

Community of Grace
Deacon Document
Sept. 2021

This fall we intend to begin the process of calling deacons at Community of Grace. As we prepare to do that, we want answer some questions to help the entire congregation understand what to expect.

What is a deacon?

A deacon is fundamentally a servant. This is a broadly used term in the New Testament, but for our purposes, we are talking about a specific office of service.

The New Testament differentiates the office of **elder** from the office of **deacon**. A deacon is one who does practical works of ministry in assistance of the elders.

We see the Biblical foundations for this in Acts 6:1-7.

In this situation the church is growing (“the disciples were increasing in number”) and some of the widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of the food.

The twelve disciples who are leading the church recognize two things. First, that caring for the physical needs of the widows is very important. Second, this is not the task that they are specifically called to. They have priorities that they need to focus on - namely the ministry of the word and prayer. Their response is instructive to us.

“It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the Word” (Acts 6:2b-4).



Caption

The disciples did not ignore the needs, or mispend their energies. Rather, they chose to appoint gifted men to oversee this practical area of ministry.

We would define a deacon as, **“A servant, formally empowered and recognized by the elders to lead and engage in practical works of ministry so that elders can devote themselves to their primary ministry of the word and prayer.”**

We see that the New Testament clearly indicates an office of Deacon and provides the qualifications for diaconal ministry I Timothy 3:8-13.

“Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.”

How do we envision deacons practically functioning at Community of Grace?

We see many opportunities for diaconal ministry. The following list serves as an example of ministries within the church where a deacon could potentially serve.

- **Care for widows**
- **Organizing mercy and compassion ministries**
- **Music ministry**
- **Building maintenance and repair**
- **Welcome and Hospitality ministry**
- **Community Garden**
- **Caring and communicating with missionaries that we support**
- **Event Planning**
- **Children’s ministry**
- **Leadership of our prison ministry**
- **Supporting Adoptive Families**
- **Providing Financial leadership to the church**
- **At Large**

Not every ministry of the church will require someone to hold the office of deacon. Nor do we intend to begin by calling a dozen deacons. However, this incomplete list shows just some of the numerous opportunities that exist for ministry in a church like ours. For these practical areas of ministry to function we need godly and qualified leaders.

How will we help prepare our church family for the appointment of deacons?

We are intending a patient process.

First, Pastor Matt preached from I Timothy 3:8-13 this fall and explained the office and qualifications of deacons in detail. This sermon can be found on our website.

Second, we want to inform you with this document.

Third, we will be teaching through the nature of the church during our EQUIP classes this fall, and will be discussing the office of deacon in those classes.

Fourth, we intend to begin training potential deacons by inviting members of our church who already have a long track record of service.

Should women be deacons?

This is an issue that Bible-believing churches debate. Romans 16:1 uses the word 'diakonos' in describing a woman named Phoebe. This could mean that Phoebe was an office holder in the church or that she was simply a servant.

The only office the Bible specifically restricts to men is that of elder. Women are not to 'teach or exercise authority' over men (I Tim. 2:11-14), so they would be prohibited from the authoritative office of elder. The office of deacon is an office of service, not authoritative leadership, and therefore does not involve teaching or exercising authority over men.

In I Timothy 3, the criteria for eldership is specific to men. The list of qualifications for deacons in I Tim. 3:8-13 includes qualifications for female deacons or for the wives of deacons. "Their wives (the literal word is 'women') likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things" (I Tim. 3:11). It would seem by context that these verses are referring to female deacons, since there are no corresponding qualifications for the wives of elders.

It is also evident that women were appointed as deaconesses very early in church history. This obviously does not carry the authority of the biblical text, but it is instructive that the early Christian churches did not hesitate to call women as deacons.

Our position as a church is that we will be led by Biblically qualified male elders. These elders will promote both men and women to the office of deacon/ deaconness who will help in the practical works of ministry under the oversight of the eldership.

How will we help prepare prospective deacons to serve the church?

Our plan is to invite the prospective deacons into a 4-6 month deacon “track.” This will involve monthly meetings that combine study, teaching, prayer and conversation.

We are looking for the qualifications outlined in I Timothy 3:8-13. As we study these Scriptures, we will also be looking for a fit around three important ‘C’s.’

Conviction - is there tight alignment around our statement of faith and core values of Gospel, community, and mission?

Character - is this person someone of godly and tested character?

Competence - is this person going to be excellent and well suited for this area of ministry?

How will deacons be appointed? Will they be selected by the elders or does the congregation have a say in who will serve as deacons?

The elders will select the deacons but they will also look for high congregational involvement. We would inform the church of the people who are entering the deacon track. During that 4-6 month period we would be particularly encouraging the congregation as a whole to get to know these people, to pray for them, and to observe their lives and character. This would also be the opportunity for people in the congregation to express any reservations that they might have about a potential deacon.

Will deacons have term limits or serve indefinitely?

Once deacons are appointed they will not have term limits but they will have regularly scheduled check ins to evaluate their fruitfulness and capacity for the work that they are engaged in.

How much Bible knowledge/training is necessary to be a deacon?

One of the men appointed to serve in Acts 6 was Stephen the Martyr who was also a fiery preacher. However, the Bible does not require that a deacon be able to teach, although this is a qualification for an elder. Rather, a deacon “must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience (I Tim. 3:9). Therefore, we would be looking for both exemplary character and an ability to articulate the gospel clearly.