

Benevolence Ministry

The background of the entire page features a close-up photograph of two hands, one darker-skinned and one lighter-skinned, gently holding each other. A thick, light green ribbon-like graphic curves diagonally across the image, passing behind the hands and text.

Don't just pretend to love others.

Really love them.

Hate what is wrong.

Hold tightly to what is good.

Romans 12:9

**Union Hill Methodist Church
457 Sunnyside Rd.
Hiawassee, GA 30546**

Updated: 3/7/2024

Benevolence Fund

Union Hill Methodist Church, in exercise of its religious purposes, has established the benevolence fund to assist persons in financial need. The Church welcomes contributions to the fund through special offerings or gifts. *The administration of the fund, including all disbursements, is subject to control and discretion of the church. Recommendations will be considered from anyone, but in no event is the church bound in any way to honor the recommendations.* Donors will not be permitted to recover a contribution on the grounds that the church failed to honor the donor's recommendation.

The church recognizes that planning for future needs is a practice of good stewardship and has established this fund as an ongoing fund. Should at any time in the future the church vote to close this fund, all money in the fund at that time will go in the general budget of the church.

Union Hill's desire is to help our neighbors while ensuring that we are in compliance with IRS rules & regulations.

Biblical Basis for the Union Hill Financial Benevolence Ministry

³² All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. ³³ With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all ³⁴ that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales ³⁵ and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

Acts 4:32-35

Who will Union Hill Methodist Church help with benevolence funds?

Our local community: Persons currently residing in Towns County.

How and what type of help can Union Hill Methodist Church offer to our community?

First, and foremost, financial assistance is always based on availability of benevolence funds.

Union Hill budgets for the Benevolence fund and accepts special offerings or gifts. Special offerings and gifts go to the general Benevolence Fund and may not be directed to a specific individual or family. If donors want to help a specific person, the financial assistance should be sent directly to the needy individual and not involve the church in the transaction.

The service provider will be paid by the Financial Administrator or support staff by check or credit card so this may limit how the Church can assist an individual. The service provider must be able to accept a check by mail, a credit card by phone or via secure website transaction. **Cash will not be provided to the individual as this does not meet the IRS required documentation guidelines. Gift cards also do not meet the IRS required guidelines but are occasionally used when the needs cannot be met through the usual methods. This might be a situation that occurs after normal business hours and the person is in need of food or auto gas. Pastoral discretion will be used and documentation of the situation will be provided.**

There are many needs in our community and the Church cannot possibly meet all of the financial needs that may be presented. For that reason, our assistance is limited to basic life needs: electricity, water, propane, automobile gas, rent only when paid to a corporation, and limited prescriptions when purchased from a pharmacy in Towns County. On a very limited basis, lodging at a local motel may be provided. Other needs, such as car repair, may be considered on occasion.

There are a few general requirements:

Applications for assistance are taken on Tuesdays and Thursdays between 1 and 3 pm.

Referrals from SAFE House in Blairsville must be presented in writing.

Union Hill does not pay deposits for any utility or rental. *(Exceptions may be made to this when working with NDO.)*

Maintaining Consistent, Fair and Equitable Assistance

There must be at least one year between helps. Individuals are asked to state what dollar amount they are seeking on the *Request for Assistance* form and this is used as the baseline for the request. Unlimited assistance cannot be provided to an individual or family, regardless of need. To ensure compliance, no individual or family will be provided assistance **exceeding \$600** in a twelve month period.

For catastrophic situations this cap may be exceeded with pastoral approval. **This would be the exception, not the rule, and would require clear documentation of the situation and rationale for decisions.**

Information Required

Each person seeking financial assistance from Union Hill must complete a *Request for Assistance* form (see attached) in person and be willing for the church office staff to talk with the service provider, such as BRMEMC, City of Hiawassee & Young Harris Water Departments, Propane suppliers, rental agent, pharmacy, etc.

Completion of this form, with accompanying copy of the identification provided and bill, satisfies IRS requirements for identification, description of financial assistance, reason the church assisted this person, cost of assistance, population served, and names of individuals approving the assistance. These records shall be maintained by the financial administrator in accordance with IRS record retention guidelines.

Proof of identity is required. This may be accomplished by providing a photo ID such as a valid GA or NC ID card or a driver's license.

Proof of residence in Towns County is required. This may be accomplished by presenting a bill with the person's name and address.

Financial Assistance Program

Intake/Interview/Counseling/Closure Process

Requests for financial assistance from Union Hill are accepted on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 1 pm until 3 pm. A counselor is scheduled to be present during these days/hours to listen to needs and offer prayer and support for the individual. Requestors who come to the church office outside these hours will be encouraged to return during these days and hours. However, depending upon the need, the church office staff may accept and process the request for assistance, in consultation with the pastoral staff.

Intake consists of obtaining the appropriate identification and residence documentation, ensuring completion of the *Request for Assistance* form, obtaining and copying the bill to be paid, asking questions to clarify the need, family, home and job situations, asking if there is a relationship to Union Hill members or leadership and checking the benevolence database for any previous helps.

Counseling consists of greeting the individual, listening to their situation, offering suggestions, if appropriate, and praying for their needs. The goal is to begin to establish a relationship with the individual.

Closure consists of telling the individual how the church has, or has not, helped meet their financial need and any referrals to other churches or agencies. Entry of the information into the benevolence database, arranging payment with the service provider, copying appropriate documents for the financial secretary and updating the benevolence database and filing documents related to the request.

BRMEMC Electric Bill – Contact Customer Service and verify the amount needed to keep the electricity on or to have it turned back on. (*For Flex Pay or regular accounts, this can also be done on the customer portal.*) In cases, where Customer Service is contacted, Give them the amount which will be paid by check if a regular account and document the name of the customer service agent. If the client is not on Flex Pay, recommend to the client that they contact BRMEMC to discuss this option as it eliminates the reconnect fee.

Hiawassee or Young Harris Water Departments – Contact Customer Service and verify amount needed to keep water service on or to have it turned back on. Give them the amount which will be paid by check. If water use seems high, remind the client to check for leaks or running toilets.

Propane – contact the retailer and confirm minimum delivery and the cost. Ask if they can reduce cost since the church is helping (some do, some don't). Give them the amount *which will be paid by check or paid via credit card via secure portal. If a check is to be mailed, confirm mailing address.*

Automobile Gas – ask the client for the make, model, year and color of the car. Call Parker Oil and give them the name of the person and the car information along with amount of gas (usually to not exceed \$75). They will bill the church each month for gas provided for benevolence.

Rent – Rent payments typically exceed what Union Hill Methodist Church can pay in total. For this reason, clients may be asked to check with other churches as well. Rent may only be paid to corporations such as Enota Village, The Gardens, Hiawassee or Young Harris Apartments. Contact the apartment manager and verify the amount of payment needed and give information on what portion will be paid by Union Hill by check. Verify the mailing address. *In general, payments are not usually made to individuals who rent cabins, homes, RVs, trailers or space within their home, such as, a garage apartment or basement. Should the need arise to pay rent to an individual, the person must be known to the church and payment approved by the Financial Administrator.*

Prescriptions – are very hard to manage as drug prices between pharmacies may vary significantly. It is best to contact several pharmacies and shop for the lowest price. However, this is not always feasible since many clients lack the ability to do this for themselves and church staff may not always have time to do this. Most pharmacies will not take a credit card over the phone nor allow the church to charge to an account. This makes it difficult to provide assistance for prescriptions so we may offer to pay another bill, such as electricity or water, in order to allow the client to pay for prescriptions. In those cases where we do attempt to help with prescriptions, the pharmacy must be located in Towns County because of the need to go to the pharmacy for the credit card transaction.

Lodging – is also a difficult area to manage as our target service population does not include transients. On some occasions, lodging may be provided for a family who has been evicted or where their permanent lodging is not available due to fire, flooding, etc. In cases of evictions, Ninth District Opportunity should be contacted. Pastoral staff must be consulted on this before arranging lodging. Lodging assistance should not exceed three nights. Homeless shelters are available in the Gainesville and Murphy areas, however, there are requirements that the clients must meet and it is difficult to place someone in either area. Budget Inn in Hiawassee will work with the church and will accept a credit card for payment.

Other Requests for Assistance – When clients present with a need outside what Union Hill helps with, the intake staff may discuss if we can help with another bill that would allow them to then pay the car insurance, rent, medical bills, car repairs or whatever the need is.

Clothing – Any requests for assistance with clothing are referred to The Hope Room or to the VFW Thrift Store or Macedonia's Necessary Closet.

Food – Any requests for food are referred to Towns County Food Pantry. Union Hill supports the TCFP through donations of both food and monetary donations. For those without a means to go to the TCFP, their staff will work with the individual to deliver food, if needed.

This is not a comprehensive list but does include those utilized more frequently for referral or collaboration..

Ninth District Opportunity

Ninth District Opportunity's Community Services Department works directly with low-income families to reduce the impact of poverty in the local communities of North Georgia. Each participant is evaluated in ten dimensions to determine the barriers to self-sufficiency and establish an achievable workplan customized to the individual household needs.

Services offered through the Community Services department:

- * Community Resource Coordination
- * Crisis Rent and Utility Assistance
- * Emergency Food Assistance
- * Family Development Counseling
- * Income Management Counseling
- * Employment Counseling
- * Work Experience Placement
- * SSI Advocacy (SOAR Certified)
- * Education Counseling and Referral Services
- * Transportation Assistance
- * Indigent Medication Assistance
- * SNAP (Food Stamp) Applications

Saint Vincent DePaul (St Francis Catholic Church)

SVdP is an independent, international organization helping the needy of all faiths, creeds, and race, and is affiliated with the Catholic Church but not part of the hierarchy. The ministry relies on unpaid volunteers who dedicate time and talents to help others in need. Help is provided to the needy by direct aid to those in immediate crisis by paying rent, utility bills, medical, food, clothing, transportation and other energy needs. We provide support to support to families of Towns and Union Counties. Contact: If you have a need: 706-745-0552.

Avita

Avita Community Partners was formed by the 1993 Georgia State Legislature to serve persons experiencing the disabling effects of mental illness, developmental disabilities, and addictive diseases. Originally founded as Georgia Mountains Community Services (GMCS), Avita Community Partners seeks to promote safe, stable, and meaningful lives for citizens and the office for this area is located in Blairsville. Our variety of services and programs are aimed at helping individuals, families, and communities minimize barriers and achieve their dreams.

Other Local Churches

Macedonia Baptist Church
Sharp Memorial Methodist Church
Hiawassee Methodist Church
House of Prayer (Blairsville)

McConnell Baptist Church

Helping Hands Community Based Services, Inc.

HH is an outpatient provider of behavioral health and substance abuse services. We are a community based service agency that address individuals, their families, schools, and their communities through a holistic approach. We are an integrated mental health and addictive disease support team of passionate, loyal, and dedicated advocates and mentors for the community.

This agency provides multiple services to children, adolescents, and adults serviced under the Georgia Department of Human Services, The Department of Human Services, The Department of Behavioral Health and Development Disabilities, and The Georgia Department of Community Health. The local office is based in Blairsville. Helping Hands completes a comprehensive assessment of needs of the consumer and provides preventative measures aimed at addressing risk factors and social problems individuals may face in the community.

Women's Enrichment Center (WEC)

This agency offers caring and compassionate support for women and families through free and confidential services:

- Coaching by trained advocates.
- Pregnancy Test and Limited Ultrasound referrals
- Baby clothing, nursery items, car seats, and diapers
- Childbirth Education Classes
- Parenting Classes
- Post-Abortion Support
- Bible Studies
- Marriage Enrichment and Coaching
- Emotional/Spiritual Support

S.A.F.E (Support in Abusive Family Emergencies)

Providing support advocacy & emergency shelter to victims of domestic, child and/or sexual abuse, regardless of gender, & to heighten community awareness of such abuse in Union and Towns Counties.