

BENEVOLENCE PHILOSOPHY STATEMENT

Scriptural Mandate: 1 John 3:16-18 "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth."

It is evident in the life of the early church that Christians accepted the responsibility and privilege of caring for one another financially. They managed their finances in such a way that it was written, "there was not a needy one among them" (Acts 4:34). Although our economic and cultural situation is vastly different than what we read about in the New Testament, we still believe this basic principle of financially caring for one another within the church should continue. The following outline defines how we, as the local body of Christ, called Oak Grove Baptist Church, Ashdown, AR (OGBC) are seeking to carry out this principle in the life of His church.

I. Defining our philosophy toward poverty

- A. It is an accepted fact worldwide that America is one of the richest nations on earth. In many countries our poor would be considered wealthy. The impact of this affluence in America has in some ways re-defined the true meaning of the word 'poverty'. When we misdiagnose the causes of one's poverty or treat their symptoms rather than their underlying problems, we can do considerable harm to materially poor people in the very process of trying to help them. As a church in America we recognize the following truths:
 - 1. Paul says in 1 Tim. 6:8, "But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that."
 - 2. The average American would probably not be content with the simplistic financial life of the early church.
 - 3. Many things that Americans view as necessities would be considered to the early Christians, and indeed to most of modern civilization, as luxuries.
- B. Root cause of poverty from a Biblical Perspective: God is inherently a relational being. From all eternity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit exist in perfect relationship with one another. As beings made in the image of this triune God, humans are wired for relationship as well. We believe God has established at least four foundational relationships for human beings to flourish on this earth: relationship *with God, with self, with others, and with the rest of creation*. We believe the fall (original sin) has damaged all four of

these relationships for all of us. We believe the following forces are at work that undermine these relationships:

1. Individual Behaviors
i.e.: an individual with an addiction may struggle to hold down a job.
2. Abusive or Exploitive People
i.e.: physical/emotional abuse can undermine our self-image (relation to self) and make it difficult to work (relation to creation).
3. Oppressive Systems (economic, political, social, or religious)
i.e.: a recession can create widespread unemployment. Or Institutionalized racism may wreak havoc in a way not easily seen.
4. Demonic Forces at war with God and human beings as image-bearers.

C. We believe that through the reconciling work of Jesus Christ in salvation and sanctification there is set forth a process in a believer whereby these relationships can begin to function in the way God designed: we can experience deep communion with a loving God; we understand our inherent dignity and worth as image-bearers; we live in positive, giving relationships with others; and we actively steward God's creation, both caring for it and being able to work and to support ourselves as a result of that work. When these relationships are working properly, the results of Christ's work rise up and bring healing to all aspects of our lives; families are nurturing, communities are flourishing, work is meaningful, and we are bringing glory to God in all that we do. (1 Cor. 10:31) Therefore, we recognize that it is possible to be materially impoverished and at the same time rich in Christ and His restorative work. "as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything..." 2 Cor. 6:10.

II. Prioritizing and evaluating our giving.

- A. OGBC does not assume that every request for benevolence represents true need. In many cases the will of God is not for the church to give benevolence, but rather to *lead the individual into correcting wrong financial decisions, spending habits, and priorities.*
 1. We don't believe that the Bible teaches the church is called to alleviate poverty or to protect people from the consequences of their actions. Neither do we believe the church is responsible to pay off personal indebtedness.
- B. OGBC considers it a priority to *give assistance to our members first*, who we have a relationship with, rather than giving to those we don't have a relationship with. Since we believe the root causes of poverty lie in broken relationships, we desire to walk beside those whom we give benevolent assistance.

1. We believe we are called to be ambassadors of Christ's reconciliation, proclaiming and demonstrating what ultimately only He can do (2 Cor. 5:18-20). While we believe we are called to be participants in His work (acting it out), we recognize that we are not the authors (causers) of that work. We cannot change broken people, nor can we change a broken world. But we believe that Christ is in the process of changing both, and He gives us the incredible privilege of being instruments He uses to accomplish His mission. We act outwardly in obedience; He causes and creates real change.
- C. While we do believe it is important to screen all requests for benevolence, the church wants to help those who are in true need. We begin with those of the household of faith yet we recognize there are many *outside our church in relationship with a church member*. These are considered next in priority, as funds are available.
1. We believe poverty alleviation is the process of restoring broken people in a broken world to the hope and dignity God intends for human beings as His image-bearers. And people who are broken - the people who need this restoration - are both the materially impoverished and those who are seeking to help them as they walk in relationship to each other and with God. We believe the restoration of broken people involves the journey of salvation and sanctification that all people - both materially rich and poor - need to experience over the entire course of their lives.

III. Qualifications for receiving benevolence funds

- A. Must either be a member of the church or faithfully taking the steps towards membership (e.g. attending worship, participation in a small Group, Sunday School, etc.), unless otherwise approved by the pastor & committee (see no. 2 below).
1. This qualifying distinction is not to promote a biased spirit, but rather to identify the obvious. Our church does not have unlimited financial resources, and must give first consideration to those whom we walk in a relationship with or those allotted to our charge by God.
 2. When a non-attender of OGBC contacts the church office during the week looking for financial assistance, or when a church member, in good standing, brings a request for a non-attender with whom they walk in a relationship - a meeting will be set up between this person requesting the benevolent funds, the pastor, and the chairman of the Benevolence Committee (or the Chairman's designee) and the church member (as appropriate). It will be made clear that this meeting does

not ensure that the church will give assistance. If in the instance that we give financial assistance to non-attenders they must be willing to abide by C & D below.

- B. Must be either giving or willing to begin voluntarily giving to the church. These gifts can be of your time, talents, and income.
 - 1. We believe in the biblical principle of generous, sacrificial giving to the Lord within the local church where God has placed you. We believe 2 Cor. 8 & 9 is the NT standard for giving.
 - a. It is a voluntary act as one has decided in his/her heart – 9:7
 - b. It is to be generous – 8:2
 - c. It is to be evidence of our commitment to Christ and His kingdom work of restoring broken relationships – 8:5
 - d. It is in essence to be sacrificial – the very nature of our Christianity and a reflection of our faith. 8:2-4
 - 2. We believe as individuals in response to the blessing of God, understood as our adoption thru propitiation, we are to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for ourselves as a good foundation for the future, so that we may take hold of that which is truly life. (1 Tim 6:18&19)
 - 3. We believe that those receiving benevolence from the church should continue to give generously to the Lord (Acts 2 & 4) regardless of their position of need out of a thankful heart to the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- C. Must be willing to submit a personal budget or spending practices to the committee and/or the leaders of the church who are involved upon request. It may also be appropriate to place one or more of the following conditions upon receipt of the benevolence funds:
 - 1. Sell unnecessary possessions
 - 2. Participate in money management course
 - 3. Participate in ongoing financial counseling
- D. Must AGREE to the following -
 - 1. Before OGBC gives assistance to anyone in need, one must fill out a Benevolent Request Form and submit it to the Pastor or Benevolent Committee Chairman for review. Should this individual or family be a non-attender and receive a benevolent gift, they must agree to allow OGBC to share all the information obtained on the Benevolent Request Form with other area churches and/or community centers in Ashdown.

2. Recognize that as a general rule we do not give cash to those who need assistance. The Church's preference is to pay directly to whoever is owed money (i.e. land lord, utility company, gas station, grocery store, etc...).
3. Recognize that we rarely give assistance unless we are able to talk the decision over with other leaders. In other words we rarely give money away "right now".

Questions to ask those in need of assistance

- Ask why they are in need of benevolence? This is very important.
 - 1) No fault of their own (family tragedy, personal tragedy, etc.)
 - 2) No savings
 - 3) Mismanagement
 - 4) Greed/covetousness resulting in debt
- Ask them what needs to change in their lives or budget in order to be financially sound.
- Have they sought to lower their overhead, sell off belongings or approach parents/family for assistance first?
- In truly dire situations (food, clothing, housing) we may be willing to help even if it is the result of irresponsible actions.
- Make sure they know that the church does not exist to liquidate personal debt.
- Ask if they have a budget. If so, how detailed a budget? Do they use it?
- Make sure they know they must fill out a "Benevolence request form" before we can consider giving them assistance.
- Ask them if they are interested in getting input into their financial situation. Ask if you can review their budget.
 - 1) Are they saving?
 - 2) Is it realistic?
 - 3) Is it thorough?
 - 4) Does it take into account unexpected expenses?
 - 5) Are they actually tithing?
 - 6) Are they working? Why or why not?
 - 7) Are they enslaved to drugs, alcohol, or gambling?
 - 8) Are they spending impulsively on unnecessary indulgences? (eating out all the time, CD's, clothes, lottery tickets, etc...)

BENEVOLENCE REQUEST FORM

Person(s) in need: _____ Date: _____

Address: _____

Phone: (H) _____ (W) _____

Amount requested: _____ For what purpose?: _____

Status of applicant (i.e. single parent, unemployed): _____

Specific details pertaining to how and why this need developed: _____

What other resources are available to this person(s)?: _____

Have they been faithfully tithing the past six months?: _____

Do they have a budget they are faithfully using?: _____

Have they received benevolence previously?: _____ How much?: _____

BENEVOLENCE APPROVAL

Approved amount:: _____

Check to be made out to: _____

Signature of Benevolent Chairman: _____

Signature of Pastor: _____