

Principles for the Ministry of Mercy

A WORKING DEFINITION OF POVERTY

1. Poverty in material things is the providential lack of sufficient resources to provide for one's self (and for the spouse and/or children for which he/she is responsible) the present basic needs—food, clothing, shelter, and medical treatment—that are indispensably necessary to preserve the life and health of those made in God's image.

WORK

2. God created man in His own image for His own glory, placed him in familial relations, and gave him work: to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over every living thing.

3. Work is not to be regarded as an end in itself, but rather as part of our obedience to our Maker, even as we press towards the chief end: the glory of God and our enjoyment of Him, for His sake, both in this life and the next.

4. While after the fall, that work would be accompanied by pain, sweat, and a return to the dust, work is nevertheless the instrument that God gives to mankind by which they are, unless He providentially orders their lives differently, to provide for their own basic needs and the needs of those for whom they are responsible.

5. God enjoins honest work upon all able-bodied persons, that not only may they be able to provide for the needs of their families, but also that they have something to share with those in need.

6. Sinful behaviors (e.g., laziness, indolence, wanton cravings, and the following of worthless pursuits) often lead to poverty and destitution. However, with regard to any particular individual currently in poverty, it should not be presumed that his/her poverty is the result of such sinful behaviors by that individual.

7. The full-time ministry of the Word is an honorable calling in Christ's church, and those who faithfully labor in it should ordinarily be fully supported by those calling them to such labors.

THE SAINTS

8. All that we presently possess has been received by grace from God to be used in His service and for His glory, and we are to be good stewards of all that He has entrusted to us.

9. All persons are to regard the dignity and worth of each other, as fellow image bearers of God.
10. God, in His providence, distributes gifts and graces among the saints, as He deems best for His own glory and the good of His church, though with respect to any particular gift or grace, some may have more and some less.
11. By virtue of their being united to Christ, all saints are united to one another in love, participate in each other's gifts and graces, and are obligated to the performance of such duties as do contribute to their mutual good, both spiritually and physically.
12. In addition to working to support our own families, the saints are also to work to support the work of Christ's church (and particularly of those who minister God's Word to us) and to have something to share with those in need.
13. Following the example of our Savior, who though He was rich, yet for our sake He became poor, so that we by His poverty might become rich, it is the duty of all saints to be hospitable and to come to the aid of one another in material things, according to their various abilities and necessities.
14. Within the household of faith, those with a present abundance of a particular gift or grace are to share generously with those who are presently in want of such, in proportion to their several stations and circumstances, that there might be present relief from such want, thereby producing a befitting symmetry—with each man providing for those in need according to the extent of his means, so that no man has too much and no man has too little, though some may still have more with regard to a particular gift or grace, and some less—not an artificial equalization or uniformity.
15. The duty of all saints to come to the aid of one another in material things extends to all those in every place who call upon the name of the Lord Jesus; and the saints (as they are able, after taking proper care of their families) should give generously for the relief of the poor in their local congregation, and then in the regional, national, and international ecclesiastical expressions thereof, knowing that the saints' love for one another is a living testimony to the world that they are Christ's disciples.
16. We are to love our neighbors as ourselves, which includes anyone in need who, in God's providence, crosses our path and whom we are able to help.
17. As they are able, the saints (after taking proper care of their families and the needs within the household of faith) are to be generous with their poor neighbors, including inviting them to attend upon the preaching of the Word.
18. As the saints respond to the needs of their poor neighbors, their loving generosity should be guided by an awareness, as much as possible, of the neighbor's

circumstances (including lifestyle choices, cultural values, etc.) and a mature godly wisdom, so as to reduce the occasion for the unintended fostering of an unhealthy dependence or the perpetuation of sinful habits, and thereby avoid placing a stumbling block before those they are trying to help.

THE DEACONS

19. The ministry of mercy of any particular board of deacons is inherently connected to a local congregation (“serve tables”), is always in support of the ministry of the Word (“devote ourselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word”), and is under the oversight of the local session.

20. The board of deacons is to be above reproach in the administration of the resources entrusted to them, aiming at what is honorable not only in the Lord’s sight, but also in the sight of men; and to that end, they should ensure that sufficient and accurate records are kept of receipts and disbursements, and that such records are available for inspection (bearing in mind the duty to protect the privacy of ultimate recipients) periodically by appropriate bodies; and further to that end, they should organize their labors to ensure that (except in cases of imminent life-threatening emergency) decisions regarding disbursements (at least those above a *de minimis* amount) are to be made by a plurality of deacons.

21. As circumstances permit, deacons should strive in every diaconal encounter to pray with the distressed and remind them of the consolations of Scripture.

22. The deacons are called to show forth the compassion of Christ in a manifold ministry of mercy towards the saints and strangers on behalf of the church, exercising a recognized stewardship of care and gifts for those in need or distress.

23. The deacons should remind members of the church of the gravity with which Scripture speaks of those who do not provide for their relatives, and especially for members of their household (*cf.* 1 Timothy 5:8).

24. The deacons should encourage members of the church to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share in order to provide for those in want, especially those in the household of faith, such provision to include not only monetary gifts or tangible gifts in kind (i.e., food, clothing, and shelter), but also an appropriate ordering of their affairs so as to be able to volunteer their time and skills to bless and assist those in want.

25. The deacons should encourage the saints (as they are able, and after taking proper care of their families and the needs of the poor in their local congregation) to give generously for the relief of the poor (“begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints,” *cf.* 2 Corinthians 8:4) in the regional, national, and international ecclesiastical expressions of the household of faith.

26. The deacons should encourage members of the church, as appropriate, to work quietly and earn their own living so that they may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one, and so that they may have something to share with anyone in need.
27. The deacons should be discreet and cheerful when making distributions to the needy, treating them with the respect and honor due them, and safe-guarding their privacy.
28. Diaconal distributions should not be made for the benefit of the able-bodied who are known to be walking in idleness or unwilling to work; but depending on the circumstances, other members of their families might still be eligible for diaconal assistance.
29. The deacons should be proactive in ascertaining that the needs of those in the local congregation, and especially of the widows and orphans, are being met, including the making of periodic home visitations, perhaps with a minister or elder.
30. Ordinarily, regular periodic distributions of diaconal assistance will be made only for the benefit of widows, orphans, the feeble, or the incapacitated (who are presently unable to provide fully for their own needs and have no family willing and able to do so); diaconal distributions for the benefit of others will ordinarily be *ad hoc* and nonrecurring.
31. In responding to a request (that is neither frivolous nor for something sinful) from within the household of faith for diaconal assistance to meet a perceived need, the deacons, if they conclude that the need is both genuine and worthy, will seek to find ways to participate with the member(s) making the request in meeting that need, encouraging therein the diligent employment of the gifts and graces that the member(s) has received.
32. To reduce occasions for temptation, diaconal distributions should ordinarily be made in a form other than giving cash directly to the individual requesting such assistance.
33. In considering the form of a diaconal distribution to a member of the church to meet a need, the further removed the purpose of such distribution is from the relief of a present basic need, the greater the weight the deacons should give to making such distribution in the form of an interest-free loan.
34. In the exercise of their stewardship, the deacons should look into the circumstances, which are not known to them, of those seeking diaconal assistance to meet a stated need, and should seek to develop networks of persons of good repute in the locality to assist them in doing this.

35. In their work of seeking to prevent poverty in the vicinity of the local congregation (and hence proximate to the preaching of the Word), the deacons should organize their labors so as to be ready, not only to respond to specific requests for assistance to alleviate poverty (e.g., maintain a garden in which those able to do so could temporarily labor to meet a present basic need), but also to be proactive in identifying some of the underlying contributing factors to poverty in the locality (e.g., lack of clean water, medical assistance, opportunities for gainful employment) and in developing the resources necessary to address such through voluntary donations (of funds, tangible items, time, skills, training, or employment opportunities) from both the saints and those in the community at large.
36. The deacons should familiarize themselves with resources (e.g., governmental, charitable/non-governmental, commercial, private) in the general locality that might be available to assist them in responding to needs in the locality in a biblical manner, seek to develop informal relationships with such, and encourage the needy to avail themselves of such when appropriate.
37. The deacons should seek to develop relationships with potential employers in the locality, who would, upon the deacons' recommendation, be willing to consider providing employment (either occasional or permanent) to the sufficiently able-bodied among those seeking diaconal assistance.
38. The deacons should take care not to undermine existing social structures that are already in place, except to the extent such may be required by Scripture.
39. The deacons should work with the other church officers to assist in developing a faithful diaconate in the local congregation, and towards this end, they will seek to develop healthy mentoring relationships with biblically qualified men therein.
40. Diaconal distributions to individuals outside of the household of faith should always be made in the name of Jesus, be accompanied by an invitation to attend upon the preaching of the Word, and except in extraordinary circumstances, be restricted to meeting a present basic need.

The Ministry of Mercy:
Materials from the OPC Standards

PART ONE – FROM THE SCRIPTURES

Genesis 1:27-28	²⁷ So God created man in his own image , in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. ²⁸ And God blessed them. And God said to them, " Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."
Genesis 2:15	The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.
Genesis 3:17-19, 23	¹⁷ And to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; ¹⁸ thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. ¹⁹ By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread , till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return." ... ²³ therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken.
Genesis 9:1	And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, " Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.
Exodus 20:9	Six days you shall labor , and do all your work,
Exodus 22:21-27	²¹ " You shall not wrong a sojourner or oppress him, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. ²² You shall not mistreat any widow or fatherless child. ²³ If you do mistreat them, and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry, ²⁴ and my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless. ²⁵ "If you lend money to any of my people with you who is poor, you shall not be like a moneylender to him, and you shall not exact interest from him. ²⁶ If ever you take your neighbor's cloak in pledge, you shall return it to him before the sun goes down, ²⁷ for that is his only covering, and it is his cloak for his body; in what else shall he sleep? And if he cries to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate.
Exodus 23:4-5	⁴ "If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey going astray, you shall bring it back to him. ⁵ If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying down under its burden, you shall refrain from leaving him with it; you shall rescue it with him.
Leviticus 19:18	You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.
Leviticus 23:22	"And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, nor shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the LORD your God."
Leviticus 25:35-37	³⁵ " If your brother becomes poor and cannot maintain himself with you, you shall support him as though he were a stranger and a sojourner , and he shall live with you. ³⁶ Take no interest from him or profit, but fear your God, that your brother may live beside you. ³⁷ You shall not lend him your money at interest, nor give him your food for profit.

Deuteronomy 15:7-11	<p>⁷ "If among you, one of your brothers should become poor, in any of your towns within your land that the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, ⁸ but you shall open your hand to him and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be. ⁹ Take care lest there be an unworthy thought in your heart and you say, 'The seventh year, the year of release is near,' and your eye look grudgingly on your poor brother, and you give him nothing, and he cry to the LORD against you, and you be guilty of sin. ¹⁰ You shall give to him freely, and your heart shall not be grudging when you give to him, because for this the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake. ¹¹ For there will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore I command you, 'You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in your land.'</p>
Deuteronomy 16:11	<p>And you shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant, the Levite who is within your towns, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow who are among you, at the place that the LORD your God will choose, to make his name dwell there.</p>
Deuteronomy 16:17	<p>Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD your God that he has given you.</p>
Job 1:21	<p>And he said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD."</p>
Job 29:11-16	<p>¹¹ When the ear heard, it called me blessed, and when the eye saw, it approved, ¹² because I delivered the poor who cried for help, and the fatherless who had none to help him. ¹³ The blessing of him who was about to perish came upon me, and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy. ¹⁴ I put on righteousness, and it clothed me; my justice was like a robe and a turban. ¹⁵ I was eyes to the blind and feet to the lame. ¹⁶ I was a father to the needy, and I searched out the cause of him whom I did not know.</p>
Psalm 37:21	<p>The wicked borrows but does not pay back, but the righteous is generous and gives;</p>
Psalm 41:1	<p>Blessed is the one who considers the poor! In the day of trouble the LORD delivers him;</p>
Psalm 50:10	<p>For every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills.</p>
Psalm 112:4-5	<p>⁴ Light dawns in the darkness for the upright; he is gracious, merciful, and righteous. ⁵ It is well with the man who deals generously and lends; who conducts his affairs with justice.</p>
Psalm 112:9	<p>He has distributed freely; he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever; his horn is exalted in honor.</p>
Psalm 146: 5, 7-9	<p>⁵ Blessed is he ... ⁷ who executes justice for the oppressed, who gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets the prisoners free; ⁸ the LORD opens the eyes of the blind. The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down; the LORD loves the righteous. ⁹ The LORD watches over the sojourners; he upholds the widow and the fatherless, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.</p>
Proverbs 10:4	<p>A slack hand causes poverty, but the hand of the diligent makes rich.</p>
Proverbs 11:24-25	<p>²⁴ One gives freely, yet grows all the richer; another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want. ²⁵ Whoever brings blessing will be enriched, and one who waters will himself be watered.</p>
Proverbs 13:4	<p>The soul of the sluggard craves and gets nothing, while the soul of the diligent is richly supplied.</p>

Proverbs 14:21	Whoever despises his neighbor is a sinner, but blessed is he who is generous to the poor.
Proverbs 14:31	Whoever oppresses a poor man insults his Maker, but he who is generous to the needy honors him.
Proverbs 19:17	Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the LORD , and he will repay him for his deed.
Proverbs 21:13	Whoever closes his ear to the cry of the poor will himself call out and not be answered.
Proverbs 21:25-26	²⁵ The desire of the sluggard kills him , for his hands refuse to labor. ²⁶ All day long he craves and craves, but the righteous gives and does not hold back.
Proverbs 22:9	Whoever has a bountiful eye will be blessed, for he shares his bread with the poor.
Proverbs 25:21-22	²¹ If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat , and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink, ²² for you will heap burning coals on his head, and the LORD will reward you.
Proverbs 28:8	Whoever multiplies his wealth by interest and profit gathers it for him who is generous to the poor.
Proverbs 28:19	Whoever works his land will have plenty of bread, but he who follows worthless pursuits will have plenty of poverty.
Proverbs 28:27	Whoever gives to the poor will not want , but he who hides his eyes will get many a curse.
Proverbs 30:8-9	⁸ Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches ; feed me with the food that is needful for me, ⁹ lest I be full and deny you and say, "Who is the LORD?" or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God.
Proverbs 30:15-16	¹⁵ The leech has two daughters: Give and Give. Three things are never satisfied; four never say, "Enough": ¹⁶ Sheol, the barren womb, the land never satisfied with water, and the fire that never says, "Enough."
Proverbs 31:27	She looks well to the ways of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness.
Ecclesiastes 5:13	There is a grievous evil that I have seen under the sun: riches were kept by their owner to his hurt,
Ecclesiastes 11:1-2	¹ Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days. ² Give a portion to seven, or even to eight, for you know not what disaster may happen on earth.
Isaiah 58:7	Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house ; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?
Isaiah 58:10	if you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted , then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday.
Ezekiel 18:16	does not oppress anyone, exacts no pledge, commits no robbery, but gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with a garment,
Ezekiel 22:29	The people of the land have practiced extortion and committed robbery. They have oppressed the poor and needy, and have extorted from the sojourner without justice.

Zechariah 7:9-10	⁹ "Thus says the LORD of hosts, Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another, ¹⁰ do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, or the poor , and let none of you devise evil against another in your heart."
Matthew 5:42	Give to the one who begs from you , and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.
Matthew 5:44-45	⁴⁴ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you , ⁴⁵ so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.
Matthew 6:19-21	¹⁹ " Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth , where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.
Matthew 7:12	"So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them , for this is the Law and the Prophets.
Matthew 10:42	And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward."
Matthew 12:48-50	⁴⁸ But he replied to the man who told him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" ⁴⁹ And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! ⁵⁰ For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."
Matthew 20:26-28	²⁶ It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant , ²⁷ and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, ²⁸ even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve , and to give his life as a ransom for many."
Matthew 25:14-15, 20-21, 29-30	¹⁴ "For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. ¹⁵ To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away.... ²⁰ And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more.' ²¹ His master said to him, ' Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master. ' ... ²⁹ For to everyone who has will more be given , and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. ³⁰ And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'
Matthew 25:35-40	³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me. ³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? ³⁸ And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? ³⁹ And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' ⁴⁰ And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me. '
Mark 7:27-29	²⁷ And he said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." ²⁸ But she answered him, "Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs. " ²⁹ And he said to her, "For this statement you may go your way; the demon has left your daughter."
Luke 3:11	And he answered them, "Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise. "

Luke 6:30-31	³⁰ Give to everyone who begs from you , and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. ³¹ And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.
Luke 6:35-38	³⁵ But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return , and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. ³⁶ Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. ³⁷ "Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; ³⁸ give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you."
Luke 10:7	And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages. Do not go from house to house.
Luke 10:27	²⁷ And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself. "
Luke 10:36-37	³⁶ Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" ³⁷ He said, " The one who showed him mercy. " And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise."
Luke 12:15	And he said to them, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness , for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions. "
Luke 12:16-21	¹⁶ And he told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully, ¹⁷ and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' ¹⁸ And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. ¹⁹ And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry." ²⁰ But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' ²¹ So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God. "
Luke 12:33	Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys.
Luke 14:12-14	¹² He said also to the man who had invited him, "When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. ¹³ But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, ¹⁴ and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just."
Luke 17:1-2	¹ And he said to his disciples, " Temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come! ² It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were cast into the sea than that he should cause one of these little ones to sin.
Luke 19:8-10	⁸ And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, " Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold." ⁹ And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."
John 13:14-15	¹⁴ If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ For I have given you an example , that you also should do just as I have done to you.

John 13:34-35	³⁴ A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another : just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. ³⁵ By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. "
Acts 1:8	But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. "
Acts 2:44-45	⁴⁴ And all who believed were together and had all things in common. ⁴⁵ And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.
Acts 4:34-37	³⁴ There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold ³⁵ and laid it at the apostles' feet , and it was distributed to each as any had need. ³⁶ Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, ³⁷ sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.
Acts 5:4	While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God."
Acts 6:2-4	² And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. ³ Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom , whom we will appoint to this duty. ⁴ But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word. "
Acts 9:36-39	³⁶ Now there was in Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, which, translated, means Dorcas. She was full of good works and acts of charity. ³⁷ In those days she became ill and died, and when they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. ³⁸ Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, hearing that Peter was there, sent two men to him, urging him, "Please come to us without delay." ³⁹ So Peter rose and went with them. And when he arrived, they took him to the upper room. All the widows stood beside him weeping and showing tunics and other garments that Dorcas made while she was with them.
Acts 11:29-30	²⁹ So the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. ³⁰ And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.
Acts 20:35	In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' "
Romans 12:4-8	⁴ For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. ⁶ Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; ⁷ if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; ⁸ the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.
Romans 12:13	Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.
Romans 12:20	To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head."

Romans 14:13	Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother.
1 Corinthians 9:14	In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.
1 Corinthians 12:27-28	²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. ²⁸ And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues.
1 Corinthians 16:1-3	¹ Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. ² On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come. ³ And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem.
2 Corinthians 8:1-5	¹ We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, ² for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. ³ For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, ⁴ begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints-- ⁵ and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.
2 Corinthians 8:8-15	⁸ I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. ⁹ For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich. ¹⁰ And in this matter I give my judgment: this benefits you, who a year ago started not only to do this work but also to desire to do it. ¹¹ So now finish doing it as well, so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have. ¹² For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have. ¹³ For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness ¹⁴ your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness. ¹⁵ As it is written, "Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack."
2 Corinthians 8:18-21	¹⁸ With him we are sending the brother who is famous among all the churches for his preaching of the gospel. ¹⁹ And not only that, but he has been appointed by the churches to travel with us as we carry out this act of grace that is being ministered by us, for the glory of the Lord himself and to show our good will. ²⁰ We take this course so that no one should blame us about this generous gift that is being administered by us, ²¹ for we aim at what is honorable not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of man.
2 Corinthians 9:1-2	¹ Now it is superfluous for me to write to you about the ministry for the saints, ² for I know your readiness, of which I boast about you to the people of Macedonia, saying that Achaia has been ready since last year. And your zeal has stirred up most of them.

2 Corinthians 9:5-13	<p>⁵ So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to go on ahead to you and arrange in advance for the gift you have promised, so that it may be ready as a willing gift, not as an exaction. ⁶ The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷ Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. ⁹ As it is written, "He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." ¹⁰ He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. ¹¹ You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. ¹² For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. ¹³ By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others,</p>
Galatians 2:10	Only, they asked us to remember the poor , the very thing I was eager to do.
Galatians 5:13-14	<p>¹³ For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. ¹⁴ For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."</p>
Galatians 6:2	Bear one another's burdens , and so fulfill the law of Christ.
Galatians 6:5	For each will have to bear his own load.
Galatians 6:9-10	<p>⁹ And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. ¹⁰ So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.</p>
Ephesians 2:10	For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works , which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.
Ephesians 4:11-12	<p>¹¹ And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,</p>
Ephesians 4:28	Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.
Philippians 4:6	⁶ do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.
Colossians 3:23	Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men,
1 Thess. 4:10b-12	But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more, ¹¹ and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands , as we instructed you, ¹² so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.
2 Thess. 3:10-13	<p>¹⁰ For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. ¹¹ For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. ¹² Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living. ¹³ As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good.</p>

1 Timothy 3:8-13	⁸ Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. ⁹ They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. ¹⁰ And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. ¹¹ Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. ¹² Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. ¹³ For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.
1 Timothy 5:3-8	³ Honor widows who are truly widows. ⁴ But if a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show godliness to their own household and to make some return to their parents, for this is pleasing in the sight of God. ⁵ She who is truly a widow, left all alone, has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day, ⁶ but she who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives. ⁷ Command these things as well, so that they may be without reproach. ⁸ But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.
1 Timothy 5:9-10	⁹ Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than sixty years of age , having been the wife of one husband, ¹⁰ and having a reputation for good works : if she has brought up children, has shown hospitality , has washed the feet of the saints, has cared for the afflicted , and has devoted herself to every good work.
1 Timothy 5:16	If any believing woman has relatives who are widows, let her care for them. Let the church not be burdened, so that it may care for those who are truly widows.
1 Timothy 5:17-18	¹⁷ Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. ¹⁸ For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain," and, " The laborer deserves his wages. "
1 Timothy 6:6-8	⁶ But godliness with contentment is great gain , ⁷ for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. ⁸ But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content.
1 Timothy 6:17-18	¹⁷ As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. ¹⁸ They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share,
Titus 3:14	And let our people learn to devote themselves to good works, so as to help cases of urgent need , and not be unfruitful.
Hebrews 10:24	And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works,
Hebrews 13:1-3	¹ Let brotherly love continue. ² Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers , for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. ³ Remember those who are in prison , as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body.
Hebrews 13:16	Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have , for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.
James 1:27	Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction , and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

James 2:15-18	¹⁵ If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? ¹⁷ So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. ¹⁸ But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.
1 Peter 2:12	Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.
1 Peter 2:17	Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.
1 Peter 4:9-10	⁹ Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. ¹⁰ As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace:
1 John 3:17-18	But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.
1 John 4:11	Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.
1 John 4:20-21	²⁰ If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. ²¹ And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

PART TWO – FROM THE SECONDARY (CONFESSIONAL) STANDARDS

Conf. 26.1	1. All saints, that are united to Jesus Christ their Head, by his Spirit, and by faith, have fellowship with him in his graces, sufferings, death, resurrection, and glory: and, being united to one another in love, they have communion in each other’s gifts and graces, and are obliged to the performance of such duties, public and private, as do conduce to their mutual good, both in the inward and outward man.
Conf. 26.2	2. Saints by profession are bound to maintain an holy fellowship and communion in the worship of God, and in performing such other spiritual services as tend to their mutual edification; as also in relieving each other in outward things, according to their several abilities and necessities. Which communion, as God offereth opportunity, is to be extended unto all those who, in every place, call upon the name of the Lord Jesus.
Conf. 26.3	3. This communion which the saints have with Christ, doth not make them in any wise partakers of the substance of his Godhead; or to be equal with Christ in any respect: either of which to affirm is impious and blasphemous. Nor doth their communion one with another, as saints, take away, or infringe the title or propriety which each man hath in his goods and possessions.
LC 122	A. The sum of the six commandments which contain our duty to man, is, to love our neighbor as ourselves , and to do to others what we would have them to do to us.
LC 131	A. The duties of equals are, to regard the dignity and worth of each other , in giving honor to go before one another; and to rejoice in each other’s gifts and advancement, as their own.
LC 135	A. The duties required in the sixth commandment are all careful studies, and lawful endeavors, to preserve the life of ourselves and others by ... charitable thoughts, compassion, meekness, gentleness, kindness; ... comforting and succouring the distressed and protecting and defending the innocent.
LC 136	A. The sins forbidden in the sixth commandment are, all taking away the life of ourselves, or of others, ... the neglecting or withdrawing the lawful and necessary means of preservation of life; (Matt. 25:42–43, James 2:15–16) ... and whatsoever else tends to the destruction of the life of any.
LC 141	A. The duties required in the eighth commandment are, truth, faithfulness, and justice in contracts and commerce between man and man; ... giving and lending freely, according to our abilities, and the necessities of others; ... and an endeavor, by all just and lawful means, to procure, preserve, and further the wealth and outward estate of others, as well as our own.
LC 142	A. The sins forbidden in the eighth commandment, besides the neglect of the duties required, are ... idleness, prodigality, wasteful gaming; and all other ways whereby we do unduly prejudice our own outward estate....
SC 1	A. Man’s chief end is to glorify God , and to enjoy Him for ever.

PART THREE – FROM THE TERTIARY (BOOK OF CHURCH ORDER) STANDARDS

FOG XI.1	... Deacons are called to show forth the compassion of Christ in a manifold ministry of mercy toward the saints and strangers on behalf of the church. To this end they exercise, in the fellowship of the church, a recognized stewardship of care and gifts for those in need or distress . This service is distinct from that of rule in the church.
FOG XI.3	In order to facilitate the performance of the duties of their office the deacons of each particular church shall be constituted a board of deacons .
FOG XI.4	The board [of deacons] shall oversee the ministry of mercy in the church and shall collect and disburse funds for the relief of the needy.
FOG XI.5	In the discharge of their duties the deacons shall be under the supervision and authority of the session.
FOG XI.7	In a church in which there are no deacons, the duties of the office shall devolve upon the session.
FOG XXV.6	... The duties of deacons consist of encouraging members of the church to provide for those who are in want, seeking to prevent poverty, making discreet and cheerful distribution to the needy, praying with the distressed and reminding them of the consolations of Holy Scripture. ...
DPW II.B.4.c	c. The session shall take care that the offerings of the congregation are used only for biblical purposes, such as the maintenance of public worship, the preaching of the gospel throughout the world, the ministry of mercy in Christ's name, and other Christian objects. The offering ordinarily should not be used to transmit funds to causes other than the ministries of the Church. If a member of the Church designates a gift to a particular cause, it shall be the responsibility of the session to determine, before the gift is accepted, if it is appropriate to support that cause through the Church or if the gift should be returned to the donor.
DPW II.B.4.d	d. It is desirable that Christian love be demonstrated by offerings for the use of the deacons in the ministry of mercy on behalf of the church. It is appropriate that a special offering be received for this purpose following the Lord's Supper.