**Evergreen Lutheran Church & Preschool LCMS**

**“Sharing the love of the Lord with all people”**

**Mercy Fund Policy**

People in need matter to God.

Furthermore, God’s people are commanded to care for each other.

*“Bear one another’s burden and thus fulfill the law of Christ*

 *and give to the people in need” Galatians 6:2.*

The Mercy Fund is an integral part of the ministry of our church to show God’s love and compassion in our community.

**Purpose**

The purpose of the mercy fund is to help support the basic needs for those in financial hardship. The fund is a restricted fund established by ELC Church Council and is supported strictly by designated giving. Gifts to the Mercy fund may not be earmarked for a specific, individual. Members of the congregation, will not be encouraged to give to the Mercy fund in lieu of giving to the general fund of the Church.

The expenses consist of funds disbursed for its stated, intended purposes approved by the direction of the Mercy Fund Committee.

**Mercy Fund Committee**

The Mercy Fund Committee is appointed by the Church Council and is made up of the Pastor, Church Treasurer, Church Secretary and the Council President.

**Responsibility of the Committee**

Mercy Fund Committee has the ultimate responsibility and accountability for the Mercy fund and will make the decisions to disburse these funds according to its charter and subject to these guidelines. The Mercy Fund Committee will provide assistance only as resources are available. It is not intended to cover all circumstances under which funds may be disbursed from the fund, only those which involve the Mercy Fund Committee.

**Oversight and Accountability**

The Mercy Fund Committee is accountable to the Church Elders. The Mercy Fund Committee will interface with the Elders.

**General Guidelines**

The Mercy fund is intended as a source of last resort, to be sought only when a family or individual requesting assistance has explored all other possibilities of help from family, friends, savings, investments, or any other resources. It is intended to be a temporary help during a time of crisis and to be a one-time gift. In unusual circumstances, the Mercy Fund Committee may decide to help an individual family more than one time. However, under no circumstance is a gift from the mercy fund to be considered a loan. No gift may be repaid, either in part or in full, in money or in labor. If the recipient desires to give to the church at a later time, this individual should be encouraged to give directly to the general fund of the church.

Those requesting assistance must also be willing to receive financial, family, or emotional counseling. The Mercy Fund Committee will not provide help to anyone who, in its estimation, will have negative or irresponsible behavior reinforced by this financial help.

Those requesting help must be willing to give the Mercy Fund Committee permission to follow up on any of the information provided to the committee. The committee will be sensitive to confidential issues.

**Recipients**

In order of priority, recipients of funds disbursed from the Mercy fund at the direction of the Mercy Fund Committee are

1. Church members
2. Regular attenders
3. Members of the community
4. Ministries and Christian agencies that serve people with the same needs as those which fit the criteria for assistance from the Mercy fund, but which provide services the church does not.
5. Employees of the church (The Mercy fund will occasionally assist staff members in need, subject to the guidelines of the employee assistance program.)

**Criteria**

To show God’s love to our community, the stated purpose of the Mercy fund is to meet people’s basic needs in times of hardship. Normally, these needs are defined as

* Lodging
* Food
* Utilities
* Clothing
* Medical treatment
* Transportation to or from a place of employment
* Funeral expenses
* initial evaluation and professional counseling appointments

**Needs that may not be met by the Mercy fund include but not are not limited to**

* School expenses, business investments, or anything that brings financial profit to the individual or family.
* Paying off credit cards (Exceptions can be made when an individual has had to use
a credit card in a crisis or emergency.)
* Needs of individuals who are wanted by the law or for paying fines because of breaking the law
* Legal fees
* Penalties relating to late payments or irresponsible actions
* Private school fees or tuition
* Business ventures or investments

Financial assistance for counseling will be considered if it is perceived that counseling would directly enable the individual to address a current financial situation. In most cases, this would be limited to an initial counseling appointment. Under special circumstances, additional financial help can be given. In such cases, the committee will consult to determine a specific amount.

Generally, assistance from the Mercy fund will not exceed $1,500 per person or family (this is a cumulative cap in the unusual case of someone who receives more than one gift from the fund). In very unusual circumstances, families and individuals who are in need of substantial funds (over $1,500) and who have the opportunity to make a life-changing decision can continue to be assisted up to whatever limit the Mercy Fund Committee deems appropriate. Such cases should be reviewed carefully and when appropriate, additional accountability should be sought (such as the Church council, Elders, etc.).

Special projects, sometimes funded by special offerings designated for the Mercy fund, might include supporting local outreach ministries to the poor or helping to provide assistance during times of catastrophe or major crises.

**Procedure for Disbursement**

**Source of Request**

A Request for Assistance Application must be completed by the person requesting help or by someone who is assisting the person in need. In either case, the application must be completed in the presence of a church representative. The church representative taking the request will record references and contacts to corroborate the need.

**Processing the Request**

1. The Request for Assistance Application and documentation is returned to the church office in preparation for presentation to the Mercy Fund Committee. The process can take up to one week.
2. In a meeting, the Mercy Fund Committee reviews the request (including proof of need) and comes to a decision.
3. The person making the request is informed of the decision.
4. Checks are written and disbursed. As much as possible, checks from the Mercy fund will be payable to vendors, homeowners' associations, etc., rather than to the individual requesting assistance.