

How to Connect with Someone Seeking Help from the WPC Christmas Benevolence Fund

1. Use the phone number you are given to contact the person requesting assistance (you may block your phone number if you wish). If you have tried the number multiple times and left a message with no answer, consider texting your name and Westminster affiliation and a good time to call you back. Note that some callers have pay-as-you-go phone plans that make texts cheaper than phone calls. Please also note that some folks share a phone with others, so you may need to ask for the caller by name.
2. Introduce yourself as a member of WPC. For example, open the conversation: “Hi, my name is _____. I understand you called our Westminster Presbyterian Church office in need of assistance. Would you share some information about your needs with me?”
3. Determine the financial need. The church can assist on a one-time basis for a short-term need. You can be reimbursed from the Christmas Benevolence Fund for up to \$300. You are invited, but by no means required, to share more from your own funds. If you are interested in meeting a greater need by pooling several shares of the fund, please contact a member of the Christmas Benevolence team: Elise Ragland, Cynthia Hanes, Marcia Kiger or Ellen Williams Hensle.

How to handle common types of requests:

➤ Rental Assistance

Ask for contact information for the motel or apartment manager. Be sure to get your caller’s apartment number or room number.

- Let the person you are working with know you will contact the motel or apartment manager and arrange to make a payment on their behalf.
- Call the manager and arrange the payment. Most hotels and apartment complexes will accept a credit card payment over the phone or by faxing a form. If you prefer, you may go directly to the office and make a payment in person.
- Be sure to get a receipt for the payment, which you will submit with your Christmas Benevolence form.

➤ Utility Bill

Confirm the utility provider. Ask the person you are assisting for the name on the account, the service address including zip code, the account number including leading zeros, and the phone number associated with the account.

- For Austin Energy utilities, call 1-833-375-4919 to pay by phone, or pay online at <https://coautilities.com/>. Scroll past the log in section and click “Make A Quick Payment.”

➤ **Groceries**

The fund was created to give our church members the opportunity to help someone face-to-face and gain understanding of the many needs of our neighbors. Usually, we would encourage you go to shopping with the caller, and you may still do this if you and the caller both feel comfortable. Due to ongoing COVID concerns, you may feel safer purchasing a gift card. Consider meeting up with the caller to deliver the gift card, rather than mailing it. Whether you go shopping with the caller or provide a gift card, be sure to get a receipt.

When you have finished helping the caller:

1. Email the Christmas Benevolence team member who recruited you and let her know how you assisted the caller.
2. Fill out the Christmas Benevolence Gift Form online as soon as possible: <https://wpcaustin.org/outreach/christmas-benevolence-gift/>. Be sure to attach a picture of your receipt(s) to the form. If you received an email receipt, please fill out the form online and forward your e-receipt to our church accountant, Michelle Elley: wpcadmin@wpcaustin.org.

If you would prefer to mail in a paper version of the form and your receipt(s), please contact Aimee Karr in the church office: wpc@wpcaustin.org or (512) 459-5497.

Our usual turn-around time for reimbursement checks is about two weeks.

**** Feel free to recommend additional resources for those with ongoing needs:**

2-1-1 is a program of the Texas Health and Human Services Commission. The line is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Operators are knowledgeable about services in the area and can use their database to help callers find food, housing, childcare, crisis counseling, substance abuse treatment and more. If 2-1-1 rings busy, call 1-877-541-7905.

You can also use <https://www.findhelp.org/> to search resources by zip code.

If the person you helped continues to call you:

Occasionally, a caller may come to see you as an ongoing source of support and continue to contact you after you have fulfilled their initial request. According to the guidelines set by the donor and the Mission Committee, the Benevolence Fund is intended for help with a one-time need once a funding cycle (the cycle begins when we receive the funds from the donor, usually in September, and continues until we receive the next round of funds). It is absolutely acceptable to be firm with the caller about your limitations: "Our church's program is designed for help once a year. I'm sorry I can't do more for you at this time." You might suggest that they use the resources listed above to find other sources of support. After you have delivered this message to the caller, you may choose to block their number (a quick google search will tell you how to do this on your cell phone or landline).

If you are able to and interested in helping the caller further, take some time to consider your limits before responding. Would you be willing to help the caller once more from your own funds? Twice? Would the caller be better served by connecting with an agency that could be a long-term source of support?

If you are not sure what to do, don't hesitate to call a member of the Christmas Benevolence team or the church office.