

# **Ebenezer Bible Fellowship Church**

## **Benevolence Fund Policy and Procedures**

### **I. Purpose**

Ebenezer Bible Fellowship Church (EBFC), in the exercise of its religious and charitable purposes, has established a Deacon's Benevolence Fund to assist persons in financial need. The administrations of this fund, including all disbursements are subject to the control of the Benevolence Committee. The Deacon Board shall appoint a Deacon as chairman to oversee a Benevolence Committee which will make the day to day decisions regarding the disbursement of funds. The Deacon assigned to the Benevolence Committee shall report the Committee activities to the Deacon Board at their regular meeting. It is the intent of the Benevolence Committee to free the pastoral staff of the obligation of attending to financial needs of the church body so that they may focus on the spiritual needs and the administrative duties of the church.

### **II. Biblical Perspective**

#### **A. James 2:14-16, 1 John 3:17-18**

James encourages believers to supply the basic needs of daily food and clothing for those in need.

#### **B. I Timothy 5:3-16 1.**

1. Believers are admonished to seek financial help from their family members before coming to the church body.
2. Those without family or any means of support should be assisted by their local church body.
3. Those who have a history of actively participating in the church, should be given special consideration when evaluating their request for Benevolence assistance.

#### **C. 2 Thessalonians 3:6-14**

1. Believers should be working to meet their own needs.
2. Paul admonishes believers to live disciplined lifestyles.

3. Paul notes that if the need results from mismanagement, the individual needs to make changes in order to meet his own needs.

D. Galatians 6:10 1.

1. Do good to all people.
2. Do good especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

III. Guidelines, Based on Biblical Principles

- A. Relatives should be responsible, insofar as possible, for providing the needs of their own families.
- B. Fund resources should be directed primarily to believers who are actively identified with EBFC. This is a “Body Ministry”. Funds can be used for people who are not associated with EBFC, but this should be done only in exceptional cases for well defined reasons. It should always be determined whether or not recipient is or is not associated with EBFC and whether or not a recipient is a believer.
- C. Requests will be evaluated on an individual basis.
- D. Financial assistance will be given primarily for emergencies and basic needs such as food, utilities, rent, etc.. Financial assistance should be given through EBFC by direct payment to the creditor in lieu of a cash disbursement to the people in need.
- E. If the financial problems are perceived to be even partially due to mismanagement, spiritual and / or financial counseling will be strongly advised, and, if deemed appropriate, may be a prerequisite to further financial assistance.  
It is desirable to provide initial spiritual and financial counseling through a member of the Benevolence committee and / or the church leadership who has been appropriately trained in financial counseling matters. The counselee’s response to the counseling may then be reported back to the Benevolence Committee and be evaluated prior to further financial assistance being given. In unresponsive cases, a maximum of two sessions of counseling should be adhered to as to not overly tax the time resources of the counselor.
- F. Financial counseling for deep financial problems may be referred to a professional financial management counselor. The Benevolence Committee may authorize payment of this service as the financial assistance that the church can offer in an extreme situation.

For those who are outside of our church and may be even strangers to the area, prayer

and significant discernment are required in each individual case. A decision needs to be made whether to refer person(s) to one of the local community charitable organizations or to help with the needs ourselves. In some cases the other organization may be better to meet the particular need than are we. Care and discernment, however, must be applied when turning anyone away ; for, as Hebrews 13:2 says “Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.” The less well that we know the people, the more important it is to avoid the use of cash and to check with references who do know them, in order to prevent misuse of funds.

- G. It is the intent of the fund to provide charity when needed, rather than continuous support. The objective is to provide assistance to those in need by:
1. Helping with the immediate financial need.
  2. Providing the help and encouragement needed for the person to return to being able to meet his / her own needs. There may also be restrictions on the use of tax deductible contributions to the church to provide continuing support. Tax deductible contributions to the church cannot be earmarked for a particular person by the contributor.
- H. Normally, fellow believers should not be turned away and sent to government agencies for short term assistance. It is the church, not the government that God has made responsible for the administration of welfare. The objective of any welfare assistance should be to help the person return to a condition of being able to provide for his own needs. This approach does not, however, preclude the encouragement of use of such government programs based on an insurance principle where an employee or an employer has paid into a fund such as workman’s compensation, social security, and or unemployment insurance. IV.

#### IV. Mentors

For each person(s) for whom a need is brought before the Benevolence Committee, one member of the Committee will serve as the primary mentor. Normally, the mentor’s functions would be to:

- A. Work with the person(s) to assess the need and accumulate the information outlined in Section V.
- B. Present the case to the Benevolence Committee.
- C. Report the results to the person(s) in.
- D. Deliver the check(s) or electronic payment(s) to the payee(s).
- E. Arrange for spiritual and / or financial counseling, if appropriate. If it is determined that spiritual counseling is necessary, the mentor should refer the person to the pastoral staff. If spiritual counseling is required beyond the available time of the pastoral staff, funding for this counseling should be made through the general budget as it is a spiritual matter and not a physical / material need. Financial counseling will be subject to the conditions outlined in section VI.D. of this Policy.

If the same person(s) has a subsequent need, the same Benevolence Committee member should be the primary mentor, if he is still on the Committee at that time. Otherwise, a new primary mentor will need to be identified.

#### V. Presentation of requests to the Benevolence Committee

Requests for assistance may come to the Benevolence Committee through any Committee member. Any member of the pastoral staff, members of the Elder Board or any Deacon may also present requests. Requests should contain a reasonable amount of information, ie:

- A. Name(s) of person(s)
- B. Specific physical need
- C. Dollar value of need
- D. Person's relationship and standing with Ebenezer Bible Fellowship Church.
- E. Prior history of requests from this person and the action taken regarding these prior requests.
- F. An assessment of the reasons for the present need.
- G. An assessment of future expectations for self-sufficiency.
- H. An assessment of the need for spiritual and / or financial counseling.

#### VI. Approval of Expenditures from the Benevolence Committee Fund

- A. At scheduled Benevolence Committee meetings:  
Approved by a majority of the attending membership shall constitute approval.
- B. Between scheduled Benevolence Committee meetings:  
Since needs sometimes should be met quickly (i.e. electronic means, email or fax), the chairman of the Benevolence Committee may gain approval of a request by discussing the need with, and getting the approval of, 50 % or more of the members of the Benevolence Committee. Any verbal agreements must be followed by documenting the agreement(s) electronically. Members may be contacted either individually or in group(s), and the chairman may count himself as part of the required 50%. Whenever approvals are made between scheduled meetings, the details and results of these approvals are to be reported by the Benevolence Committee chairman at the next scheduled meeting. The Benevolence Committee chairman is to report on the status of the Benevolence Committee activities and responses to requests for assistance to the Deacon Board at the regularly scheduled Deacon Board meetings.
- C. By the pastoral or office staff for emergency needs, contact a member of the Benevolence Committee and complete an Intake Form. A member of the Benevolence Committee will then contact the person requesting Benevolence assistance
- D. By the Benevolence Committee for emergency financial counseling:  
Since outside professional counseling is sometimes advisable, this provision allows the Benevolence Committee to authorize expenditures from the Benevolence Fund for counseling purposes, subject to the following process:
1. The Benevolence Committee should do all that they can themselves before resorting to outside counseling.
  2. If the counseling member then feels that outside counseling is advisable, the Benevolence Committee should be consulted. With the majority of the Benevolence Committee's approval, up to three visits to outside counselors at the Benevolence Fund expense may be authorized. The portion of the costs to the Benevolence Fund should be based upon the need for counseling and the financial need of the counselee. The Benevolence Committee should send a letter to the counseling agency informing them about our counseling policy.

3. If further outside financial counseling is deemed advisable, the Benevolence Committee, mentor should confer with the counselee and obtain a status report. This should be presented to the Benevolence Committee, and the Benevolence Committee should make any decisions to authorize any further expenses for counseling from the Benevolence Fund.

E. Whenever possible, items should be purchased or bills paid directly rather than giving money to the person in need.

F. The administration of the Benevolence Fund must be in compliance with all applicable tax regulations. For example, disbursements made to persons who are also church employees may be considered as taxable income by the taxing authorities.

## VII. Fund Treasurer

A. The Benevolence Committee shall select one member to serve as treasurer and record keeper for the fund.

B. The duties of the Treasurer are:

1. Keep an accounting of the contributions to the fund and the disbursements from the fund and the fund balance.

2. Prepare disbursement checks.

3. Organize the data and be prepared to present reports to the Benevolence Committee meetings in the following format:

a) History of each person(s) having request(s) in the past. Each person's file should include:

i. Name(s)

ii. Address

iii. Phone numbers

iv. Member of Ebenezer BFC

v. Membership date

vi. Regular attendee

vii. Since when

viii. List of past requests, each including:

a) Date of request

b) Nature of request

- c) Dollar value of request
- d) Action taken by the Benevolence Committee
- e) Dollar amount given
- f) Check payable to:
- g) Running dollar total of all requests

These logs should include any requests that are denied by the Benevolence Committee. This could be helpful to the Benevolence Committee in considering requests made in the future on behalf of the same person(s). This data can be kept either in paper records as specified or in a data base capable of generating the report. These logs are also helpful when the books are audited.

#### VIII. Fund Budgeting Philosophy

- A. The Benevolence Fund shall be funded by designated gifts through offerings taken specifically for benevolence purposes. The offering checks should be made payable to Ebenezer Bible Fellowship Church.
  
- B. Expenditures will be based upon the determined needs, and not based upon the amount of available money. This fund will not be administered in the way that the regular church budget is handled. We will operate in the faith that our function is to meet the needs of our people, according to the guidelines of Section III, and that the funds necessary to meet these needs will be available. Additional funding beyond that available through normally received gifts may be sought from the Elder Board when the need is clearly defined and presented to the elders. A special offering may be taken or monies allocated from the general budget at the approval of the Elder Board to replenish the Benevolence Fund.
  
- C. The church welcomes contributions to the fund. Church members may feel free to suggest beneficiaries, however all contributions shall be used solely at the discretion of the Benevolence Committee. Checks payable to Ebenezer Bible Fellowship Church for the Deacon's Benevolence Fund should not

identify the suggested beneficiary.

#### IX. Confidentiality

All information regarding the identity of the people helped, the nature of the problem, the amount of money used for each person, etc. is to be kept in confidence by the Benevolence Committee members. Such information is to be given only to other people who have a “need to know”. Other people, who do not have a “need to know,” are not to be given any information. This includes spouses and other members of Benevolence Committee’s families.

The minutes of the Benevolence Committee should record the dollar value of each disbursement approval, and the balance of the fund; but, the minutes should not include names -of recipients or any other details.

The detailed financial records maintained by the fund treasurer are to be seen only by the Benevolence Committee, and the auditors.

#### X. Auditing

Financial records of giving must be audited by qualified personnel (other than Benevolence Committee members or Deacons) on an annual basis prior to the annual report. Personnel can be selected from within the church by the Deacon Board. The treasurer’s responsibility will be to provide all information requested by the auditor.