

“If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us love not with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.” I John 3:17-18



## Procedures for Community Benevolence Requests

(Suggestions from ACCESS & VIS Caseworkers – Updated (1/14/09))

### **When a person calls or walks into the church for emergency assistance, ask two questions:**

**How did you hear about our church? and Where do you live? If people have either a connection to someone in your church or they live in the geographical area defined by your church, proceed with the following:**

1. Ask the caller for **Name** (ask for correct spelling--ACCESS needs that to check their database), **address, phone, and summary of the need**. Tell them that you will pass their information to the appropriate person at your church who will contact them to further discuss their need and possible church response.
2. To determine legitimacy and course of action **send an e-mail to [caseworker@accessofwestmichigan.org](mailto:caseworker@accessofwestmichigan.org) or call the ACCESS caseworkers, Marcia Szumowski 774-2175 ext 101 or April Faasen at ext. 107 with that information as soon as possible**. ACCESS' hours are 8:30 am - 4:00 pm Monday through Friday.

**ACCESS serves as the clearinghouse for benevolence requests that circulate to churches and can advise you of clients who are contacting multiple churches for help.** Calling ACCESS first before talking with the client will provide screening that will save the deacon time and energy. It is important for ACCESS to know how the church wants to be involved. ACCESS will ask you for the name, phone number and e-mail address of the deacon that she should follow up with. ACCESS has up-to-date resources for people in financial difficulty and will pull in the church where community resources can't be found. Thus people with legitimate needs who are truly "falling through the cracks" will be helped, while those looking for an easy handout will be identified. VIS and ACCESS are partners in ministry, with ACCESS working with the emergency needs of people and VIS addressing long-term friendship needs.

**If the person has no connection to your church and does not live in the area defined by your church** you can respond with something like, "I'm sorry but our church does not offer emergency assistance. I can give you phone numbers to other agencies that you can contact." **Other resources to give directly to the caller are:**

- **211 (First Call For Help)** - An excellent 24 hour every day resource for clients needing emergency answers! Many caseworkers are available to answer questions. They keep a data base to track callers. **Cell phone users will need to call 459-2255.** (Simply dialing "211" doesn't work on cell phones.)

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- ❑ **The Salvation Army Booth Family Services - 459-9468** offers emergency programs.
- ❑ **Network 180 – 336-3535** is a community mental health service that can provide a listening ear to someone in crisis.
- ❑ **DHS (Department of Human Services, formerly FIA) – 247-6000**
- ❑ **Disability Advocates - 949-1100** works with people who are physically or mentally challenged.
- ❑ **Homeless Assistance Program – 459-9468** is a clearinghouse for those evicted from their home.

**If the person has called the above resources without success you can say:** “I can also refer you to Volunteers In Service (VIS). They do not provide any emergency or financial assistance. They are a friendship referral organization and are willing to brainstorm possibly linking you with a mentor who will work with you to set goals toward self-sufficiency.” If you do this, please make a quick call (459-7500) or send an e-mail to VIS to alert connections staff. VIS Connection Directors are: Bernita Tuinenga (x17 or [btuinenga@visgr.org](mailto:btuinenga@visgr.org)) and Debbie Jones (x16 or [dbjones@visgr.org](mailto:dbjones@visgr.org)). VIS will ask the client for a professional reference person who can make a referral on their behalf.

**Please keep in mind that a sense of urgency shouldn't force a church into a quick decision without consulting one of the above resources. A sense of urgency can be a red flag.** Sometimes the weekend and after hours calls come to the church *because* the person doesn't want you to check and therefore makes the calls when church personnel are unable to reach agencies for screening assistance. **But if the weekend or after hours request seems legitimate offer to go with them to pay for a tank of gas or a bag or two of groceries and report this help to ACCESS on Monday along with details of the family.**