



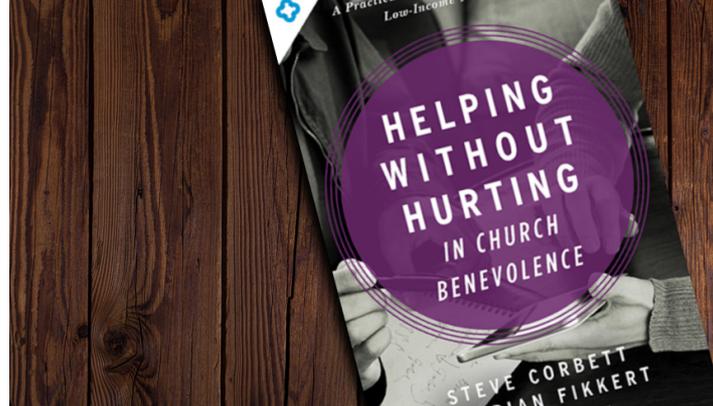
This monthly e-newsletter is a ministry of **Christian Reformed and Reformed Church in America** Deacon ministries.

Reflection

The work of the deacon is often associated with administering benevolence. While this is an important function, a deeper theological reflection on *diakonia* sees the task of the deacon as equipping church members for works of service (*diakonia*). Synod 2015, in fact, used Ephesians 4:12 (leadership as equipping) as part of the basis for important updates to the Church Order of the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA). Dr. Mariano Avila, professor of New Testament at Calvin Theological Seminary, spelled this out beautifully in a background paper about the 2015 CRCNA Church Order changes:

“In summary, service is the foundational vocation of humanity and must be expressed in all areas of life. Service is the search for the well-being of creation, of our fellow human beings, and the glory of God. We are called, in a fallen world, to model with our life and in all of our relationships a central value of God’s upside-down kingdom: *diakonia*. We must aim for the deaconship of all believers.”

Since deacons often act as the benevolence committee of the church, this issue of *For Deacons* will focus on benevolence from various angles. In the future, though, we want to consider how benevolence should be just one of the functions to which deacons give oversight. To read more of Dr. Avila’s paper, [Click here](#) »



DEACON RESOURCE

Book Resource on Benevolence

Several important principles can guide you along the way as you walk with low-income people. The book *Helping without Hurting in Church Benevolence* (Chalmers Center, 2015) describes these principles to help you lay a solid foundation for your church's benevolence work. It is profoundly important to remember that these principles are not meant to be simple recipes that can be applied blindly to every person. Indeed, the more you delve into any given situation of poverty, the more likely you are to discover all sorts of subtle complexities that require a nuanced approach rather than a one-size-fits-all formula. As a result, understanding these principles helps you recognize your need to rely on the Holy Spirit in *prayer*, asking for *wisdom* and *discernment* as you walk with low-income people. This book serves as a great resource for a church wanting to develop a healthy benevolence policy.



DEACON RESOURCE

The Art of Listening Well

Benevolence ministry requires that we have good listening skills. It is appropriate that deacons reorient themselves on a regular basis to what goes into listening well. David Mathis, executive editor of the web-based ministry *Desiring God*, lays out six helpful steps in a form that can easily fit into an orientation package for new deacons, or for members of your church's benevolence team. See [Six Lessons in Good Listening](#).

For additional helpful thoughts from Erin Knight, who edits *e-Quip* for Diaconal Ministries Canada, see [Hey, Deacons . . . Listen Up!](#)



DEACON RESOURCE

More Benevolence Perspectives for Deacons

Dr. David Apple is the director of Mercy Ministries at Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia. He says, “In my many years of experience, I have had two philosophies of ministry: (1) There is no mercy without the gospel—we must provide an alternative to what the world offers; (2) Don't work harder than the people coming for help—encourage independence, not dependence.” These philosophies are seen plainly in his work with poor and homeless persons, drug addicts, incarcerated adults and youth, nursing home residents, separated and divorced men and women, and others. Dr. Apple has served in diaconal and mercy ministry for forty years—first at Northside Chapel and Madison Ave. CRC in Paterson, N.J., and, since 1988, at Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia. He is the author of *Not Just a Soup Kitchen: How Mercy Ministry in the Local Church Transforms Us All* and *Neighborology: Practicing Compassion as a Way of Life*.



DEACON RESOURCE

Moving from Benevolence to Empowerment

The needs in our communities are increasing, and deacons are increasingly being asked to meet needs from individuals outside of their church membership. How do deacons begin to think about and partner so that ministry moves from benevolence to empowerment? Bob Lupton, author of the books *Toxic Charity* and *Charity Detox* and founder of **Focused Community Strategies**, presents a model that deacons can view in one of their meetings in this 30-minute video: [Moving from Betterment to Empowerment](#).

Developing Policy and Guidelines

The CRC's charge to deacons states that “benevolence is a quality of our life in Christ and not merely a matter of financial assistance.” Benevolence involves a lifestyle of love, respect, and compassion. To that end, the links below offer practical ideas to help deacons

develop guidelines for benevolence, use a plan of action when providing long-term help, and identify people who will be able to partner with those in need of the ministry of mercy. These resources also address attitudes and behaviors that are needed to help deacons relate well to the ones they serve (adapted from Diaconal Ministries Canada).

In short, consider the following guidelines:

- Ensure that your general benevolence policy and procedures are approved and regularly reviewed at the council level so that they have continuity.
- See that the procedures articulate other resources that need to be considered before monies are given out (e.g., government or community resources). Some churches utilize a local Christian Community Organization to administer the emergency needs of community members.
- Determine whether your benevolence policy applies equally to church members and to community members.
- Determine whether the deacons administer the fund directly or give oversight to a benevolence committee made up of people gifted in mercy ministry.

See the following links:

- [Diaconal Ministries Canada—Deacon Resources](#)
- [The Network—Benevolence Fund Policy](#)
- [Reformed Church in America—How Should Deacons’ Funds Be Administered?](#)

Deacons Connect

Got a question about diaconal work? Ask your fellow deacons!

Post your questions and ideas in the [Deacons](#) section of [The Network](#). Here are some postings from others:

- [One Model for Recruiting Elders and Deacons](#)
- [How Does Your Church Handle Cold Calls?](#)

A Host of Supportive Resources for Deacons

Remember to Check Out These Resources Dedicated to Your Support

- [Diaconal Ministries Canada, e-Quip diaconal blog](#)
- [Volunteers in Service](#)
- [Holland Deacons Conference—Diaconal Ministry Resources](#)

- [Volunteers in Action—Resources for Deacons](#)
- [Northern Alberta Diaconal Conference Newsletter](#)

Andrew Ryskamp is acting editor of this resource. You can contact him with questions or suggestions at andrewryskamp@crcna.org. Andrew is retired from World Renew after working as diaconal ministries director for thirteen years and as executive co-director for seventeen years.



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