



We ask all of our friends and volunteers to take the Oath for Compassionate Service¹ before making the decision to become a donor, friend, or volunteer in our community:

1. I will never do for the poor what they have (or could have) the capacity to do for themselves.

*Can those I seek to help do what I am thinking about doing (prepare or serve food, paint, etc.)? Are there good alternatives to “doing something **for** someone” (e.g., doing something **with** someone)? What gifts and resources do I have that those I seek to help may not have (or could have) themselves (e.g., expertise in something, useful connections, resources)?*

2. I will limit one-way giving to emergency situations.

Is there really a crisis at hand? If I fail to provide help, will there be serious negative consequences? To what extent has this person already been receiving help from you or others in the past? What good alternatives might there be to one-way giving in this situation (e.g., employment to purchase one’s own food vs. soup kitchens vs. giving cash to people panhandling for food; helping the person connect with sustainable resources and services)?

3. I will seek ways to empower the poor...

How can I support those I seek to help to use their own gifts and resources to help themselves and their community? How can I invest in those I seek to help?

4. I will put the interests of the poor above my own (or organization) self-interests even when it means setting aside my own agenda.

What is driving my interests and activities as I seek to help? Am I self- or organization-centered or am I centered around the interests of those I seek to help?

5. I will listen closely to those I seek to help, especially to what is not being said - unspoken feelings may contain essential clues to effective service.

What do the people I am seeking to help think about their situation? What ideas do they have? Am I considering issues that might complicate my relationship with those I seek to serve, such as the imbalance of power, feelings of intimidation, fear of judgement, fear of losing support, and fear of appearing unappreciative?

6. Above all, to the best of my ability, I will do no harm.

What unintended consequences could result from my efforts to help? What indirect consequences could result (on the families of those I seek to help, on the greater community, on the system)? What might be the impact(s) of my efforts if/when I leave? a year from now? five years from now?

“If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.”

Lila Watson

¹ Lupton, Robert D. Toxic Charity: How Churches and Charities Hurt Those They Help, And How to Reverse It. 1 edition. New York: HarperOne, 2012.

Friends & Volunteer Guidelines (Continued...)

We also ask all of our friends and volunteers to respect the following guidelines while engaging with the Open Door community. These guidelines have been developed over more than 25 years of learning through our failures and successes on the front lines. Coming from the outside, you may have questions or concerns about some of our guidelines, and when you do, please talk with one of our staff. We value transparency and are happy to further discuss any of these with you.

- 1. Always treat people with kindness, respect, and dignity.** Our neighbors experiencing poverty and homelessness are people not projects. Every one of us is created in the image of God, has inherent worth and goodness, and gifts that you may not see at first glance.
- 2. Please do not give people money.** This is sometimes a controversial issue, but in our experience it is always better to meet a need directly and through an ongoing relationship than give cash. This is for the wellbeing of our neighbors in poverty as well as your own. Many times giving out cash reinforces a giver-receiver relationship and an unhealthy system of dependency. Prepare yourself to kindly say, “Sorry, I don’t give out cash.”
- 3. Please talk with and get approval from Open Door staff before giving out resources such as food, clothing, medication, etc.** Our staff will help you determine if the way you want to help is needed (e.g. there may already be a meal served during the time you plan to bring food; donating bicycles may be much more complicated than it first appears.)
- 4. Do not take photos or videos of our neighbors without approval from Open Door staff.** If appropriate, our staff will ask our neighbors for their permission. This is an example of listening for what is not being said, or said to you. Our neighbors may be intimidated to tell you no. Be considerate of their space (you may be in their *home*). You may be seeing someone at their worst, and a photo or video may amplify feelings of embarrassment and exploitation.
- 5. Keep healthy boundaries.** This means something different to every person. Here we mean: Do not give out your phone number (seriously, don’t do it, yes, this applies to you too), be prepared to say, “Sorry, I don’t give out my phone number.”; lock the doors to your vehicle; keep valuables (phones, purses, wallets) in a safe place at all times; never go anywhere alone with someone, especially someone of the opposite sex; be careful about getting into intimate or deep emotional conversations, especially with people of the opposite sex.
- 6. You are not expected to give rides.** If you have a vehicle, you will be asked for a ride. If you’re uncomfortable giving a ride or feel unsafe, prepare yourself ahead of time to say, “Sorry, I can’t today.” Be careful and thoughtful if you decide to give someone a ride, and the expectations that may develop. Check with a staff member. Never give a ride to a person of the opposite sex.
- 7. Notify an Open Door staff member of unsafe or inappropriate behavior.** Do not try to handle volatile, violent, or other complex situations by yourself. Always seek the assistance of a staff member. Report any inappropriate behavior to a staff member as soon as possible.
- 8. Please dress appropriately.** This means different things to different people. Here we mean: Do not wear very tight clothing, short shorts, revealing (i.e., low cut, spaghetti strap) tops, or yoga pants *only*. Unfortunately, our culture is highly sexualized and we work diligently at Open Door to help each other view and treat people with respect and not as sexual objects. It isn’t your fault and it isn’t fair, but in this environment, we’re asking everyone to help us with this.
- 9. Be aware that some may “demonize” Open Door and/or the staff.** This is one of the many survival skills that some people have learned over time. It’s often intended to win you over and gain your sympathy (e.g., “Open Door doesn’t care and won’t help me, will you?”). If this happens, please talk with an Open Door staff member. Again, we value transparency.