

Ministry Description:



Deacons

Last updated: Thursday, 14 August 2014

Serving in the Church

The Bible describes the church in a number of different ways, but one of the richest analogies is that of a body working together with every part doing its share.

In 1 Corinthians 12 we learn that:

- the church is one body made up of many different members (v12f);
- God has positioned each of the members in the body for specific purposes (v18);
- even though some members have a more prominent role, every member is absolutely necessary (v21-25);
- if one member stops doing their part, the whole body is affected, because the whole body is interconnected (v26);
- members should strive to use all that they have been given to serve in the church (v7).

These points should cause every member to regularly ask questions like: “What am I contributing to the life of this church? Am I using my gifts, abilities and opportunities to benefit the rest of the church body? Am I a contributor or am I a consumer?”

Such questions are important to ask because there is always plenty of existing work that needs to be done, there is always plenty of new work that could be done, and in many churches 80 per cent of the work gets done by 20 per cent of the people.

However, for the body to function well, every part needs to do its share

(see Ephesians 4:16)

With such thoughts in mind the Session has decided to draft a number of “ministry descriptions” laying out ways in which members can helpfully contribute to the life of the church. Not all of these ministries are glamorous, not all of these ministries are prominent, but each and every one is important, and if done well, will be of great benefit to our church and/or community.

Therefore, regardless of the job at hand, we are looking for members who are committed to faithfully fulfilling their specific duties responsibly, diligently, and with excellence, always remembering Colossians 3:23-24:

“Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.”

(Colossians 3:23–24 ESV)



Serving in the church, no matter what that looks like, is ultimately about serving the Lord. With this in mind, please prayerfully consider the following ministry description for Deacons.

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Description of the Ministry of Deacons

(from the Westminster Presbyterian Church Book of Church Order)

BCO 2.3 The Diaconate

1. The qualifications of deacons are outlined in the Scriptures, especially in 1 Timothy 3:8-13 and Acts 6:1-6.
2. The exact nature of the relationship between the Diaconate (deacons) and the Session (elders) shall be determined by consultation with the Session in the local church in which they serve. The Session should encourage the deacons to be creative in their ministries. Deacons are not assistant elders nor do they exercise rule in the congregation. Though their work is under the oversight of the elders they do not need the immediate involvement of the elders in all their work. Some, but not all, meetings of the Diaconate require attendance by one or more elders. This can be negotiated in each local church. Minutes of meetings of the Diaconate must be accessible by the session. The Diaconate is to be accountable to the session for the ministries in which it engages.
3. Diaconal work, historically, has chiefly been in the field of ministry to the needy and in administration of finances {see, for example, chapter 8 of *The Second Book of Discipline* (1578)}. Deacons have precedent and scope to develop specific ministries of mercy and administration and stewardship relating to both inside and outside the congregations in which they serve.
4. Ministry to the needy need not be understood as fulfilled only by supplying money or goods to people in financial hardship. Physical, social, mental, emotional, and psychological needs of various age groups are concerns for deacons to consider. Deacons should look for untapped resources of skills and willingness, and endeavour to harness them to the ministries of compassion and the building up of the church.
5. The functions of the deacon are performed through the Diaconate (board of deacons) and not individually except as authorised by the Diaconate.
6. A deacon not actively engaged in a local church Diaconate may be appointed to a special task and be accountable to the appointing body.
7. No deacon may be removed from office except as provided for in this *BCO*.
8. It is often expedient that the Session of a church should select and appoint godly women and men of the congregation to assist the deacons in their work.

~~BCO 2.4 Officers' Ordination and Installation Questions~~

All presbyters, deacons, and licentiates of this denomination shall give affirmative answers to the following questions at ordination, installation, or appointment.

1. Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, inerrant in their original writings, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?
2. Do you sincerely receive and adopt the doctrinal standard of this church, *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, as embodying the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures, to the maintenance of which this church is bound before God by solemn obligation?
3. Do you acknowledge the Lord Jesus Christ as the only Redeemer and Head of this church, and do you accept the presbyterian form of church government as derived from the Holy Scriptures?
4. Do you promise, by the help of God, such subjection to your brethren as is taught in the Word of God?
5. Have you been induced, as far as you know your own heart, to seek the vocation of the (teaching eldership OR the ruling eldership OR the diaconate) from love to God, and a sincere desire to promote his glory in the Gospel of his Son?
6. Do you promise, by the help of God, to be zealous and faithful in maintaining the truths of the Gospel and the purity and peace of the church, whatever persecution or opposition may arise toward you on that account?
7. Do you promise, by the help of God, to be faithful and diligent in your personal and family life, as well as in the public duties of your office, endeavouring to adorn the profession of the Gospel by your life, and walking in exemplary piety before the flock in which you shall serve?
8. Do you promise, by the help of God, to be conscientious in attending the assemblies of this church and in directing your best attention to the business thereof, doing all in a spirit of faithfulness, brotherly kindness, and charity?
9. Are you now willing to accept the responsibilities of a (teaching elder OR ruling elder OR deacon OR licentiate) in this congregation as you agreed to do so when you (accepted the call of OR were elected by the members OR (in the case of a licentiate) were appointed to serve here) – and do you promise, by the help of God, to discharge your duties to them in Christian ministry as God shall give you strength?

Requirements

In summary,

- Deacons must be men who are members of the church, who meet the Biblical qualifications laid out in Acts 6:1-7 and 1 Timothy 3:8-13, and who, after much prayer, believe that God is calling them to serve as a Deacon.
- Deacons must be men of faith who enjoy a close walk with the Lord, regularly feeding on His word and pursuing an active prayer life, and who lead their families in a godly way.
- Deacons must be men of character who are committed to faithfully fulfilling the listed responsibilities for the glory of God, and for the health and witness of the church.
- Deacons must be men who familiarise themselves with relevant sections of the Westminster Presbyterian Church Book of Church Order (BCO) which lays out the denominational standard for certain aspects of their work.
- Deacons must be men who are able to take the aforementioned vows (BCO 2.4) with a clear conscience.

Responsibilities

To ensure that the *physical* needs of the people in the church are met by...

1. Attending monthly Deacons' meetings to discuss and pray about the needs of the church;
2. Regularly communicating with individuals and families to ascertain their needs;
3. Coordinating practical help, when necessary, for those in need
4. Managing the logistics of Sunday services
5. Coordinating the general upkeep of the church building and grounds;
6. Coordinating working bees and maintenance work at the church;
7. Overseeing the church's finances and pastor's stipend.

Furthermore, Deacons are to...

8. Endeavour to free up the Elders, wherever possible, so that they can give themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word. (see Acts 6:4)

Accountability

The Bible makes it clear that God will hold the Elders accountable for the overall oversight of the church (e.g. Hebrews 13:17, Acts 6:6). Therefore, although Deacons have an authority over, and a responsibility for, the physical needs of the church, they are nonetheless accountable to the Session. This does not mean that every decision must be run past the

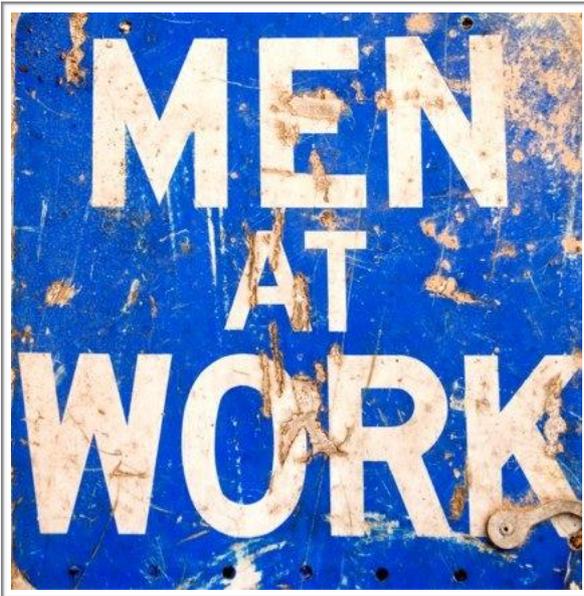
Session, (that would in fact, undermine the very purpose of the Diaconate) but it does mean that the Session must be informed of decisions made, and consulted in significant matters.

In order to keep the Session informed, the Deacons' Court is required to provide the Session with a copy of their monthly meeting minutes (BCO 2.3.2, *above*)

Furthermore, in the interest of good communication between the two courts, there will be a general meeting of Elders and Deacons from 7.00pm - 7.30pm on the last Monday of each month. During this time, we will hear from God's Word and pray together, discuss items of joint interest, and share any particular physical needs of congregation members.

Time Commitment

Deacons are expected to attend a meeting of elders and deacons from 7.00pm - 7.30pm on the last Monday of each month. From 7.30pm, the Diaconate will conduct their own meeting, the length of which is determined by the items presented for discussion.



Deacons are also expected to attend services at Grace faithfully, and be available to serve at church services as needs arise. Deacons may also be called upon to serve the Lord's Supper at services on the first Sunday of each month.

The exact time commitment required to be a faithful Deacon is impossible to specify as there are so many variables. In normal circumstances, an average of a couple of hours per week is probably a reasonable expectation, however, this would increase

during times of greater need.

Description of Responsibilities

To ensure that the physical needs of the people in the church are met by:

2. Attending monthly Deacons' meetings to discuss and pray about the needs of the church

Deacons' meetings are not an end in and of themselves, but they provide a necessary forum for prayerfully discussing and then addressing the various physical needs of the church. In normal circumstances the Diaconate should aim to have one meeting per month, taking place concurrently with the Session meeting.

The shape of these meetings is not set in stone, although the following elements should normally be included:

- A predetermined agenda laying out the course of the meeting. This agenda can be added to at the meeting if necessary;
- A formal acceptance of the previous minutes;
- A review of the action points stemming from the previous meeting;
- A time for new points to be considered and discussed;
- A clearly minuted account of the meeting should be recorded by the nominated secretary, giving a brief summary of each discussion point along with relevant action points. It can be helpful to put specific names next to specific action points so that everyone knows who is responsible for what things. (Following the meeting, the draft minutes should be distributed ASAP by the secretary, so that all the members of the court have a record of the meeting and a reminder of their unique responsibilities for the month;
- A regular update should be given to the congregation regarding the activities of the Diaconate and any needs that they may have.
- A time of prayer, separate from the elders, in which the needs of the church, the needs of individuals, and the course of the meeting are brought before God. Hypothetically speaking, even if there were no business to conduct, the Deacons could still profitably meet together, simply to pray for the church.

Throughout the course of Deacons' meetings, it is important that the Deacons remember that their role in the church is a *people-centred* role. While it is true that finances and buildings and rosters will often take up much time, all these things are discussed so that the physical needs of the people in the church are addressed.

Furthermore, in order to keep the *people* of the church in focus, it would be helpful to have a current membership list on hand, so that specific people and their specific needs can be discussed and served.

Finally, Deacons' meetings should not be seen as a burden, but as a time of blessing, in which brother Deacons can encourage one another to keep on working diligently for the Lord.

3. Regularly communicating with the Session to ascertain specific physical needs of congregation members

In order to care for people's specific physical needs it is important that the Deacons actually know what those physical needs are. With this in mind, regular communication needs to take place between the Elders and the Deacons. Who is sick? Who has just had a baby? Who is moving house? Who is old and frail? Who is struggling financially?

In order to be as helpful as possible, both Elders and Deacons need to make a concerted effort to be aware of, and involved in, the lives of the people in congregation.

4. Coordinating practical help, when necessary, for those in need

Caring for each other is a mandate given to all Christians (1 Corinthians 12v24-26), but office-bearers in the church have a responsibility to lead the charge, setting a pattern of loving concern for those in the church. Again, having a finger on the pulse of the needs within the church, will enable Deacons to know who would benefit from practical help, whether providing transport for hospital visits, urgent help in the home, assisting in the casserole ministry, or any number of other things.

BCO 2.3.3-4 encourages Deacons to be creative in how these needs are met, and to mobilise and encourage members of the congregation to assist in these ministries of mercy.

5. Managing the logistics of Sunday services

The highlight of a Christian's week should be the gathered worship of their church family Sunday by Sunday. The Elders have the responsibility of ensuring that the *content* of the worship service and other activities are profitable for the members and pleasing to God, while the Deacons have the responsibility of ensuring that practicalities of the day profitable for the members and pleasing to God. Again, this

does not mean that Deacons will do everything themselves, but it does mean that they will encourage others to serve and oversee the running of the services so that everything happens efficiently.

Before services, Deacons must ensure that

- The alarm is disarmed and church is unlocked prior to people arriving;
- Both front doors are opened and the door mat is taken outside;
- The power, lights, fans and urns are switched on prior to people arriving;
- Windows are opened (except on days of unusual cold weather);
- Those rostered for sound and data projector have arrived
- Those rostered for taking up of the offering have arrived and are briefed on their role for the service
- For Lord's Supper services (first Sunday of each month, all three services), that the table is prepared and those appointed to prepare the elements have done so

After services, the Deacons must ensure that

- Power, lights, fans, urns and sound systems (hall *and* main church) are switched off;
- Extra tables and chairs are packed away (e.g. on the deck, in the hall)
- Windows are closed and secured;
- Any money is taken up during the services is secured in the safe;
- The alarm is armed, and the offices and church building are securely locked

While all of these things may seem menial, Deacons should never lose sight of the fact that the way the Sunday programme is taken care of can add or subtract to the blessing of the day for the church family. The phrase "undistracting excellence" encapsulates what Deacons should be aiming for as they manage the Sunday needs.

6. Coordinating the general upkeep of the church building and grounds

The Diaconate carries the responsibility of ensuring that our building and grounds remain neat and tidy, and safe for those attending and serving at our church.

Ideally, this will actually take place through the implementation of the various rosters; however, many people are prone to forget when they are on rosters. Because of this, it is not enough for the Deacons to simply draft and implement mowing and cleaning rosters. The Deacons will also need to *remind* people when they are on duty and sometimes they will need to *chase* people when they forget their duties.



Having a neat and tidy church, is of course, not an end in itself, but is all a part of the “undistracting excellence” mentioned previously. Long grass, food on floors and cobwebs can easily distract people from worshipping God and fellowshiping with one another. They can start to niggle and frustrate, neither of which are conducive to the blessing of our Sunday gatherings. With this in mind, keeping the church building and grounds neat and tidy, is in fact a way of showing love to others in the church.

For the sake of physical safety, the Deacons are also responsible for implementing and managing our Health and Safety procedures. Safety also ensures that we continue our ministry without distraction caused by accidents and injuries, and that we are able to remain above reproach in our service.

Finally, the upkeep and safety of our building says something to the community about our commitment to the church. If we are willing to keep our homes neat and tidy but not our church, we are actually sending a message to the community about where our real priorities lie. (Haggai 1:4) With this in mind, keeping the church buildings neat, tidy and safe, is also a way of preserving our Christian witness.

7. Coordinating working bees and maintenance work at the church

Apart from general upkeep of the church and grounds, the Deacons are also ~~responsible for coordinating Working Bees and ongoing general maintenance work~~ at the church. The Deacons’ Court is free to decide how frequently working bees

occur and what maintenance work needs to be done, always remembering that we should take a healthy pride in our church facilities, as outlined above.

8. Overseeing the church's finances and pastor's stipend

Even though the church will normally have a designated Treasurer, it is responsibility of the Deacons to ensure that church finances are used wisely, and that the pastor (or any other employed staff) are properly remunerated.

Handling church finances includes counting the offering, banking the offering, keeping financial records, paying bills, giving to missions, and paying the salaries of those employed by the church.

The Deacons' Court is to be both wise and transparent in their handling and usage of church money. Detailed financial reports will be distributed to the congregation twice a year at our members' meetings (March and September), and regular updates will appear in the bulletin following Session meetings.

The Deacons will be responsible for an annual financial review and preparation of a budget at the end of the financial year, as part of a Budget Committee appointed by Session.

9. Endeavouring to free up the Elders, where possible, so that they can give themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word. (Acts 6:4)

This isn't so much an individual job that needs to be done, as much as it is an underlying thought and motivation that Deacons should remember as they carry out their work.

Acts 6v4 shows that the reason the first Deacons were set apart was so that the Elders were able to get on with caring for the church's spiritual needs ("ministry of the word and prayer"), without being overloaded with the responsibility to care for its physical needs as well.

With this in mind, Deacons should endeavour to safeguard the Elders' time by taking responsibility for all of the things listed above, and for any other physical needs of the church that should arise.

Final Comments

When all is said and done, the most important thing to remember is that the role of Deacons is to care for people. A Deacons' work is not primarily about caring for money or a building; it is primarily about caring for the physical needs of the people within the church.

Where there is a great love for the people in the church, a Deacon will usually find his work to be a blessing rather than a burden.

If a Deacon is a man who loves God with all of his heart, soul, mind and strength, and who loves his neighbour as himself, he will have all the incentive he needs to work faithfully in this ministry. Even in the monotony of hard work, he will appreciate that his efforts are all for the God he loves and the people he is serving.

“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

(Mark 10:45 ESV)

Please pray fervently that God would show you if He is calling you to this vital ministry.



