



PHILOSOPHY OF DEACON MINISTRY

We've prepared this document to help the church better understand and pray for deacon ministry at SGBC. Below is a summary philosophy of ministry statement followed by an expanded explanation of its major points.

Summary Statement of Ministry Philosophy

Deacons are a tested and esteemed group of character-qualified servants (1 Timothy 3:8-12) who are approved and directed by the elders to serve Christ and bless the church by:

- Wisely stewarding people and resources so that the temporal needs of the church are met, the unity of the body is encouraged, and the ministry of the Word can go forth unhindered (Acts 6:1-6);
- Actively stimulating and intentionally promoting a culture of selfless service through the godly influence they have as honored servants (1 Timothy 3:13, Hebrews 10:23-24);
- Freeing the elders to focus on the oversight of the church and the ministry of the Word as they effectively steward the ministry responsibilities given into their care by the elders of the church (Acts 6:1-6).

What is a Deacon?

We derive the English word “deacon” from the transliteration of the Greek word “diakonos”, which literally means “servant”. Though every Christian is a servant in the general sense, only those who are biblically qualified may bear the title of deacon. Deacons are churchmen. They stand out by virtue of their godly character, their demonstrated giftedness to meet needs wisely and well, and the consistently selfless nature of their service to the body of Christ.

Next, we'll explain how Acts 6:1-6 and 1 Timothy 3:8-13 help us recognize the defining marks of a deacon and understand the deacons' practical role in ministry life. We'll also see the unique opportunity deacons have to promote a culture of God-honoring service in the local church.

Tested and Qualified Servants: The Character of Deacons

1 Timothy 3:8-13: “Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain, but holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. These men must also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach. Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things. Deacons must be husbands of only one wife, and good managers of their children and their own households. For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.”

The Scriptures place far more emphasis on the qualities a deacon must have than the work that they do. Those biblical qualities are proven godly character and an evident giftedness in the ministry of service. 1 Timothy 3:8-12 clearly explains the character qualifications, and both Acts 6:1-6 and 1 Peter 4:10-11 gives us a concise description of what it looks like when a believer is a good steward of their serving gift— they serve “by the strength which God supplies”.

Wise and Trusted Stewards: The Role of Deacons

Acts 6:1-6: “Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, ‘It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.’ The statement found approval with the whole congregation...”.

This gives us helpful insight into why deacons exist as a select group in the church:

- The apostles needed men to manage the task of feeding the Hellenistic widows to ensure that it was done properly and well. This stewardship not only required excellent character, but also organizational and administrative skill and the wisdom and maturity to deal sensitively with the physical needs of the sheep. Thus, the apostles were looking for a qualified group who were “full of the Spirit and of wisdom”.
- The apostles couldn’t allow themselves to be distracted from the ministry of the Word, and if they weren’t careful in whom they chose to steward the task of feeding the widows, conflict arising from unmet needs could distract from the ministry of the Word. Their solution wisely met the congregation’s physical needs while guarding the ministry of the Word. They chose capable servants of exemplary biblical character and let them use their gifts to organize and meet the temporal needs of the body.

Deacons are wise and trusted servants. They employ their giftedness, wisdom, and skill to care for the temporal needs of the church. As they do, the body is blessed, unity is encouraged, and the ministry of the Word is enabled to go forward unhindered.

A Godly and Helpful Influence: The Example of Deacons in Promoting a Culture of Service

1 Timothy 3:13 “For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.”

The “high standing” or honor given to deacons who serve well is an appropriate expression of love and appreciation. However, the influence that naturally flows from this esteem can be another avenue of blessing to the church.

Church members who are known and highly regarded by the body generally have a significant influence on body life. We find their biblical wisdom and godly character compelling, and so they stir up our desire to grow in Christlikeness.

For example, godly and gifted pastors and elders fan the flames of our love for the truth and our desire to come under its precepts, and this creates a culture where Scripture saturates and enriches the life of the church. In the same way, deacons who serve well provoke us to serve one another and actively mentor us in the discipline of service, and therefore help promote a church culture where humble and sacrificial serving becomes the rule rather than the exception.

A Word About Female Deacons, and the Question of Authority

While deacons (diakonos) may steward certain ministry responsibilities, they do so under the oversight and authority of the overseers (episkopoi). Therefore, given the terms “diakonos”, “episkopoi”, and their biblical usage; the multiple New Testament passages that indicate the authority to teach and govern the church belongs to the elders; and the reference to a female disciple in Romans 16:1-2 who bears the title of diakonos; we believe that there is no governing authority in the office of deacon and therefore no biblical warrant to restrict the office of deacon to men only. If you have further questions about women serving as deacons, Pastor Marc Wragg preached a sermon series on this many years ago, and we can direct you to that series online.

Conclusion

A healthy and robust deacon ministry is a great blessing to the local church. It organizes the ministry of service so that the temporal needs of the church are met, allows the elders to focus on their primary role of teaching and governing, and encourages the entire church to serve selflessly, so that the body is ultimately strengthened and built up in love for the glory of Christ.

Knowing these things, here’s how you as a member can bless and help prosper the deacon ministry of Saving Grace Bible Church:

- Pray for our deacons, for their strength in serving the body, and for their wisdom in stewarding the tasks, resources, and people under their care.
- Encourage the deacons in their work and honor them as they strive for excellence in meeting the temporal needs of the church.
- Imitate their faithful example by serving God in the strength which He supplies, so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.