

GUIDELINES FOR THE BOARD OF DEACONS

Grace Reformed Church (Reedsburg, WI)

I. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

It shall be the express purpose of the Board of Deacons of Grace Reformed Church to conduct an active ministry of mercy on behalf of the Body of Christ, first within Grace Reformed Church, and then, as the ability exists, to those outside of this congregation.

As a result of the faithful fulfilling of this purpose, the Session of Grace Reformed Church will be free to devote its efforts to the responsibilities of oversight, leadership, prayer, and the ministry of the word (Acts 6:1-6).

These guidelines for the ministries of mercy exist to assist the Pastor, the Session, and the Deacons in meeting the temporal needs of the Body of Christ.

While developing and adopting these guidelines, the Deacons considered the Old Testament provisions for the ministry of mercy, the ministry of Christ on this earth, the examples of the Apostles, and related Scripture passages.

II. ORGANIZATION OF THE BOARD

Because of the modest size our Board of Deacons, the organizational guidelines shall be flexible and adaptable. As God provides additional Deacons, formal diaconate offices may be established. These guidelines we establish now:

1. Meetings - The Deacons should endeavor to meet at least once a month and submit their report to the Session for review.
2. Terms - Deacons are elected and ordained for a lifetime of service. Six to twelve month sabbaticals from active service will be granted upon request or as necessary upon approval by the Session.
3. Augmentation - Due to the size of our Board, the Deacons are encouraged to seek unanimity in all decisions. To facilitate this, the Minister or a Ruling Elder may be asked to serve as a temporary augmented member of the Board while deciding difficult cases or contemplating any exception to these guidelines.

III. RELATION TO THE GOSPEL

The diaconal ministry was appointed by God in service to the ministry of the word and prayer (Acts 6:1-7). Therefore, the Board of Deacons will always endeavor to distribute gifts with a view to opening doors of opportunity for the Gospel.

This does not require the Deacons to verbalize any explicit call to repentance and faith, but all gifts should be offered in the name of Jesus Christ (*i.e.*, as an outward demonstration of his love for the world and our love for him).

IV. STEWARDSHIP OF FUNDS

The Diaconal Fund is for the express purpose of ministering to temporal needs as they are made known to the Board of Deacons. A legitimate “temporal need” is to be understood as food, shelter, clothing, medical, dental, utilities, fuel, and mechanical repairs that are necessary for maintaining employment and/or a healthy standard of living.

While seeking to meet such needs, and in an effort to be responsible stewards of the money which has been entrusted to them, the Deacons take guidance from Galatians 6:10, “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.”

To this end, the Board has determined that the money available to the Deacons will be dispersed after considering the following priorities:

1. Church Members - Communicant members of our local church and their baptized children will be the Deacon’s first priority. 70% of the available funds will be dedicated to members. It will be the intent of the deacons to keep a minimum of \$500 in contingency for this purpose.
2. Church Visitors - Those Christians who live in our community and are regularly involved in the life of the congregation, will be the Deacon’s second priority. 15% of the available funds will be dedicated for use in situations involving our visitors.
3. Outside Believers - Those who profess the true Christian faith, but who are only in our geographical area temporarily, will be the Deacon’s third priority. 10% of the available funds will be dedicated for such use.
4. Outside Unbelievers - The fourth priority will be to address those needs which have been expressed by unbelievers who solicit the Board for monetary relief from a pressing concern. 5% of the projected funds will be dedicated for such use.

V. NON-MONETARY NEEDS

Since not all temporal needs are best met with money (and since funds may sometimes be lacking), the Deacons will assist in arranging non-financial helps (*e.g.*, the distribution of donated food, providing transportation, making arrangements for moving from one apartment to another, *etc.*).

In such cases, the Deacons may offer assistance freely and without consideration to the priorities as listed above under the “Stewardship of Funds” heading.

VI. EQUIPPING FOR MINISTRY

The reason Christ gave officers to the church is that they might equip the saints for the work of ministry so that each individual member of the body might do his or her own share (Ephesians 4:7-16). Therefore, the Deacons will maintain an inventory of gifts and abilities within the local church and actively encourage the exercising of those gifts.

For the encouragement of faithful and sacrificial giving among our members, the status of the diaconal fund will occasionally be reported in the bulletin.

VII. DISBURSEMENT OF FUNDS

One of the most difficult tasks facing Deacons is the determining an appropriate response when a request is brought to their attention. Since only God can know the hearts of men, the Deacons are

often faced with a dilemma in evaluating the true situation which caused the need in the first place. For this reason, the Board will practice the following policy when presented with a request:

1. All requests and action taken will be held in the strictest of confidence.
2. A judgment of charity and a one-time \$25 gift card may be granted to every first contact (regardless of the previously stated Stewardship Priorities).
3. If the request pertains to persons within Priorities 1 or 2, the Deacons will meet with the person requesting assistance, evaluate the genuineness of the need, agree upon the most appropriate and effective course of action, and follow up by contacting the person at a later date.
4. If the request pertains to a person within Priority 3, the Deacons will endeavor to confirm the genuineness of his personal profession of faith through a personal conversation.
5. If the request pertains to a person within Priority 4, the Deacons will offer assistance explicitly in the name of Christ and invite the person to visit our worship services.

VIII. COUNSEL & ACCOUNTABILITY

Because diaconal ministries are oftentimes (and sometimes easily) abused, the Deacons will endeavor to incorporate appropriate counseling in their ministry and, when necessary, to establish accountability measures.

1. If a person within Priorities 1 or 2 requests assistance repeatedly, a meeting will be arranged to discuss the nature of the need(s) so that counseling and instruction may be offered by the Deacons.
2. If a person within Priorities 1 or 2 continue to request assistance repeatedly after the Deacons have offered counseling, the case will be referred to the Elders as a matter of pastoral care.
3. If a person within Priorities 3 or 4 requests assistance repeatedly, they will be asked to meet with the Deacons and graciously informed of their inability and/or unwillingness to help any further.

Adopted by the Elders and Deacons of Grace Reformed Church (Reedsburg, WI) on August 10th, 2013. Amended July 18, 2017.

Grateful acknowledgements are extended to the Committee on Diaconal Ministries of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, to the Franklin Square OPC in New York, to the Westminster OPC of Hamden, Connecticut, and to Second Parish Orthodox Presbyterian Church of Portland, Maine.