

Church and Community

Using Aid Wisely

Christians love Jesus. Christians serve Jesus. Christians are the incarnate presence of Jesus. It is therefore no surprise that Christians, when they think of starting a new church or growing an existing church, think about ways to serve their neighbors.

Christians want to serve their neighbors because they know service is a pathway to becoming more like Jesus. Christians are shaped and reshaped by the mission. God does something in and to us when we engage in incarnational ministries. A hunger to be like Jesus draws Christians into service with their neighbors.

Christians want to serve their neighbors because they want their neighbors to have an "abundant" life in this life, and the life to come.

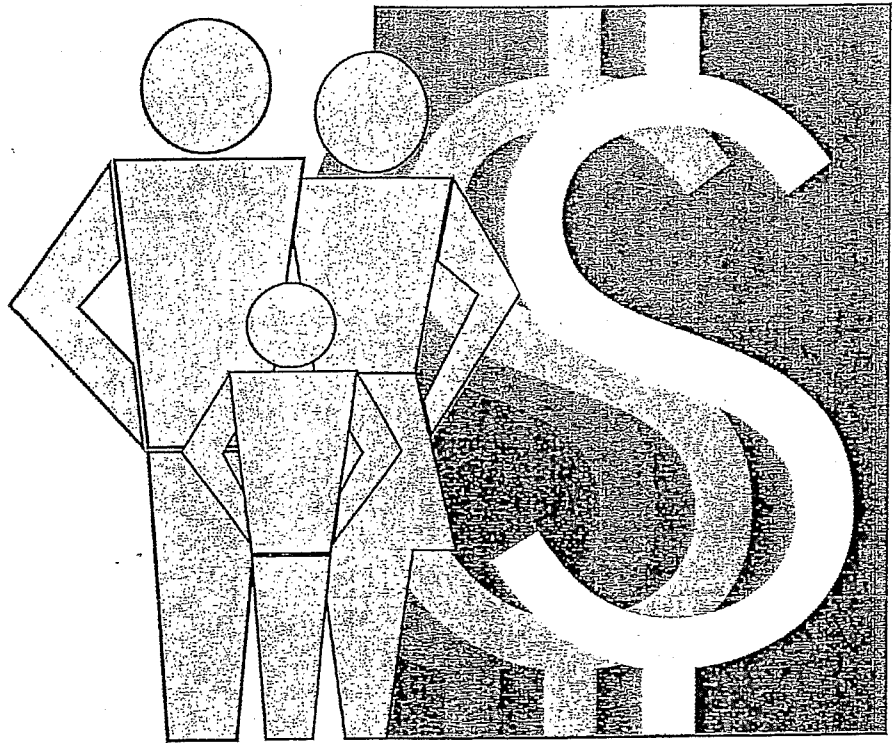
Did you realize that service can be dangerous? How we serve is important! Christians can't be naive about this. Aid, by its very nature, creates dependence. One time assistance (random acts of kindness, or limited aid in a crisis) is not generally a pathway to dependence. Repetitious aid is almost always a pathway to dependence. It takes away the need for someone to solve/be responsible for their own circumstances.

Christians can and should use aid, but they should do so wisely. Use aid as reward or incentive for change. When aid supplements, follows, rewards good behavior, it almost always produces fruit.

When aid is the first, the only, or the repetitious response to a need, it almost always produces dependence.

What does this look like?

- When someone needs to pay back a debt, let them pay \$25 and then match it.
- When someone needs to pay a delinquent bill, let them pay \$40 towards it and then give them \$30 worth



of food items to offset their expense and reward their good behavior.

- Instead of using a food pantry and giving \$20 worth of food to anyone who asks, use your food aid as a planned pathway to meeting specific goals. (One church gives 10 low income families each week \$20 worth of food items from the pantry while they save for a deposit on their first home. They have to show their weekly deposit to get the continuing aid).
- When someone has a utility shut off notice effective in 3 days, negotiate a payment schedule with the company, and then make one, limited payment. That gives you time to create a plan with the family in which you will match their payments for 3 months while they plan and work out a way to increase their income or reduce expenditures.

You get the point, right? Aid that is incentive for change, that rewards new behavior, is much better than a gift that makes a problem disappear.

By the way:

- Food aid is easier to generate in a small and growing church than additional cash. It has the same value. Use it.
- A church can often access the resources of other local food banks. With limited members and limited cash, a small church can still go deep in providing aid that produces fruit by taking this approach while using a food bank's resources.

— Jay Van Groningen, CRWRC North American Ministry Team Leader