



POSITION PAPER

The Office of Deacon

Fellowship Bible Church

Tulsa, Oklahoma

Fueled by the Gospel, Rooted in Prayer, and Urgent in Mission

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to clarify how Fellowship Bible Church (Fellowship) biblically views and uses the office of Deacon. It clarifies what a Deacon is, how they are identified, the biblical qualifications of a Deacon, and, most practically, how Fellowship uses this office to serve our church body and community.

What is a Deacon?

In the most general sense, a Deacon is someone who serves. The English word Deacon comes from the Greek word for “servant” (*diakonos*). Scripture regards a Deacon as one of two offices of the church and as a role that exists to preserve and promote the church’s unity ([Acts 6:1-6](#); [Phil. 4:2](#)). Deacons are called to carry out the vision of the Elders by meeting the ongoing and emerging needs of the church, thereby modeling the ways all church members can serve one another.

There are some distinct differences between the office of a Deacon and the office of an Elder. God specifically designates these two offices because His church is to be administered by different individuals with different gifts and abilities. Elders shepherd the church through biblical teaching and oversight of the church as a whole, while Deacons serve by taking initiative to meet practical needs. However, as pastor Matt Smethurst explains, Deacons can still play a role in the teaching ministry of the church:

Elders must be “able to teach” ... This doesn’t mean that Deacons may not teach, much less that they be unable to teach. (Remember Stephen and Philip!) It simply implies that the gift and responsibility of teaching is not a prerequisite for the office of Deacon... They will unavoidably exercise influence and a measure of natural leadership within a congregation, particularly in their areas of responsibility... Nonetheless, Deacons are never presented as spiritually authoritative leaders over the *whole* congregation. Elders alone are identified by their calling to exercise oversight ([Acts 20:28](#); [1 Tim. 3:1-2](#); [5:17](#); [1 Pet. 5:2](#); [Heb. 13:17](#)).^[1]

Deacons play an important role in protecting the Elder’s priority of teaching, preaching, and prayer, as we see in [Acts 6](#). They do this by serving the church, taking initiative, and organizing others so that the Elders are freed up to pursue prayer and the ministry of the Word.

How are Deacons Identified?

In [Acts 6:1-6](#), we see the apostles providing a solution to an issue about how to best support the church. The apostles explained that they should remain faithful to their central calling of prayer and the ministry of the Word. The apostles instructed the church to select seven leaders who would be enlisted to serve, who must be known to the church, of good character, and full of the Spirit of wisdom. These service-oriented leadership roles act as the prototype for the office of "Deacon" that Paul defined later in [1 Timothy 3](#). The instructions the apostles gave the church for identifying these leaders are also instructive for how Deacons should be identified and appointed today.

In [Acts 6:5](#), we see seven men selected by the Jerusalem church who fit the qualifications given by the apostles. Then, in [v. 6](#), the apostles commissioned them by praying and laying hands on them. In the same way, we believe that potential Deacons should be identified and commissioned through prayer and laying on of hands.

Biblical Qualifications of a Deacon

Deacons must be initially and routinely evaluated, and only those who meet the biblical qualifications noted below should be commissioned as Deacons:

⁸In the same way, deacons are to be worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. ⁹They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. ¹⁰They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons. ¹¹In the same way, the women are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything. ¹²A deacon must be faithful to his wife and must manage his children and his household well. ¹³Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus (1 Tim. 3:8-13 NIV).

The list of qualifications for Deacons emphasizes character. The qualities of character required for both Elders and Deacons are essentially the same:^[2]

1. 1 Tim. 3:8 – ***“not indulging in much wine”***

Drunkenness leads to recklessness, or the opposite of self-control. Paul does not prohibit drinking wine; he prohibits being under its control.

2. 3:8 *"not pursuing dishonest gain"*

Deacons were designated to meet the needs of the poor and oppressed (Acts 6:1-3). They may increase resources through wise stewardship but not through dishonest means (Acts 5:3). They serve for the benefit of others, not imagining godliness as a means of gain.

3. 3:9 *"they must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience."*

The deep truths of the faith refer to the gospel message about Jesus Christ as received by the apostles. A Deacon embraces their confession of faith with both their mind and their heart. They need to have a firm grasp of the gospel, and their life must match their profession of faith.

4. 3:10 *"they must first be tested"*

The exact nature of the test or evaluation is uncertain; at the very least, it involves an evaluation of the candidate's qualifications based on the list in 1 Timothy 3:8-12.

5. 3:10 *"then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons."*

This testing would also include an evaluation of their heart to serve, as the Elders become acquainted with their ministry service in meeting the needs of the body.

6. 3:11 *"In the same way, the women are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything."*

Some churches, following several English Bible translations, hold that 1 Timothy 3:11 refers to the wives of Deacons and not to women serving as Deacons. However, in the Greek text, the word for "women/wives" (*gunaikas*) lacks the possessive pronoun "their;" thus, the most literal translation is simply "women."

7. 3:12 *"A deacon must be faithful to his wife and must manage his children and his household well."*

A Deacon's care for the church is reflected in how they treat and nurture their families, which serves as a model for how they will care for others within the church.

8. 3:13 *"Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus."*

Jesus Christ is the model for all Deacons. Deacons serving in the church are a reflection of Christ's humble, servant-hearted character. "In these acts of service, Deacons are reflecting the care and devotion of the great Suffering Servant. Diaconal work is anything but menial. It's a high and holy calling."^[3]

Defining a Deacon at Fellowship Bible Church

Deacons are commissioned to meet the various practical needs of Fellowship as they carry out the vision for ministry established by the Elders. They also protect the priority of teaching, preaching, and prayer by serving the church and freeing up the Elders for prayer and shepherding. But how does this life of service differ from others who are gifted to serve in specific areas of ministry?

- **Deacons are mature disciples who set an example worth following through a life of service that imitates and displays Jesus.**

By caring for the hurting, Deacons function as Christ's hands and feet to a world that needs his touch. As they discern and meet practical needs, Deacons reflect the Savior who took the ultimate initiative to meet our deepest need. And by acting as "shock absorbers," who both protect and promote church unity, Deacons please the One who both prayed for it (John 17:21-22) and bled to secure it (Eph. 2:11-22).^[4]

- **Deacons are multiplying disciples who function as lead servants training others to serve.**

They disciple others through service as mobilizers in ministry: "It's crucial to emphasize that the most effective Deacons don't do everything themselves. They are mobilizers... So as you scan your church for qualified Deacons, don't just look for workhorses. Look for those who will faithfully *organize* service, not simply do it all themselves."^[5]

- **Deacons exercise discernment as they demonstrate a constant concern for the body's prospective ministry needs, with insight into how to appropriately meet those needs.**

"Deacons who do not spend time getting to know the members of the congregation will have no hope of discovering the needs which require their attention and intervention. Thus, the ministry of Deacons... must be proactive."^[6]

- **Deacons connect *hands to heart and head*, as the gospel fuels their life of service.**

They are also able to help others connect the dots by providing an example, not just of what to do or how to do it, but also why. Motivated by love and a desire to care for others in need, Deacons are also able to address conflicts that may lead to dissension or disunity:

The best Deacons, therefore, are far more than business managers or handymen. They are persons with fine-tuned 'conflict-radars.' They love solutions more than drama and rise to respond, in creatively constructive ways, to prompt the harmony of the whole... They should also have a knack for solving problems; specifically, solving problems *in order to*

safeguard unity. On top of the character requirements for the office (1 Tim. 3:8-12), then, an ideal Deacon candidate should have a track record of embodying and encouraging this cycle:

sees a problem

› **wants to safeguard unity**

› **thinks creatively**

› **solves the problem^[7]**

The Deacon Team

In addition to their individual areas of service and responsibility, Fellowship's Deacons also function collectively as a team. The Deacon team carefully considers the overall vision for the church to be fueled by the gospel, rooted in prayer, and urgent in mission, established by the Elders. Then they work together to implement that vision, utilizing the various gifts and abilities of individual Deacons to collectively serve others in our church and community.

The Deacon team carries out various functions such as generating ideas, establishing plans, and coordinating volunteer teams to address ongoing church ministry needs. Gathering regularly as a team also promotes synergy and protects Deacons from becoming "siloed" in their individual ministry areas. Regular team gatherings foster collaboration, prevent isolated ministry focus, and create a supportive environment where Deacons can grow spiritually while serving the community together. This helps ensure a collective effort towards the common goal of serving the body of Christ.

Relationship with the Elders

All Deacon ministries operate under the authority and oversight of the Elders. At the same time, Deacons are encouraged and empowered to bring forward ideas for ministry and to participate in the early planning stages of various initiatives.

Ministry ideas may originate from the Elders and be entrusted to the Deacon Chairman for implementation. Likewise, ideas may originate from the Deacons and be brought to the Elders—through the Deacon Chairman—for approval and oversight.

This process requires a strong relationship of cooperation, communication, and trust between the Elders and the Deacon team.

Shared Expectations For All Deacons

- **Be fueled by the gospel** – intentionally seek opportunities to share the good news with those you serve.
- **Be rooted in prayer** – pray over every activity and every person you serve.
- **Be urgent in mission** – set the pace by pursuing opportunities to move your ministry outward toward those who don't yet know Christ.
- Be faithful in participation in Deacon meetings.
- Take full ownership of your responsibility—from preparation to execution.
- Be a team member by supporting and encouraging the overall ministry of the Deacons.
- Fully support the vision and mission of Fellowship.
- When appropriate, maintain the confidentiality of matters discussed at Deacon meetings and prayer requests you receive.
- Support the church financially as God leads.
- Support the Elders and Staff with encouragement and prayers.
- Serve the membership as God leads; be sensitive to the needs of others.
- Encourage unity within the Church Body; be an encourager, not a discourager.
- Be an example to the members of the Church Body by exemplifying the qualifications of a Deacon and the heart of a servant.
- Give priority to spiritual growth as an individual, as a couple, and as a family.
- Train someone to take your place after three (3) years and foster a leadership pipeline for the Deacon Team.

Term of Service

Although 1 Timothy 3:10 does not limit a Deacon's call to service to a specific time frame, we believe it is in the best interest of the Deacon Team to have limited terms of service and train up more leaders to replace themselves.

Length of Term

- A Deacon will serve on the Deacon Team for a term of three (3) years.
- At the completion of the current term, the Deacon will step down from the Deacon Team and cannot return to active status for a minimum of one (1) year.
- If, after a year, the Deacon desires to return, he must be approved by the current Deacon board.
- To maintain continuity, Deacon terms will be staggered. Terms will be set up at the beginning so that not all Deacons rotate off at the same time after three (3) years.

Deacon Officers

As a minimum, there will always be a Deacon Chairman for the Deacon team. Other officers may be established as needed, or disbanded when no longer needed.

Function and Responsibilities of the Officers

Chairman

- Schedules and presides over all Deacon meetings. The Chairman may designate another Deacon to preside in his absence.
- Ensures clear communication between the Deacons and/or the Elders and Staff.
- Provides oversight and accountability for each Deacon's area of responsibility.
- Helps maintain unity, alignment, and effectiveness within the Deacon Team.
- Assists in identifying, developing, and onboarding new Deacons.
- Addresses challenges or gaps in ministry with wisdom and initiative.
- Ensures all Deacon ministries are aligned with being fueled by the gospel, rooted in prayer, and urgent in mission.
- Prays regularly for the Deacons, church leadership, and overall ministry of the church.
- Helps the Deacon Team cast vision for the Deacon ministry at Fellowship.
- Keeps the Deacon Team informed.
- Works with the Chairman of the Elders as needed to develop agendas for Deacon Meetings.
- Facilitates communication between the Deacons and Elders.
- Works with the Chairman of the Elders and Staff as needed.

Secretary

- Maintains a written record of Deacon Meeting proceedings.
- Maintains a file of Deacon team documents.

Leaving the Deacon Team

In addition to leaving the Deacon team due to completion of one's term, Deacons will leave the Deacon team for any of the following reasons:

- He is no longer a member of Fellowship.
- He is no longer able to serve as a Deacon for some other reason.
- He is removed from service by the Elders because he no longer meets the qualifications and/or expectations.

Conclusion

Deacons are an essential gift to the local church. As its leaders embraced their God-given and distinct roles, the Jerusalem church grew united and multiplied exponentially ([Acts 6:7](#)). Deacons are mature, multiplying disciples who lead by example as they follow Jesus' example of sacrificial service ([Matt. 20:25-28](#)). May God bless those who serve as Deacons at Fellowship, and may God bless our church and our community through them, so that the name of Jesus may be honored.