

Scriptural Reasons for Dispensing Diaconal (Mercy Ministry) Funds Carefully

Why Deacons at Oakland Hills OPC Must Follow Policies and Proceed Cautiously When Dispensing Funds

"Jesus Christ said more about money than about any other single thing because, when it comes to a man's real nature, money is of first importance. Money is an exact index to a man's true character. All through Scripture there is an intimate correlation between the development of a man's character and how he handles his money." - a quote from Richard C. Halverson, Chaplain of the U.S. Senate

1. We are all commanded to **love God**, and **love our neighbor** as ourselves. (Matt. 22:37-40) Jesus constantly challenges our self-righteous views of love for God and the poor (the rich young ruler - Luke 18:22) and defines our **neighbor** as any person we see that has a need. (Luke 10:25-37)
2. The Deacons are set apart by God (Acts 6:1-6) - a distinct office in the church - for works of mercy so the care of the needy in the church (esp. poor widows) will **NOT be neglected** - and help for God's saints will be administered **equitably** (without partiality James 2:1) - not favoring one group, family, or person above another.
3. The Deacons are called upon to dispense diaconal funds **generously** (Psalm 37:21; Prov. 14:21,31; Luke 6:30; 2 Cor.9:6-15), with cautious optimism in the grace and mercy of God, encouraging the rich of the congregation to continue giving generously (1 Tim. 6:17-19) that the light of the Gospel may shine brightly in the darkness of our community. (2 Cor. 8:1,2,9,20; Eph. 5:1,2)
4. **Wisdom** (Acts 6:3) and discernment must always be practiced, carefully apprehending the light of the Gospel along with each check written and every gift of mercy provided. (Eph. 5:3-21)
5. **Greed, swindling, and covetousness** are sins equal to adultery, practicing homosexuality, sexual impurity, idolatry, drunkenness, gossip and slander. (Eph. 5:3,5; 1 Cor 5:9-12; 1 Cor. 6:9-11) In all these things Deacons must strive to be blameless (1 Tim. 3:8-13), and Elders must remain 'above reproach'. (1 Tim 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9)
6. In one of the most dramatic instances of apostolic **judgment** in the New Testament, Ananias and Sapphira were slain by God for their **sin of prideful greed**. (But Peter said, "*Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? 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.*" - see Acts 5:1-11)
7. Although sparse - **sufficient guidelines and examples are provided in Scripture** to prevent situations of financial abuse. For instance, we are instructed to be careful in providing ongoing financial support to widows (and other persons by analogy). Younger widows should NOT be 'on the list'. (1 Tim. 5:3-16) We are warned to **NOT give financial aid** to some people (enabling them to continue in poverty or unemployment) who become self-indulgent, idlers, busy-bodies, and gossips. Those in need are encouraged to seek help from family members so that the church will not be unnecessarily burdened, and believing family members are strongly warned to care for their own family. Deacons are encouraged to look for family resources, outside the diaconal fund. ("*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 Tim. 5:8) See also Eph. 4:28; 2 Thess. 3:10

Questions for further reflection, study and discussion:

1. We are called to discern greed and covetousness. How does one discern greed and covetousness?
2. How can the deacon's financial aid process be improved - to make decisions quickly - while exercising wisdom and discernment - and continuing to uphold the highest ethical standards?
3. What can be improved in the deacon and elder communication process - so the elders can focus more energy on 'prayer and the ministry of the word'?