Shepherd of the Valley

Mutual Aid Policy

May 2020

Approved by the Congregation Council May 19th, 2020

**Principle:**

Due to the coronavirus pandemic and the ensuing economic disruptions, some members of our community are suffering financial hardship. Loss of employment, reduced hours, or other impacts on household income, coupled with continued or increasing expenses, are placing an extreme burden on some. Meanwhile, other members are financially secure.

In the book of Acts, the early church is described as having “all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need” (Acts 2:44-45). A mutual aid fund allows our congregation to live into the Spirit of Christian community, by caring for those most in need.

**Contributions to the Fund:**

Shepherd of the Valley members who are able are encouraged to make a special offering to this fund. We invite financially secure members to donate all or part of their government stimulus check, though contributions of any amount are welcome. These funds, earmarked “Stimulus,” are being kept in a designated fund.

**Requests for Assistance:**

Those seeking financial assistance should contact Pastor Jennie or Pastor Nikki directly to explain the situation and the need. The pastors may ask for additional information or documentation (e.g. employment status, bills, etc.) as needed.

*Who is eligible to request assistance?* The Mutual Aid fund is intended to be used within the community of Shepherd of the Valley. We will consider requests from those who are actively involved in the life of the congregation. Voting membership is not required. Former members, relatives of members, or patrons of Still Waters Café are not eligible (unless they are also involved in the worship life of the congregation). Individuals or households may apply, but only one request per household will be considered.

*Who will review the requests?* Upon receiving a request for aid, the pastors will consult with the council president (Pat Plyler) and vice president (Brian Apuzzo), or another council member if one of the officers is not available. These four individuals will make the final determination of whether to provide financial assistance, and how much to disburse. They will maintain strict confidentiality regarding the requests—including the identity of the applicant and any personal or financial information shared as part of the request.

*Council oversight:* At each scheduled council meeting, Pastor Jennie will provide a summary of the work of the Mutual Aid panel, without any personal details. The report will reflect how many requests were received, how many were granted, and how much money was disbursed from the fund.

*Principles for considering requests:* The intent of the Mutual Aid fund is to provide assistance to those who are most in need within our church community. The panel (pastors, president, and vice president) will decide how to disburse the money, at their sole discretion. The panel will be guided by the following principles as they consider requests:

* Is the applicant eligible to receive assistance, based on the terms of this policy?
* Is the need for financial assistance serious and pressing?
* Will the funds, if received, make a significant difference for this individual/household?

**Duration of the Fund:**

No one knows how long the disruptions due to the pandemic will last. Requests will be considered as they are received, and disbursements made promptly once approved. As long as there are contributions in the designated fund, additional requests will be accepted. Any funds remaining when the pandemic disruptions have ended will be released to the Endowment fund of the congregation.