

## **First Presbyterian Church** **Guiding Principles for Christian Outreach Ministries**

### **Reconciliation of the “Four Foundational Relationships”**

The Christian Outreach Committee (COC) values reconciliation as the primary focus of our ministry (rather than the alleviation of material poverty). We work for the reconciliation of the “four foundational relationships” that every person has with God, self, other people, and the rest of creation. We seek to promote the health of these relationships in those we are called to serve by refraining from paternalism and by empowering people to work for their own self-development. We also seek to promote the health of these relationships in ourselves by abandoning our “God complexes” and by recognizing our own brokenness, non-material poverty, and need for God’s grace. Ultimately, the focus of our outreach ministry will be the people, not the product.

We recognize that many different types of poverty result from brokenness in the four foundational relationships. In addition to material poverty, unreconciled relationships result in spiritual poverty, powerlessness, the loss of dignity, voicelessness, hopelessness (the inability to imagine the future differently), invisibility (having assets that aren’t recognized or valued), vulnerability, the lack of knowledge, the lack of coping skills, and the lack of support systems. We seek to focus on reconciliation rather than on the alleviation of material poverty, so that we don’t increase people’s poverty in other areas (loss of dignity, lack of power, etc.) in our efforts to improve someone’s material well-being. The alleviation of material poverty may be a *byproduct* of the work of reconciliation, but our priority and starting point should always be the strengthening of the four foundational relationships in others and in ourselves.

### **A Relational Approach**

COC values a relational approach to outreach ministry, given our primary focus on reconciliation. We seek to build relationships with those we are serving, seeing them as equals in God’s eyes, treating them as people capable of being responsible stewards, and involving them in every aspect of our ministry, including the planning, implementation, evaluation, and celebration of our work together. One phrase that captures the essence of this spirit of mutuality is “walking together” – we are doing things “with” others rather than “to” or “for,” giving and receiving in both directions as we learn from and bless one another.

We value a relational approach that involves building relationships not only with the people we are directly serving, but also with organizations, groups, congregations, and leaders who are already working “on the ground” or with the people being served. We seek to work under their direction, understanding ourselves as participants in *their* ministry, willing to be involved without being in charge.

We value a relational approach to outreach ministry that is rewarding for both sides. The person serving should have a rewarding (even if challenging) experience, and the person or community being served should be positioned to move to a higher plane. Success happens when this kind of “win-win” situation occurs.

### **An Asset-Based Approach**

COC values asset-based approaches to outreach ministry, rather than need-based approaches. Beginning with a person’s needs and problems puts them in an inferior position and falsely affirms our own identity as superior people with all the solutions. We seek to empower those we are called to serve by helping them to name and exercise their assets as we participate together in seeking solutions.

## **Importance of Assessment**

COC values assessment as a key tool for ensuring that we are focusing on the reconciliation of relationships and on an empowering approach to outreach ministry. Before we undertake any project (whether current or new), we will ask questions that will include whether a situation requires relief (a life/health threatening emergency), rehabilitation (restoration to the positive aspects of a pre-crisis condition), or development (long-term empowerment). We will also explore which other organizations, groups, congregations, or leaders are already involved, what counsel they might offer us, and how we might partner with them or come underneath their leadership. Through the process of assessment, we will also determine the specific nature of our role and set specific goals, which we will then evaluate after all activities and trips.

## **Long-Term Commitments Geared Toward Sustainability and Continuity**

COC values investing our financial and human resources in outreach ministries that show potential for long-term sustainability and continuity. Rather than going for short-term successes or quick fixes, we value committing to longer-term processes of empowerment, even if they are challenging and take longer to bear fruit. It is important to understand and accept that true wholeness is a long-term process that will not happen overnight (counter to our cultural mindset). Partnerships with other organizations, groups, congregations, and leaders will also help foster a greater continuity of service, from the perspective both of those serving and of those being served.

## **Inclusion of Christian Spiritual Reflection**

COC values Christian spiritual reflection as an integral component of all outreach activities and trips. FPC's outreach leaders and teams are not simply people involved in humanitarian good works or "United Way"-style projects. Rather, we are disciples committed to times of reflection on scripture and prayer, and our outreach activities will include reflection on how our work is an expression of being a disciple of Jesus Christ. "Prayer partners" can be set up between participants and church members staying at home, between participants and other participants, or even between participants and "recipients."

## **Education and Training**

COC values the education of both our own church members and of those we are called to serve. We seek to educate our own church members about our guiding principles for outreach and to provide them with practical training specific to different outreach activities. We also seek to provide those we are called to serve with training that will "teach them how to fish for a lifetime." In all of our activities we will ask, "Are there opportunities for equipping those we are serving to do for themselves what we have come here to do?" Training can be specific to certain skills, or it can encompass broader concepts like education and financial management.