

FP-17 BENEVOLENT FUND

17.1 Purpose

1. As part of our mission and charitable purposes, First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa maintains a Benevolent Fund (formerly the Minister's Discretionary Fund) which is used to assist members and other congregants, as well as members of the broader Ottawa community, in times of urgent need.
2. While CRA rules for charities normally prohibit donations being directed to individuals, the CRA recognizes the role of charities in helping those in need. This policy ensures that proper controls are in place for funds given to individuals in need.

17.2 Policy Details

1. Money is raised by accepting specific contributions to the Benevolent Fund. These contributions qualify as a charitable donation¹ and will be receipted by the Finance and HR Manager at the end of each year. Where necessary, funds may also be transferred to the Benevolent Fund from the Operations fund.
2. All contributions are to be made specifically to the Benevolent Fund, never to assist identified individuals or families.
3. These funds are meant primarily for the necessities of life in times of crisis and immediate financial distress for those experiencing poverty. Funds will not be granted at a set amount but rather given based on actual need and availability of funds. Examples of urgent need might include a contribution towards rent or utilities, funds for public transportation, hygiene items, a tank of gas, or a grocery card. Ideally disbursement will be in the form of payment directly to the party owed or some sort of gift or other payment card like a grocery card. Where funds are urgently required, petty cash funds of up to \$50.00 may be used, to be repaid from the Benevolent Fund.
4. An individual may normally only make one request from the fund per year. Exceptions may be made on a one-off basis in cases of urgent need.
5. The fund is established for short term needs and not ongoing assistance. When appropriate, the individual will be directed to an appropriate agency.
6. No congregant or Staff should provide or loan their own funds to anyone asking for assistance.
7. Bus tickets or equivalent and grocery cards may be purchased by the Benevolent Fund and retained in the office for distribution to individuals in need who present in person.
8. The Minister or their designate will be responsible for maintaining confidential records on disbursements from the Benevolent Fund.

17.3 Authorities

1. The Treasurer (on behalf of the Board and Finance Committee), Finance and HR Manager, and Minister hold ultimate responsibility for the establishment and oversight of the Benevolent Fund.
2. The Minister is responsible for the assessment of need and disbursement decisions. If the Minister is not available to conduct the assessment, then two people shall make this decision together:
 - a. the Treasurer or the Finance and HR Manager; and
 - b. the Chair of the Social Justice Action Network (SJAN) or other person from SJAN Executive.
3. The disbursement of benevolent funds will be handled by the Finance and HR Manager or in their absence, their designated replacement. Decisions and disbursement will be handled in a timely and confidential manner.

¹ Reference: <https://www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/charities->

[giving/charities/policies-guidance/charitable-registration-relief-poverty.html#toc1](https://www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/charities-giving/charities/policies-guidance/charitable-registration-relief-poverty.html#toc1)

4. When adequate time for discernment allows, the parties responsible for disbursement decisions will meet to make determinations. In situations of great urgency, the Minister or Spiritual Care Visitor will make the needs assessment and determine with the Finance and HR Manager whether funds are available and will be disbursed.
5. Bus tickets or equivalent and grocery cards purchased from the Fund with the approval of the Minister may be distributed by the Operations Manager or the Finance & HR Manager at their discretion to individuals in need presenting at the office.
6. Requests for transfers to the Benevolent Fund from the Operations Fund will be made by the Minister and approved by the Executive Committee. The Finance and HR Manager will verify that funds are available to support the transfer prior to it being approved.

WHO DRAFTED THIS POLICY: Reverend Patricia Guthmann Haresch

WHO WAS CONSULTED IN THE DRAFTING OF THIS POLICY: Finance and HR Manager, Finance Committee, Governance Committee, Social Justice Action Network, Poverty Action Group.

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE TO REVIEW/UPDATE OR AMEND THIS POLICY: Finance Committee

WHO APPROVES THIS POLICY AND ITS AMENDMENTS: Board

DATE OF INITIAL APPROVAL: 2021-08-27

REVISION HISTORY

Revision Date	Version	Comment
21-10-05	21-05-04	Finance Committee edits
2021-08-27	2021-08-27	Initial Governance Edits
2022 March		Board approval
2024 February		Board Reapproval