

## Can You Pay This Bill?

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June 18, 2013 | 41<sup>st</sup> General Assembly

### Seminar Outline:

- 1) **Introduction**
  - a) Read the handouts and be prepared to answer:
    - i) What do you think of this caller?
    - ii) How likely is it you will help this person?
- 2) **Outline of today**
  - a) We are going to first identify the challenge, talk about various responses, and then I'll share what I think is one of the best (but not the only) ways to respond.
  - b) I was a deacon 11 years, have been on staff 13 years at APC. Have responded to hundreds of phone calls and knocks on door, 2-5 every week.
- 3) **The phone call**
  - a) "Hi, can I speak to the pastor?" or "Does your church help with rent/gas/food?"
    - i) (Some people knock on the church door, but our response should be similar)
- 4) **How should we respond?**
  - a) Who is the right person to respond to requests for material assistance?
    - i) This, of course, varies depending on your church structure and size
  - b) What should we say to the caller?
    - i) Mistake #1 — *Quick yes*
      - (1) Say yes to the financial request without engaging the person relationally
      - (2) But, material assistance alone does not communicate the Gospel
    - ii) Mistake #2 — *Quick no*
      - (1) Don't help outsiders at all
      - (2) But, a cynical Jesus would have stayed in heaven because we don't deserve Him
    - iii) Better Option — *Real engagement*
- 5) **Step back**
  - a) What is the mission of the church?
  - b) What are the needs of human beings?
    - i) Material, Emotional, Spiritual
  - c) All human suffering is a result of a broken relationship with the Creator
  - d) Loving ministry that has lasting impact will point people to their Creator
  - e) *Felt needs are an opportunity to engage whole people in holistic ways*
- 6) **Whole people need a holistic response**
  - a) It's easy to hand out bags of groceries. It's harder to build relationships
    - i) Example of church that handed out food, but withheld relationship
  - b) But that's what the church is best at—being a community
  - c) Loving, gospel-centered relationships are the key to lasting change
- 7) **Members of your church must come first**
  - a) Acts 2:42-47, 4:32-37
  - b) BUT: we should open the doors wide, and encourage everyone and anyone to come be a part of our church community
- 8) **Acts 2:42-47 as a model**
  - a) The church must provide material assistance to hurting people
  - b) But this is best done in the context of everything else the church does

- i) Fellowship, teaching, eating, praying, worshipping
- 9) **Five Pieces of Advice:**
1. **Let deacons lead the ministry**
    - a. See BCO 9-1 and 9-2. Read Strauch's *New Testament Deacon*
    - b. BCO 9-7 provides a great way to involve women and other men in building relationships with the people we serve.
  2. **Invite anyone who asks for help to attend worship, then meet with deacons**
    - a. If they've made the effort to come to worship, you make an effort to make a sincere welcome and make them feel at home.
  3. **Give generously to members, then regular attenders, then outreach**
    - a. Seek to invest resources of the church where the Spirit seems  to be at work
    - b. You must build relationships to discern work of the Spirit
  4. **If you're always in response mode...**
    - i) If you are stuck in a cycle of mostly responding to cold calls, my advice is to cut back on that investment. It's mostly *Relief*, anyway. (See *When Helping Hurts*.)
    - ii) Tighten that faucet, and open another. Identify proactive ministries that allow you to do mercy on your terms.
    - iii) KEY: build the relationship on a foundation other than paying bills. ESL, seniors, refugees, mentoring, community Bible studies, etc.
    - iv) Reach out, offer assistance on your terms, using your people's gifts
    - v) Do a few things well, and refer people elsewhere for other resources
  5. **Above all, be the church!** (Not another para-church organization)
    - vi) In other words, do good work, but let it flow from and lead to relationships
- 10) **Q&A and Conclusion**
- a) What questions do you have?
  - b) Be sure to pick up resource materials.
  - c) See [alexandriapres.org/mercy](http://alexandriapres.org/mercy) for copies of the presentation, slides and handouts

Chris Sicks serves as Pastor of Mercy at Alexandria Presbyterian Church (APC) near Washington, DC. He leads and trains the deacons and Mercy Committee as they show mercy to the hurting within the congregation and the community. Previously, Chris was a deacon and Director of Mercy Ministry at APC. He has also worked at a homeless shelter and drug recovery program in DC, and served as executive director of a mentoring and scholarship program for DC children. His career also includes time spent as a newspaper editor, restaurant manager and Army officer.

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