

# The Role of Deacons....Key Concepts

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The word diakonos (deacon) occurs some 120 times in the New Testament. Of those 120 times the predominant usage is one of function not office, to physical and spiritual needs in service not decision making capacities. How do deacons serve in churches today?

## Three Different Deacon Structures

### 1. Deacons as Board of Directors....

Term originated in 1800's business nomenclature. People would meet around a wooden or board table to find solutions to problems. By easy transfer of meaning, "board" became identified with any group of persons charged with decision making.

#### Deacons as Board of Directors - Symptoms:

- a. All major recommendations from church organizations and church committees are screened by the deacons to determine whether or not they should go to the congregation.
- b. When the pastor and staff members are directly responsible to the deacons rather than the church.
- c. When the use or expenditure of major church resources such as facilities and finances must first be approved by deacons.

### 2. Deacons as Business Managers....

- Built upon Acts 6:3 (KJV)... "Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business."

Acts 6:3... "But select from among you, brethren, seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task." (NAS)

Acts 6:3... "Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them." (NIV)

- 1774 Charleston Confession of Faith initiated a change in the theory of the work of deacons - it stated that deacons were to do the "inferior" work of the church - to relieve the pastor of secular concerns.

- R.B.C. Howell (Baptist pastor) wrote "The Deaconship" (1846). Spoke of the deacon working in his separate department-the secular business of the church-while the pastor tended to the spiritual affairs.

#### Deacons as Business Managers - Symptoms:

- a. The deacons responsibilities are composed solely of business management matters.
- b. When deacons administer the affairs of the church primarily as a business operation.
- c. When deacons are viewed as decision makers in most business affairs.
- d. Deacons are chosen for their business skills/ability.

### **3. Deacons Serving in Pastoral Ministries**

Gaines S Dobbins, 1929, emphasized the spiritual ministry of the deacon. From this there grew an increasing awareness by churches of the spiritual nature of the ministry of the deacon as well as the growing awareness by pastors that they needed co-laborers to come alongside to help them in the work of the ministry.

#### **Deacons Serving in Pastoral Ministries - Symptoms:**

- a. When deacons seek to build and maintain Christian harmony and fellowship .
- b. When deacons seek to proclaim the gospel to believers and unbelievers.
- c. When deacons seek to meet the needs of persons in the church and the community, caring for individuals, families and groups.

### **The Role of The Deacon at Friendship Church:**

*Acts 6:1-7*

*6:1 In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. 2 So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. 3 Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them 4 and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word." 5 This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. 6 They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. 7 So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith. NIV*

#### **Three areas of deacon ministry:**

- 1. Tending to the specific needs of a group of people.** *Acts 6:1... "... their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food."*

At FBC we relate this to Family Ministry and the Care Caller Ministry.

Some Suggestions:

1. Memorize their names and faces. Recognize them and call them by name when you see them. Make it your point to greet THEM!
2. Pray for them at least once EACH WEEK by name.
3. ADOPT one family per week or month. Target them for encouragement.
4. Fellowship! Invite that family to your home for a meal, dessert, or a game night.
5. Birthdays and anniversaries. Mark your calendar and send them birthday and anniversary greetings.
6. Words fitly spoken. Greet them at church by name.
7. Write them encouragement cards (one a month).

You cannot do EVERYTHING for everyone. But you can begin by doing SOMETHING for someone on your list!

**2. Freeing the pastors to devote themselves to the ministry of the Word and prayer.**

*Acts 6:4.... "...will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."*

At FBC we relate this to Teaching, Counseling, Visiting, and Witnessing along with the pastoral staff. There are always more than enough of these vital tasks to go around. Administering the Benevolence ministry of the congregation is also an important part of the deacon ministry.

*James 1:27... "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world."*

**3. Helping to avert conflict and promote unity through godly ministry.**

*Acts 6:5,7.... "This proposal pleased the whole group.....7 So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith."*

At FBC we relate this to deacons being proactive instead of reactive....heading off conflict and promoting outreach by :

- Giving wise counsel to the pastoral staff and the congregation
- Praying for their pastors and their families
- Praying for other deacons
- Backing the pastoral staff and church ministries publicly
- Disagreeing and resolving conflict privately
- Encouraging those with whom they have influence
- Keeping close contact with their assigned families
- Diligently working with the Care Caller Ministry
- Modeling the principles of the Church Membership Agreement
- Holding each other accountable as servants of the Lord

## THE QUALIFICATIONS FOR A DEACON:

### A. Macroscopic View, Acts 6:3

1. "Good reputation" (" martus"): Legal import, i.e., "credible witness." Trustworthy.
2. "Full of the Holy Spirit": Godly; Representing the One filled with the Holy Spirit beyond measure, cf. Jn. 3:34. One clothed with the character of Christ.
3. "( Full of) wisdom": Ability to APPLY truth and godly insight in day to day life.

### B. Microscopic View, 1 Tim. 3:8-13

"Likewise", i.e., "Likewise deacons MUST, cf. vs. 2: Non-optional qualifications. If this is disregarded by the congregation it is no less a denial of Christ's authority than a denial of the necessity of the new birth, cf. Jn. 3:7.

1. "Reverent" (" semnous"): Umbrella characteristic. Honorable, dignified, courteous. Commanding respect and trust.
2. "Not double-tongued: ("dilogous") e.g., "Forked tongue." Making commitments he is unwilling or unable to keep. One who is trustworthy and dependable. "His yes is yes!"
3. "Not given to much wine", e.g., Mediterranean customs of hospitality included giving wine to guests. Must be manifestly self-controlled. Ill discipline in one area is indicator of ill discipline in other areas.
4. "Not greedy for money." Not obsessed with material gain. Weakness in this area could create distrust in those who know the deacon handles funds. It can also bring an analogous attitude toward regarding temporalities in the church, i.e., Empire building or stinginess vs. liberality.

NOTE: Constant need to balance sobriety with a benevolent spirit.

5. "Holding the mystery of the faith, cf. I & II above, with a pure conscience", cf. 4:2, 1 Peter 3:13-17.

I.e., One who does what is right regardless of the cost. One who does not give in to wrongdoing, knowing the cost. (Emphasize the importance of a pure conscience!)

6. "Tested": Passed the test, cf. Rom. 12:1,2. cf. Directive #3, C (below)

NOTE: The "provenness" comes first, not afterward!

7. "Women/wives": Not "deaconesses". Probably: Wife of deacons, cf. vss. 2, 12. Or: Women who assist deacons, i.e., unordained deaconesses.

a. "Reverent": Commanding respect, cf. #1 above.

b. "Not slanderers", i.e., Not "devils" (!), i.e., , Malicious gossips, cf. Titus 2:3.

c. "Temperate": Sober. Moderate. Careful. Both feet firmly planted on the ground!

d. "Faithful in all things": Truly godly person. Woman who represents the faithfulness of Christ, the Faithful One.

#### 8. Domestic Qualifications:

a. "One wife husband/One woman man": Not a playboy. No doubt about his faithfulness to his wife (if he is married). Remember that deacons have a special responsibility to minister to widows, including young widows. Great danger of temptation here.

b. "Ruling children well" ("proistemi"): 1) To put one's self before; lead. 2) Care for: Caring leadership of children. The deacon manages his house with this concern in view.

c. "Manages his own household well.": Including his wife! All is in order, e.g., bills are paid,

d. Biblical priorities, godly home management.

NOTE: This is what deacons must provide for the church, "the household of God."

#### C. Basic Directives for Cultivating These Qualifications:

1. Diligence and regularity in exercises which develop personal piety.

2. Serious attention to the breadth of duties connected with home management.

NOTE: Home is nursery of the church. Officers are outstanding nurserymen.

3. Natural demonstration of these qualifications in the context of corporate church life.

NOTE: You do not make yourself a deacon. Neither does the Church. The Church must recognize the Deacon that Christ is making you.