

Circleville First Baptist Deacon Handbook

October 2023

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I. What is a Deacon?

In order to understand what the role of a deacon is to be, we can look at the biblical and historical lessons about deacon ministry. The word translated as *deacon* in the Bible is the Greek word *diakonos*, which means *servant*. This word is used 30 times in the New Testament, typically translated as “minister” or “servant”. Five times we find this word referring to “deacons”.

For example, we can find it translated as “deacon” in:

Philip. 1:1, NIV

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons:

1 Tim. 3:8-13, NIV

Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. (9) They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. (10) They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons.

(11) In the same way, their wives are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything.

(12) A deacon must be the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well. (13) Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus.

By the time of Phil. 1:1, apparently the office of deacon had become formalized, and as the early New Testament church grew, the need for deacons grew with it. We know that from early on in the church’s history, there were deacons.

Before AD 500 – In the early centuries of the church, deacons’ responsibilities included benevolence ministry to those who were sick or imprisoned or widows/orphans. There was discipleship of new Christians and restoration of wayward Christians. There were times when they preached. They helped with baptism and the Lord’s Supper. They were evangelistic and leaders in worship and in pastoral care.

AD 500-1500 – During the Middle Ages, the deacon role changed as they became assistants in liturgical worship. The servant role was diminished. The church was becoming more hierarchical, and the deacon office became a step up the ladder towards priesthood. Their benevolence and ministry activities diminished, and they began to lose distinctiveness.

1500 AD – During the Reformation, the reformers preached that deacons should focus on serving others, ministering to the poor and needy and spreading the gospel. This was a movement back towards the New Testament servant model that had been lost.

With the rise of democracy in the late 1700s into the 1800s, the rights and power of the individual became the emphasis. In order to find solutions to problems in business, leaders would gather around a wooden or board table to discuss them. These “board members” came to be understood as people with decision-making power.

This concept which people were experiencing in business and culture came to be transferred into church life. Especially with the high number of small churches and the low numbers of pastors, the deacons came to take on more and more decision-making authority. They controlled the finances, facilities, and other business affairs. They screened all major recommendations before they went to the church. The pastor was responsible to the deacons rather than to the church. This concept of the deacons making decisions for the church as a board continues in many churches today. Consequently, the servant role of the deacon withered away.

This trend continued and was strengthened by the Charleston Confession of Faith in 1774. The deacons, according to this, were to be in charge of the “inferior” services of a church. This included giving close attention to relieving the pastor of secular church concerns.

This provision influenced R.B.C. Howell in writing his book *The Deaconship* in 1846, which divided the labor of the church between the pastor and the deacons. The pastor would deal with the spiritual matters of the church and the deacons would deal with the temporal matters of the church. J.M. Pendleton in 1847 followed this up with *Church Manual*, which put deacons strongly in control of the business aspects of the church. In 1929, P.E. Burroughs wrote *Honoring the Deaconship*, which again made a clear distinction between the pastor’s role as the ranking officer entrusted with spiritual ministry and the deacons’ role as the guardian of the church’s material and financial interests. These books, especially that of Burroughs, shaped much of deacon ministry during the first 60 years of the 20th century. The approach of deacons as a board led to stagnation of deacon ministry.

Why was this distinction made? It basically came as a misunderstanding regarding Acts chapter 6. Each of these authors looked at Acts 6, equating the apostles with pastors and the seven selected men with deacons, which is not necessarily true. These men are not identified there as deacons, although they may be forerunners for the deacon ministry that was to develop.

In any case, the authors also took from this passage a distinction between spheres of service that are not intended. The point of this passage is that the church intentionally made provision for ministry to all those in need, regardless of their individual heritage or background. And they did it with organization, with wisdom and with intentionality. Up to here, the 12 were the only leaders the church had. In Acts 2 & 4, we see the 12 receiving proceeds from people and distributing them as needed. But the church grew beyond the capability of just 12, especially with the increasing diversity in the church – Hellenistic (Greek) Jews as well as Hebraic Jews. This diversity, and either prejudice or thoughtlessness of the Hebraic Jews, was leading to dissension.

Acts 6:1-4, NIV

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."

The job was too big for the 12 to do it alone, so they enlisted additional servants from the ranks of the Hellenistic believers (as the names that follow indicate). Howell and Pendleton interpreted Acts 6:3 regarding the seven's responsibility over "this business" or "this task" to mean secular/financial dimension of church life; however, that phrase actually spoke to the acts of personal care to the Hellenistic widows. The split, therefore, was not between spiritual and secular but was between spiritual leadership and personal care of those in crisis.

These seven are still never identified as deacons. Whether they were models for later deacons, we do not know. But there was no simple distinction between ministry to needs and ministry of the word that some might take from the passage. If they were some types of future models for deacons, then they set a high standard. Stephen will soon be martyred for working miracles and preaching the name of Jesus. In fact, Paul will later, when meeting Philip, refer to him as "Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven" (Acts 21:8).

1950's to Present – During the first half of the 20th century, there has been a trend toward recapturing the New Testament view of deacons. Howard Foshee wrote *the Ministry of the Deacon* in 1968 and Henry Webb wrote *Deacons: Servant-Models in the Church* in 1980. These continue as standards today. These books, and others since, strive to portray the deacon as a fellow minister with the pastor.

The best understanding of deacon ministry from a biblical and historical basis is that of a partner in ministry, a servant-leader who points people to Jesus through their words and their deeds. Just as with Moses in Exodus 18 and just as with the 12 of Acts 6, the pastor cannot do all the pastoral ministry that needs to be done. If he tries, he will fail, and the church will suffer. There has to be a team that works together to minister to the needs of the body. That is the role of the deacon ministry.

II. What are the Expectations of a Deacon?

As deacons serving Jesus Christ at Circleville First Baptist Church,
we agree to uphold the following expectations:

1. To be consistently growing in spiritual maturity and Christlikeness.
2. To exhibit a lifestyle consistent with biblical teaching.
3. To serve others above self, promoting the health and welfare of our church body.
4. To visibly support the pastoral staff and leadership of our church.
5. To attend and support the services, ministries, and activities of our church.
6. To be a spiritual leader at home, modeling and directing Christian values there.
7. To grasp the foundational truths of Scripture and of the Baptist faith.
8. To regularly spend time with God in prayer.
9. To actively seek opportunities to share the good news of Jesus Christ.
10. To financially support the work of God at CFBC through tithes and offerings.
11. To be actively involved in ministry in alignment with God's calling.
12. To maintain confidentiality.

III. What does a Deacon do?

1. The role of the deacon at CFBC is to provide ministry to people in our church through a partnership with the Sunday School. The deacon works with an assigned Sunday School class to ensure care for people associated with that class. This responsibility entails making and organizing regular contacts with members, absentees, and prospects of each Sunday School class. Contacts are opportunities to develop and nurture relationships and friendships, with the ultimate goal to help these families grow in their faith. It is through these contacts that a deacon and Sunday School class can discover the needs of our families and partner with one another and with the other CFBC ministries to provide care.

Current Class Partnerships

Class:

Joy
Agape
Harvest
Sonshine
MAD
Eve
Young Adults

Teacher:

Tony Wagner
Bob Smith
Steve Huff
Pastor Billy Barbo
Craig Belknap
Cheryl Burton
Tom & Sherri Camden

Deacon:

Tom Carroll
Tom Perkins
Keith Hudson
Pastor Barbo
Tim Summers
Terry Richmond
Matt Ridley

2. Love God and others.
3. Implement the Benevolence Ministry.
4. Assist with the Lord's Supper & baptisms as needed.
5. Attend deacon meetings.
6. Attend church on a regular basis.
7. Support loyally the pastor and staff.
8. Assist with prayer during invitation.
9. Lead the church to handle church discipline issues.
10. Partner with church leadership in accomplishing the mission of our church.

IV. How Does Someone Become a Deacon?

Annually the active deacon body with pastor will evaluate and consider potential candidates to serve as deacons. These candidates include both inactive ordained and individuals who have never previously served as deacons. If the latter become deacons, they will go through a deacon ordination process.

A listing will be generated of all men within the church meeting the age and membership qualifications. The active deacons will prayerfully consider and examine the qualifications of each individual candidate, particularly in light of appropriate biblical passages (example: I Timothy 3:8-13). A second listing will then be generated within the active deacons of potential deacon candidates. Viable candidates will then be personally contacted to determine their interest. If they are interested, *The Deacon Handbook* including *Questionnaire for Potential Deacons* will be hand delivered, to be completed and questionnaire returned. Inactive deacons will not be required to complete the questionnaire if they have done so in the past. After receiving the completed questionnaire, the pastor, deacon chairman, and vice chairman (or alternate chosen by active deacons) will interview each candidate personally.

If all parties chose to continue the process, the prospective deacon will be invited to a deacons' meeting for fellowship and conversation with the remainder of the deacon body. If the deacons are in agreement as to the individual, then the prospective deacon will be recommended as a qualified candidate for deacon election at a business meeting. The church may also provide nominations from the floor at the business meeting, but these nominations will require prior agreement by the individual to serve and go through the above explained questionnaire and examination process.

The new candidate shall complete a study course, Deacons by Henry Webb, before approval and ordination.

V. Questionnaire for Potential Deacons Confidential

1. Will you share your testimony with the deacons?

If your answer is yes, briefly write out your testimony on the back of this questionnaire. Describe what your life was like before receiving Christ, how you realized you needed Christ, how you became a Christian, and how Christ helps you in your daily life today.

2. After reading I Timothy 3, do you feel you understand the qualifications of a deacon?

YES NO

3. Do you believe it is the Lord's will for you to serve as a deacon at Circleville First Baptist Church? Please explain

4. Do you believe the Bible is the divinely inspired Word of God? YES NO

5. Do you believe Jesus is the Son of God and the only Savior of man? YES NO

6. Are you in agreement with the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper as administered by the church? YES NO

7. Have you ever been divorced? YES NO

8. Do you approve of homosexuality as an alternative lifestyle? YES NO

9. Do you use or promote the use of mind-altering drugs or intoxicating beverages? YES NO

10. Are you in agreement with the church's support of the Cooperative Program of Southern Baptists as a means of participating in World Missions? YES NO

11. Would you be willing to fulfill each of the following expectations for deacons at Circleville First Baptist Church?

a. To be consistently growing in spiritual maturity and Christlikeness. YES NO

b. To exhibit a lifestyle consistent with biblical teaching. YES NO

c. To serve others above self, promoting the health and welfare of our church body.
YES NO

d. To visibly support the pastoral staff and leadership of our church. YES NO

- e. To attend and support the services, ministries, and activities of our church.
YES NO
- f. To be a spiritual leader at home, modeling and directing Christian values there.
YES NO
- g. To grasp the foundational truths of Scripture and of the Baptist faith. YES NO
- h. To regularly spend time with God in prayer. YES NO
- i. To actively seek opportunities to share the good news of Jesus Christ. YES NO
- j. To financially support the work of God at CFBC through tithes and offerings.
YES NO
- k. To be actively involved in ministry in alignment with God's calling. YES NO

12. Would you be willing and able to visit those in the church family when they are in need?
YES NO

13. Would you, as a deacon, be willing to responsibly serve the church by administering material items (food, clothing, money, etc.) to those in need, honestly and in accordance with the desires of the congregation? YES NO

14. Would you commit to participate in deacon training? YES NO

15. Do you know of anything in your life that would hinder or preclude you from serving as a deacon? YES NO

16. If your lifestyle changed to hinder or preclude your service, would you resign your position as deacon? YES NO

17. Do you have any questions or concerns regarding the deacon ministry at Circleville First Baptist Church? If so, please describe.

Your printed name: _____ Date: _____

Signature: _____ Date of Birth: _____

Member of Circleville First Baptist Church since: _____