**Maranatha Benevolence Team**

It is our heartfelt desire that the administration of the benevolence fund not be perceived in any way as a closed group that makes decisions without an open process, and that anyone in the congregation should be able to give input, but with the understanding that there are guidelines for priorities, etc.  For example, we would seek to give priority for those in need in our own congregation’s extended family, and secondarily, as funds are available, we would show consideration to needs in the community, and finally, as funds are available, to needs in the region.  It seems to be that our first responsibility is always to those closest to home, and to our immediate relationships.

**Biblical Basis for Benevolence**

Galatians 6:9, 10: “And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.  Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to ***all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.”***

We seem to have a special responsibility to help those who are of our own household on at least two levels.

1.  The first responsibility for providing for a family comes from the members of their own immediate family household.  “If anyone does not ***provide for his own, and especially for those of his household***, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever” (I Timothy 5:8).  For example, if a widow in the early church was to receive support and to be honored, she was to be “a widow indeed” (I Timothy 5:3).  “If the widow has children or grandchildren, let those children or grandchildren learn piety at home and repay their parents” (I Timothy 5:4a) for all that they had invested in them.  “This is good and acceptable before God” (I Timothy 5:4b).  “If any believing man or woman has widows, let them relieve (give aid to) them, and ***do not let the church be burdened***, that it may relieve (give aid to) those who are really widows” (I Timothy 5:16).  The nuclear family had the first line of responsibility in providing for their own so that the church or the extended family might get involved in those cases where widows, single parents or orphans were without family networks.

2.  If the nuclear family unit is either unable or unwilling to provide for their own, the second level of responsibility seems to be through the extended family, the local church.  Even here, however, the church is relational, unlike a welfare agency, where one side gives something and the other side does nothing by way of investment or of planting a seed.  In a relationship, both parties are involved in the relationship, and each gives to the other whatever it is that they have, whether it be time, money, resources or prayer.  “Honor those widows who are really widows” (I Timothy 5:3).  Who are really widows? “She who is really a widow and left alone (without family networks) trusts in God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day” (I Timothy 5:5).

So this is not in any way suggesting that we give with any strings attached, or according to law, but it does mean that we should know through trusted relationships the people that we are investing in, and not to simply give in the dark or outside of a personal way of knowing so that the investment becomes a partnership, a mutual seeding in one another, each investing whatever it is that they have.  The church needs to give priority to those cases of widows, single parents and orphans who have no immediate family support, but who are still planting a seed with whatever it is that they have to give, be it prayer ministry, taking in foster children, visiting and helping others by whatever means is possible.  These people are especially to be honored with aid and financial support, because the money invested in this type of soil will be a mutual blessing that will bring an ever greater harvest, and it will enrich both the giver and the receiver in powerful ways in that both will receive a greater harvest from the seeds that they have planted.   Genuine benevolence is a relational rather than an impersonal, bureaucratic thing, it is a hand-up rather than simply a hand-out.

Having said that, the church is not to discriminate in its support of widows, single parents or orphans based upon race, language or gender.  The early office of deacons was there to make sure that the distribution of food and financial aid was done without partiality and equitably between the Hebrews and the Hellenists (Greek-speaking Jews) where there were complaints of discrimination on that basis.  Acts 6:1-7.  We can readily see that to administer benevolence, it requires men and women who are filled with the Spirit, because there is always the opportunity for disputes and conflicts among those who may feel that they are not being treated fairly, and the administration of this needs to be done in a way that those who make the distributions do so with the fear of God, and in a way that they seek to be led of the Spirit, and to be gracious to all without favoritism or personal preference, even though others may not always agree.

In general, we are not giving to ministries but to individuals or families directly.

The most important thing, of course, is to be a people of prayer, to hear God as accurately as possible, and to be led of His Holy Spirit.