on this service. See pages 17 and 18 in this handbook for more information on CAP.

Tuition Support

Through regular offerings members of New Life Church are encouraged to support the Tuition Assistance Funds of Guelph Community Christian School and Woodland Christian High School. Parents who find that tuition is providing a financial hardship for their families are encouraged to apply for tuition assistance offered through each of the schools. If the cost of tuition for Christian education leaves parents in arrears, the diaconate, on behalf of New Life Church, may assist in paying rent and/or utilities. If the family continues to fall behind it is advisable to prepare a Plan of Action with the family.

Christmas Baskets

To assist families in need with the added expenses associated with their Christmas celebrations, the diaconate has a Christmas basket program. These baskets are given to those in need within our church community, and to families or individuals with whom the deacons have had regular contact during the past year. Food vouchers may be included with these baskets. The amount of the vouchers is decided on a yearly basis; in general \$50 for an individual and \$25 for each additional person in the household. Families in need are also encouraged to apply for the



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Christmas hampers distributed by the Salvation Army and other neighbourhood agencies in Guelph. The diaconate may also contribute names of financially stressed families or individuals (of Dutch origin) to the Nederlandse Bazaar, another organization that distributes Christmas baskets.

Support from the Compassionate Ministries Fund for Youth Involved in a Mission or Service Trip (Updated March 2012)

To encourage our youth to participate in mission and service trips, programs and projects, the Deacons may assist them to raise funds within the church community and/or provide some financial support. This support through the Compassionate Ministries Fund is intended to inspire compassion in the participant, and encourage him/her to gain a better understanding and discernment in their response to the waste, injustice and selfishness present in our society and in the world.

Generally the Deacons approve up to \$250 for participation in a mission or service trip, project or activity of one month or less, and will consider requests for more support for experiences of a longer duration.

Some of the criteria the Deacons consider in approving requests for financial support are:

- Is this a project or program of New Life Church or an activity encouraged by a ministry of the church?
- Is this a project or program directly related to a Christian Reformed Church agency?
- Is this a project or program with Christian roots?
- Is this a project or program that will directly benefit Guelph and our neighbouring community?
- Does this project have a youth or a food sufficiency aspect?

Those requesting short-term mission funds are asked to write a letter to the Deacons prior to their regular April and October meetings:

- Explaining the project/trip in which they plan to participate;
- Describing what they hope to learn from the experience and what they hope to give to others;
- Outlining the efforts they are making to raise their own funds and their request to the Deacons;
- Indicating how they might share their experience with New Life.