

Can You Pay This Bill?

Chris Sicks, Pastor of Mercy | Alexandria Presbyterian Church
CULTIVATE | CCDA 2013

Before we begin...

Please read “*How would you respond*” handout. Be prepared to answer:

1. What do you think of each situation?
2. Who will respond, and how?

Introduction

- *I was a deacon for 11 years. Have been on staff at Alexandria Presbyterian Church for 13 years.*
- *We get 2-5 requests each week from outside church.*
- *I have responded to hundreds of such requests. Situations in the handouts are real. (I always take notes during calls.)*
- *Today's objective: Respond to requests from those outside your church or ministry, in truly helpful ways, without neglecting members of your own community.*

The Phone Call

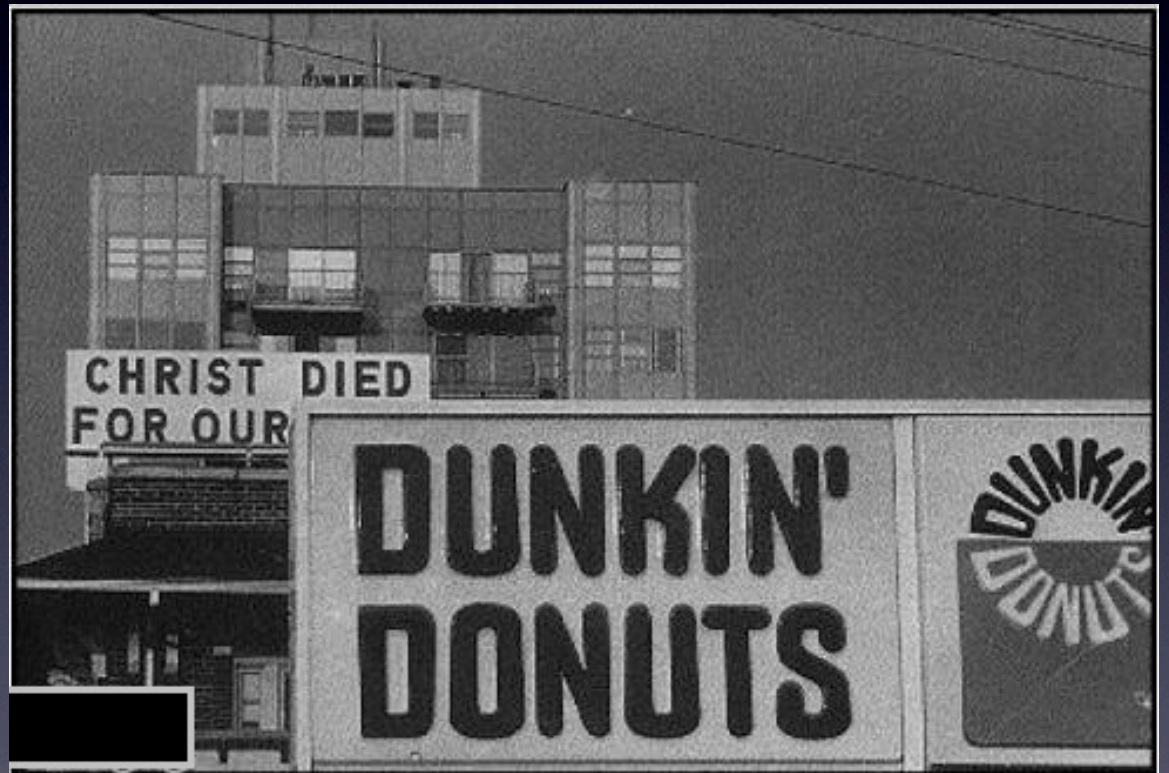
- *“Hi, can I speak to the pastor?”*
 - *(Some people knock on the church door, but our response should be similar)*
- *What are they often seeking?*
 - *Help with utilities, food or rent.*

The Phone Call

- *Who takes these calls at your church?*
 - *Will vary depending on church structure and size*
- *What happens next?*
 - *Mistake #1 — Quick yes*
 - *Mistake #2 — Quick no*
 - *Better Option — Real engagement*

Mistake #1: The Quick Yes, aka: *Material Help Alone*

- All suffering is a result of a broken relationship with God
- Purpose of the church: Help people reconnect with their Creator and know their Savior
- A quick “yes” to every request will quickly exhaust funds, and encourages people to seek material help apart from their spiritual and emotional needs



God's Reason for Mercy

- God is always focused on *eternal relationships* when He shows mercy
- Jesus “had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.” ~ Mark 6:34
- I have indeed seen the misery of my people... and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them...I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt. ~ Exodus 3:7-10

Mistake #2: The Quick No, aka: *A Closed Door*

- Scams and liars can quickly make us cynical
- We are often tempted to limit help to those who “deserve” assistance
- But, if Christ used the same criteria with us, where would we be?
- Every person has a story, and each story is unique.



Mercy is Required of Us

- *The mercy we show others is evidence that we have received and understood God's mercy toward us.*
- He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? ~ Micah 6:8
- This was the sin of Sodom: She and her daughters were *arrogant, overfed and unconcerned*; they did not help the poor and needy. They were haughty and did detestable things before me. Therefore I did away with them.
~ Ezekiel 16:49-50

What's Our Mission?

1. Suffering is the result of broken relationships with God. People suffer:

- *Materially*
- *Emotionally*
- *Spiritually*

2. *God uses the Church to point people to relationship with Him...*

3. *...and to address the suffering that results*

4. *Loving ministry that has lasting impact will point people back to their Creator*

5. Our Mission:
Serve people holistically and point them to Christ

Relational Ministry



Take Care of Family First

- Needs within the Body of Christ take priority.
(Acts 2:42-47, 4:32-37)
- Members receive ~50% of our financial assistance.
Regular attenders: 30-35%
- Outreach is also important, but we are always drawing to draw people into the church family where holistic ministry happens.





A Ministry Sandwich

- Acts 2:42-47 as a model for merciful community
- Helps us explain our philosophy to new folks
- Encourages members that they can get help, too
- We invite folks to become part of this community. Response helps us discern where the Spirit is at work.

They devoted themselves to the apostles' *teaching* and the *fellowship*, to the *breaking of bread* and the *prayers*...

And all who believed were together and had all things in common... selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.

Attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, *praising God*...

Five Pieces of Advice

1. Let deacons lead the ministry, with a team
2. Invite anyone who asks for help to attend worship, then meet with deacons & mercy cmte.
3. Give generously to members, then regular attenders, then outreach
4. If you're always in response mode, try being proactive instead
5. Above all, be the church! The Body of Christ is God's chosen instrument for holistic transformation

#1 Deacons Should Lead

- PCA BCO 9-1
The office of deacon...is one of sympathy and service, after the example of the Lord Jesus; it expresses also the communion of saints, especially in their helping one another in time of need.
- Acts 6:2-5
the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said...pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty... and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and...

Create Relational Teams



The diversity of gifts and experiences in the Body of Christ is a gift to be shared. And the blessings flow both ways!

#2 Invite Callers to Worship

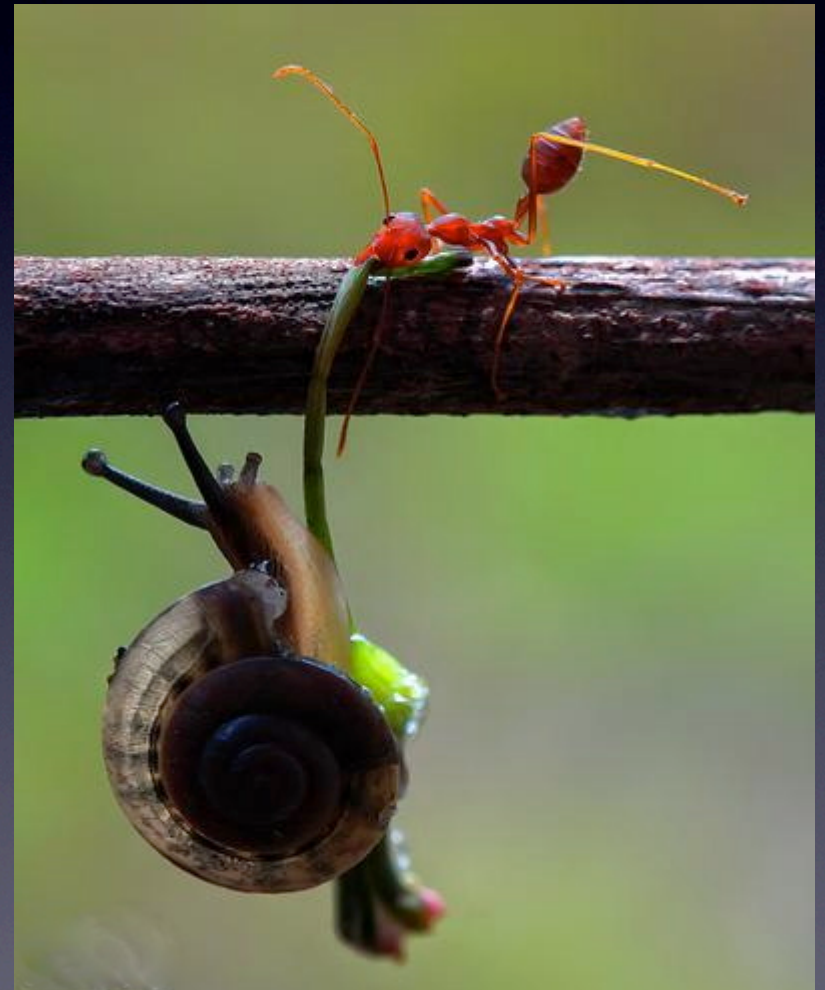
- Invite anyone who asks for help to attend worship
- Tell them they can meet with deacons after worship, to see how you might be able to help
- Give them a friend/advocate. Women for women, men for men.
- Find someone to sit with or near them in worship, and show them around
- Ask lots of questions, to build rapport and get to know them
- Hear their story, express concern, pray for them
 - Prayer is best gift

Decide What to Give

- Don't give cash! Or things easily sold.
- You are beginning a *relationship*. Let the help and relationship develop at the same time.
- It's okay to say no. Sometimes it is the merciful thing to do.
- Don't send them away empty-handed, even if you feel you cannot give what they've asked for.
- A modest food pantry, bus tokens, gift cards, Bibles (in multiple languages) etc are good to have on hand.

#3 Give to members, then regular attenders, then outreach

- Goal is to relieve suffering and provide evidence of God's compassionate presence, in the context of the church family
- Seek to invest resources of the church where the Spirit seems to be at work
- You must build relationships to discern work of the Spirit



Covenant Community

Acts 2:41-2

So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And **they** devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship...were together and had all things in common.

Acts 4:32-34

Now the full number of **those who believed** were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common...
*There was not a needy person among **them**.*

#4 Proactive Outreach

- Church bus brings seniors from two facilities across town
- Reaching out to refugees and asylees, welcoming them into the church family
- Spanish-speaking church plant, support of Casa Chirilagua
- Encourage members to volunteer at pregnancy clinics, mentoring programs, etc



#5 Be The Church!

- Some callers see the church as another social-service agency
- No, the Body of Christ exists to enjoy and worship God, and to tell others about Him.
- So, we extend sincere welcome to anyone who asks for assistance, always remembering that:
 - They need Christ more than anything else
 - Accountability and transformation are best achieved through meaningful relationship



Recommended Resources

- *Ministries of Mercy* by Tim Keller
- *The New Testament Deacon* by Alexander Strauch
- *When Helping Hurts* by Corbett & Fikkert
- *Love Walked Among Us* by Paul Miller
- *Beyond Charity* by John Perkins
- *Tangible* by Chris Sicks
- diaconalministries.com (CRC, Canada)
- tangibletheology.com/resources/ for today's slides, handouts, and other resources

THANK YOU