

# **Deacon Training Handbook**

@ Seven Rivers Church

*May, 2023*

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# Timeline and Process for Deacon Ordination

- December/January:** Officer Nominations
- February:** Offers extended for apprenticeship to those nominations that get approved
- March-July:** Conversations and consideration of the nomination  
Reformed Theology Class (serves as officer training)
- July/August:** **Begin one-year apprenticeship**
- 1. Read this Deacon Training Handbook
  - 2. Begin coming to deacon meetings (1 / month)
  - 3. Shadow a deacon on weekend services
- *[Following Year]* -----
- February-April:** Consideration of next step:
- 1. Continue to ordination
  - 2. One more year of apprenticeship
  - 3. Discontinue the process
- May:** Officer examinations  
Officer Interviews by Session
- June:** Session approval and congregational vote
- July:** **Ordination and Installation**  
Take officer vows before congregation
- July/August:** **Begin term as ordained Deacon**

# General Role & Responsibilities

## I. Mercy & Care (Congregation & Community)

- Oversee benevolence budget
- Help set vision and guidelines for care
- Approve benevolence requests
- Ministry to widows
- Overseeing SRC Care Teams
- General awareness of those who need care and finding ways to care for them

## II. Weekend Worship (Once/4-6 weeks at a Saturday or Sunday worship service)

- \* You will shadow another deacon several times until one feels comfortable
- Unlock doors and turn on lights (1 hour before service)
- Check in with security and head usher
- Pray with preacher before service
- Collects offering, sorts and counts
- Turn off lights and lock up (~ 1 hour after service)

## III. Minister Alongside Elders (at times when needed)

- Assist with new member interviews
- Pray for preacher before service
- Deacon representative on church finance team
- Assist in serving Lord's supper
- Pray up front after the service

## IV. Other General Expectations

- Faithfulness to the Lord, your family and the church (regular worship attendance)
- Aligned with SRC theology and core values
- Take Reformed Theology Class within first two years
- Attend Deacon meetings
- Serve on a deacon leadership team
  - Benevolence
  - Widows
  - Facilities
  - DRT
  - Hurricane Response
  - Usher
  - Parking
  - Security

# Summary of Benevolence Guidelines

- General Process:**
1. Need arises (communicated to Pastor, Staff, Ministry Leader, Prayer Net, etc)
  2. If low amount, care staff meet need. If large, care staff sends email to deacons
  3. Deacons respond within 48 hours or move decision to Deacon meeting

People Needing Help	Amount Requested <sup>2</sup>	Approval
<b>Category 1</b> (Members/Regular Attenders)	\$0 – \$300 \$300 – \$1000 \$1000+	- Cong. Care Coordinator/Ministry Staff <sup>3</sup> - Deacon Vote by Email <sup>4</sup> - Deacon Vote at Meeting <sup>5</sup>
<b>Category 2</b> (Connected to SRC ministry, member, or SRCS)	\$0 – \$300 \$300 – \$1000 \$1000+	- Cong. Care Coordinator/Ministry Staff - Deacon Vote by Email - Deacon Vote at Meeting
<b>Category 3</b> (Disconnected to SRC/Citrus County Residents)	\$0 – \$100 \$100 – \$300 \$300 – \$600 \$600+	- Community Care Coordinator - Community Care Coordinator - Deacon Vote by Email - Deacon Vote at Meeting

<https://www.sevenrivers.org/community-care>

## Category 1&2

- 0-\$300 → Need arises → Congregational Care Coordinator/Ministry Staff Approval? → Meet need → Record
- \$300-\$1000 → Need arises → Initial Approval by Congregational Care Coordinator? → Approval by deacon vote by email → Meet Need → Record
- \$1000+ → Need arises → Initial Approval by Congregational Care Coordinator? → Approval by deacon vote at meeting (email deacons) → Meet Need → Record

## Category 3

- \$0-\$100 → Application (Part 1) → Approval by Community Care Coordinator? → Come in with proof of need<sup>6</sup> → Meet need
- \$100-\$300 → Application (Part 1-2)<sup>7</sup> → Approval by Community Care Coordinator? → Come in with proof of need + discussion of application<sup>8</sup> → Meet need
- \$300-\$600 → Application (Part 1-3)<sup>9</sup> → Initial approval by Community Care Coordinator? → Come in with proof of need + discussion of app. → Approval by deacon vote by email? → Meet need
- \$600+ → Application (Part 1-3) → Same as \$300-\$600 + vote at deacon meeting<sup>10</sup> → Meet need

1	This chart is online at <a href="https://www.sevenrivers.org/deacon-resources">sevenrivers.org/deacon-resources</a> . The password is [REDACTED]. More details in Appendix 2
2	This number is cumulative over the course of 12 months and includes prior aid plus current request.
3	Currently, these people include Fred Bailey, John Colossanti, Tricia Marble, Robyn Shipes, and Michael Hart.
4	Deacons have 48 hours to respond. One “no” vote sends the request to the deacon’s meeting.
5	In the event that a large request has a deadline before the next deacon’s meeting, vote can be done via email. Deacons will have one week to consider the request. Contact Fred B. if more information is needed. This applies to Category 1 & 2 only.
6	Exceptions to requirement to come into the office can be made for those who are elderly and/or disabled.
7	Part 2 of Application includes an explanation of where they have gone to for help.
8	Part of this meeting will include the Community Care Coordinator asking to hear the requester’s story, in order to start building
9	Part 3 of Application includes a requirement to watch a video and answer a few questions.
10	If/when we develop a Family Advocacy Team, this will be included in this step.

# What a Deacon Is: Your CALLING

Jesus once said that He “did not come to be served (‘deaconed’), but to serve (‘deacon’), and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). The One who is Supreme over all things became the supreme Deacon (Rom. 15:8) in His life and His work on the cross. Because the ministry of Jesus included the gospel in word and in deeds (Matt. 4:23; 9:35), the ministry of mercy is as necessary in the church as the ministry of the Word and church discipline.

Every Christian is called to serve others with the mercy they have received. Serving is not optional, but rather a sign of true faith<sup>1</sup>. So in one way, every member of the Church is called to be a deacon [διδάκονος], which simply means one who humbly cares or serves others for their good.

## The OFFICE of the Deacon

While all Christians are called to be “servants,” the bible shows that some are to be set apart in the Church to the office of deacon to be the lead servant-leaders, loving our neighbor and ministering to the poor, the needy, and vulnerable in the name of Jesus. Acts 6 reveals the necessity of the office of deacon, where some were chosen to carry out the ministry of mercy, allowing the apostles to carry out the ministry of the Word. This ministry is later seen as a central responsibility of the Church (Gal. 2:10)<sup>2</sup>, and because the poor would always be among us (Matt. 26:11; from Deut. 15:11), the office and work given to deacons is a permanent one in the church. Paul shows in several letters to the churches that the office of deacon was a distinct office from an “overseer” or elder. (Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3). The Book of Church Order (“BCO”) of the PCA says is this way:

“The office of deacon is set forth in the Scriptures as ordinary and perpetual in the Church. The office is one of sympathy and service, after the example of the Lord Jesus; it expresses also the communion of saints, especially in their helping one another in time of need.” - BCO 9-1

### ► The deacon is a SIGNIFICANT OFFICE.

It is far from a lower calling or a stepping stone to being an elder. In the eyes of Jesus, the apostles and early church, the ministry of mercy was a critical role in gospel ministry as the ministry of the Word. The office of deacon can be no more deemphasized in the church than the deeds of mercy can be in Jesus’ own ministry.

Deacons do not differ from elders so much in degree of Christian maturity as in differentiation of gifts and calling. The diaconate is not a proving ground for the eldership, but a distinct office requiring mature wisdom and gifts for service. In the areas of responsibility delegated to them, deacons function under the authority of the elders, who must encourage them in initiative and faithfulness, giving honor to their office.  
- Biblical Guidelines for Mercy Ministry in the PCA, 1987

### ► The deacon is also a SPIRITUAL OFFICE.

The first deacons in Acts 6 had to be men “full of the Spirit and of wisdom.” This has led many churches to rightly ask when addressing what deacons do, “What tasks require the Holy Spirit and wisdom?” What does not require the Holy Spirit and wisdom can be delegated to others.<sup>3</sup> Deacons must be Spirit-filled men who share in the spiritual leadership of the church with the elders.

#### **Definition of a Deacon**

Agent of God’s mercy who cultivates material and relational gifts to bring wholeness to areas of brokenness in the congregation and community.

<sup>1</sup> Is. 1:10-17; Mic. 6:8; Matt. 25:31-46; James 2

<sup>2</sup> Other verses: Acts 11:29-30; 24:17; Rom. 15:25-27; 1Cor. 16:1-2; 2Cor. 8:1; Heb. 13:16; James 2:15-16; 1John 3:17

<sup>3</sup> David Apple, “Not Just a Soup Kitchen.” p. 140. This is discussed further under “What a Deacon Does: Leadership”

## The CHARACTER of the Deacon

The deacon is not merely the one most equipped to efficiently get things done concerning the church money and property. He is to be a spiritually minded man of great character, which is in fact, not that much different from the qualifications of the elder.<sup>4</sup>

### Acts 6:3

“...select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom...”

### 1 Tim. 3:8-10,12

“Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or greedy for dishonest 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. Wives 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.”

### Book of Church Order 9-3:

To the office of deacon, which is spiritual in nature, shall be chosen men of spiritual character, honest repute, exemplary lives, brotherly spirit, warm sympathies, and sound judgment.

### **List of Qualifications:**

- 1) good reputation** (Acts 6:3) - Others speak well of you
- 2) full of the Spirit and wisdom** - You are led by the Spirit as opposed to our fleshly desires and selfish ambition (Rom. 8:4-8). You bear fruit of the Spirit as found in Gal. 5:22-23.
- 3) dignified** (1 Tim. 3:8) - You are honorable and worthy of respect.
- 4) not double-tongued** (v. 8) - You are sincere with your words, not speaking one thing to one person and something else to another, thus being trustworthy in what you say.
- 5) not addicted to much wine** (v. 8) - It literally means to not pay close attention or devoting yourself to much wine. You have self-control in your life, enabling you to have compassion and serve those who may not.
- 6) not greedy for dishonest gain** (v. 8) - Such a man cannot lead the church into sacrificial generosity.
- 7) holding to the mystery of the faith** (v. 9) - You must not only have accepted the “mystery of the faith,” which refers to the gospel, but you must be ever “holding” to it and growing in it.
- 8) beyond reproach** (v. 10) - You cannot be accused of wrong in your character, very similar to being of good repute, which is why you must have some sort of “testing” to know this.
- 9) dignified wives** (v. 11) - The character of your wives matters. A wife without self-control and full of gossip will hinder your ability to minister to others.
- 10) husband of one wife** (v. 12) - It literally means being a “one-woman man,” so that you are not inappropriately emotionally or physically involved with another woman that is not your wife.
- 11) good managers of their children and households** - A good manager of God’s household will also be striving to manage his own household well.

► On the one hand, be encouraged that the majority of these qualifications are quite ordinary and encouraged for all Christians. On the other hand, the more you strive to be full of the Spirit and emptied of all subtle greed and deceit, you will see that your first calling is to “hold to the [gospel]” (#7). Your heart is far from perfection in these character traits and you need a Savior as much as any other. You must be a leader in repentance and faith in God’s mercy towards you in Christ. This will result in an exemplary motivation towards such character as mentioned above, compassion with those who fail like you have, and a demonstration of the mercy you have received towards others.

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<sup>4</sup> 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 stress that both offices require respectable men of great character. The deacon is especially called to watch his tongue, being sincere with his words, but he is not required to teach as the elder.

# The MOTIVATION of the Deacon

## 1) The Heart of God

*“Whoever oppresses a poor man insults his Maker” Prov. 14:31*

God has an amazing affinity for the poor, vulnerable and lost in His fallen creation. Where fallen man overlooks the needs of such people out of self interest, God’s heart is for their justice, being the provider and protector of the fatherless, the widow and immigrant. God redeemed a people so that they might have the same heart and do the same work. In fact, God says that pleading the cause of the afflicted and needy is what it actually means to know God (Jer. 22:16). Social relief laws, economic development laws and social structures and institutions were established within the life of God’s people in order to encourage them towards a lifestyle of mercy. As God has a heart abounding with compassion for the most afflicted and needy, so we were created to have such a heart of compassion. To love and serve these around us is one way we love and serve God.

## 2) The Work of Jesus

*“For even the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve...” Mark 10:45*

Jesus came not only to proclaim the kingdom (reign) of God with words but to demonstrate it through his deeds (Matt. 4:23). He came to serve, to reverse the effects of the curse and bring restoration to all that was broken by the fall. His life was one of utter other-centered mercy towards others, culminating at the cross, where He willingly accepted the punishment and condemnation of God that we deserved. Because God did not give us what we deserve, we are called to display such undeserved kindness to others. This means the deacon must first admit his own great inward poverty and need of restoration. He then is enabled to identify with and serve the poor and hurting in a way that doesn’t promote his self-righteousness as a giver or the shame of the receiver.

## 3) The Good of the Person

*“Love... your neighbor as yourself” Luke 10:27*

In Mark 3, we see Jesus wanting to restore a man’s ability to work and dignity in society by healing his withered hand. The religious men only are about breaking their Sabbath traditions. Jesus responds by asking, “Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath, to save a life or kill?” Jesus was teaching that the center of the whole law was the love for God and the good of your neighbor. Deacons should pray for a heart like Jesus, that sees the pain in people around them, to have compassion and then seek to alleviate that suffering with the resources given to the church body.

## 4) The Reward of Faithfulness

*“Blessed is the one who considers the poor” - Psalm 41:1*

Contrary to the way the world thinks, those who become servants and least of all shall be considered great and first by their Creator (Mk. 10:43-45). While some see the office of low standing, the deacon will “obtain a high standing for themselves and great confidence” before God Himself (1 Tim. 3:13).

### ***What a Deacon Is***

*The deacon is a godly lead servant in the church, motivated by the gospel and empowered by the Spirit to model a heart of compassion, wisdom, and service towards the most needy and vulnerable of the church and the community.*

### ***Why A Deacon Does It***

*Because God loves the poor, so will we. Because Jesus first came to serve us, so we will serve others. Because people are broken, we work towards their good and restoration into all God created them to be.*



# What a Deacon Does: Your Roles

The office of the deacon is not one of rule, but of sympathy and service.

- BCO 7-2

It is the duty of the deacons to minister to those who are in need, to the sick, to the friendless, and to any who may be in distress. It is their duty also to develop the grace of liberality in the members of the church, to devise effective methods of collecting the gifts of the people, and to distribute these gifts among the objects to which they are contributed. They shall have the care of the property of the congregation, both real and personal, and shall keep in proper repair the church edifice and other buildings belonging to the congregation. In matters of special importance affecting the property of the church, they cannot take final action without the approval of the Session and consent of the congregation.

- BCO 9-2

## I. SERVE

## II. LEAD

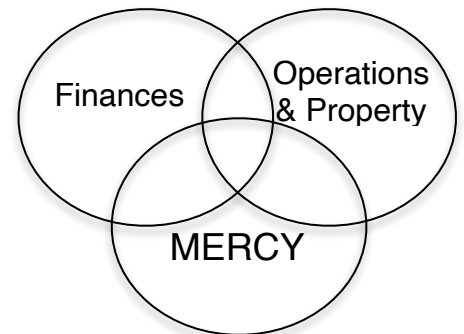
## III. ADMINISTRATION

### I. SERVE

The three main ways a deacon is called to SERVE the church and community are:

**1) MERCY, 2) FINANCES, 3) OPERATIONS & PROPERTY**

While all deacons are called to be full of mercy, caring for the poor and vulnerable in the church and community, each will have different gifts like the rest of the body. This provides the opportunity to allow each to serve while using their gifts within an area of ministry that best fits them<sup>5</sup>.



**1) MERCY** [A primary role of a deacon — See pg. 11ff]

### **2) STEWARDSHIP OF FINANCES**

*“Developing the grace of generosity in the members of the church, to devise effective methods of collecting the gifts of the people, and to distribute these gifts among the objects to which they are contributed.”*

#### **STEWARDSHIP Responsibilities:**

- a. Oversee the collection and counting of the Sunday offering
- b. Consider how to develop the grace of generosity in church members
- c. Oversee and analyze the deacon budget regularly towards meeting diaconate goals
- d. Review church budget and give counsel

### **3) STEWARDSHIP OF OPERATIONS & PROPERTY**

*“Having the care of the property of the congregation, both real and personal, and keeping in proper repair the church edifice and other buildings belonging to the congregation.”*

#### **OPERATIONS Responsibilities:**

- a. Oversee the unlocking and locking of facilities on Sunday morning
- b. Oversee the setting up and taking down for all church events

<sup>5</sup> See Romans 12:4-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11; Ephesians 4:7,11-13; 1 Peter 4:10

## II. LEAD

*“In view of the responsibility of the teaching office to equip the saints for the ministry (Eph. 4:11-16), it would appear that the same principle should apply to diaconal leadership. While deacons do not have the shepherding and disciplining authority of elders, they do take the lead in the ministry of mercy. Acts 6:3 indicates that diaconal ministers should be full of spiritual wisdom, which is always the qualification for leadership. As leaders, deacons should not only minister in the name of the church, but should encourage the church by their example to fulfill the ministry of mercy to which the Lord calls all.”*

*- Biblical Guidelines for Mercy Ministry in the PCA, 1987*

The deacons should not only be serving, but should be key *leaders* of mercy ministry in the church, mobilizing and equipping other members into using their God-given gifts and resources to serve others. All Christians are called to give to those in need (Eph. 4:28) and be merciful to the poor and vulnerable around them (Luke 6:35-36). Each member of the church has received a spiritual gift and is empowered by the Spirit to use it to serve the common good of others (1 Peter 4:10; 1 Cor. 12:7). Deacons must therefore be a resource of service opportunities, leading others into a lifestyle of mercy to those in the church and in the community.

Examples of leadership include:

- ▶ Identifying felt needs in the church and the gifts and resources of members to meet them<sup>6</sup>
- ▶ Cultivating generosity<sup>7</sup>
- ▶ Leading ministry events such as “Saturdays of Service” and other mercy-related outreaches
- ▶ Each deacon identifying, nominating and recruiting men who might be called to be a deacon
- ▶ Recruiting **Deacon Assistants** or others to assist with mercy, finance or help/facility needs<sup>8</sup>
- ▶ Overseeing care teams that do specialized areas of care (i.e. - Meal Team)

## III. ADMINISTRATION

In the discharge of their duties the deacons are under the supervision and authority of the Session.

-BCO 9-2

The deacons of a particular church shall be organized as a Board, of which the pastor shall be an advisory member. The Board shall elect a chairman and a secretary from their number and a treasurer to whom shall be entrusted the funds for the current expenses of the church...The Board shall keep a record of its proceedings, and of all funds and their distribution, and shall submit its minutes to the Session regularly, and at other times upon request of the Session. It is desirable that the Session and the Board of Deacons meet in joint session once a quarter to confer on matters of common interest.

- BCO 9-4

- ▶ Elect officers (chairman, secretary and treasurer)
- ▶ Keep minutes at all meetings and post them on Google Drive
- ▶ Meet jointly at least quarterly with the session
- ▶ Keep good records of who is helped, when and how

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<sup>6</sup> *The Need/Talent Structure encourages the need to be met in their local community such as a Life Group verses an administratively driven data-base. (See APPENDIX 4-a)*

<sup>7</sup> 1 Cor 8:12; 2 Cor 8:4-9; Gal 2:10 - This can be through collecting the “Deacons collection,” giving “missional moments,” communicating to the elders and congregation who is being helped generally, teaching on mercy, etc.

<sup>8</sup> *It is often expedient that the Session of a church should select and appoint godly men and women of the congregation to assist the deacons in caring for the sick, the widows, the orphans, the prisoners, and others who may be in any distress or need. These assistants to the deacons are not officers of the church (BCO 7-2) and, as such, are not subjects for ordination.*  
- BCO 9-7

# MERCY & CARE

A Primary Calling

*“It is the duty of the deacons to minister to those in need, the sick, the friendless, afflicted and distressed...” - BCO 9-2*

The deacons should take the lead in the church to demonstrate the restorative nature of the kingdom of God, helping people and families experience spiritual, emotional, social and physical healing through deeds of mercy. The deacon is called a “*minister*” of mercy to those who are hurting in the BCO. He must be known as the first to identify and care for the widows, lonely and afflicted, not simply as those who collect the offering, move the chairs or lock the doors. Mercy is a primary act of service.

## MERCY Responsibilities within the Church:

- Identify and understand the true needs of church members
- Work to meet those needs through the gifts and resources of the whole church
- Minister to them by offering prayer, encouragement, comfort and hope<sup>9</sup>
- Oversee mercy-related ministries and care teams

## MERCY Responsibilities within the Community:

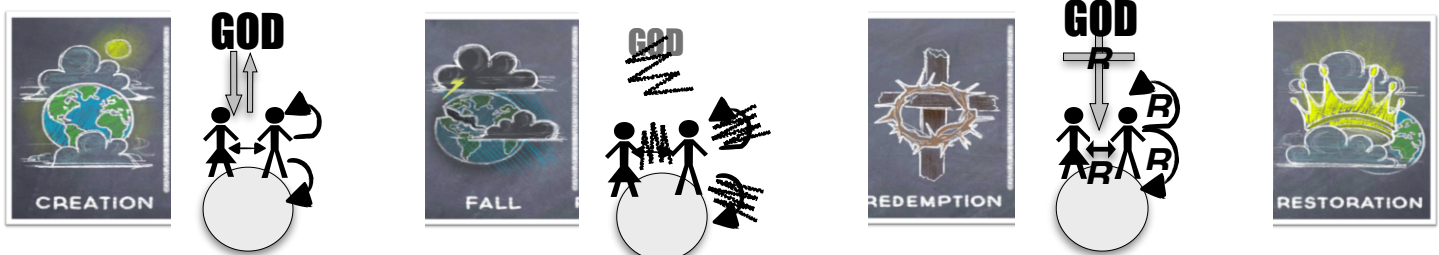
- Love our local “neighbors” around us by working to identify their felt needs
- Work to meet those needs through the gifts and resources of the whole church

## PRINCIPLES for MERCY MINISTRY

### ► Principle #1: Remember the Goal of Mercy

Our goal is to put God’s mercy on display in such a way that they might glorify God and seek to be reconciled in all areas of life. This means we must seek to restore their spiritual life (reconciliation with God), their dignity (reconciliation with self), community (reconciliation with others), and stewardship (reconciliation with creation). Deacons must seek to see the need beneath their need so they can help them move toward such restoration in these areas.

It’s good to remember and apply the Biblical storyline here.



All humans, male and female of every race, were created loved and valued by God. They had wholeness in their relationship with God, self (identity), others, and creation.

Sin and the curse came to all born in Adam. Separation from God brought brokenness to all areas of relationships with self, others, and creation. (See Principle #2)

Jesus brought hope of restoration and healing to all areas of sin and the curse. Redemption with God brings restoration to all areas of our relationship with God, self/identity, others, and creation.

One day Jesus will return and usher in the new heavens and new earth where all things broken will be made perfectly whole forever.

<sup>9</sup> You might especially think about this on a Sunday morning. Deacons should be the ones out in front of others on a weekend, initiating to any who come to worship who are elderly, poor, or anyone who seems lonely, sick or afflicted to see how they are doing.

▶ **Principle #2: Poverty is complex**

The fall of man brought about the curse which affects us in very complex ways. Our relationship with God, with our selves, with others and the rest of creation is dramatically affected by sin. Families are not always nurturing, communities are not always flourishing, work is not always meaningful. On top of that, our economic, political, religious and social systems are broken, which means poverty is quite complex. In general though, you might look for these following areas of brokenness that attribute to one’s poverty:

1) Individual

Own sin or addictions such as laziness, materialism or greed.

2) Abusive/Exploitive People:

The sin of others such as sexual abuse or negligent family

3) Oppressive Systems:

Recessions, opportunities for education or work, racism, etc

4) Natural Disasters:

Unforeseen events such as hurricanes or flooding

5) Demonic Forces:

Satan wages war to keep people broken and separated from God

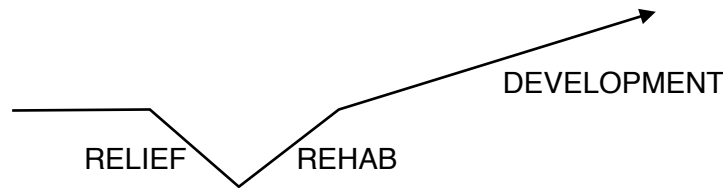
Broken	
Worship	Rel. w/ God
Relationships	Rel. w/ Self & Others
World & Worldview	Rel. w/ Creation
Enemy	Rel. w/ demonic forces

▶ **Principle #3: There are different types of helping**

1. **Relief** is helping in an urgent and temporary way to relief some form of immediate suffering. It’s thought of as a form of “stopping the bleeding.”

2. **Rehabilitation** is helping to restore elements of healthy living and thinking that were there before the crisis. There is movement from doing things *for* them to working *with* them to improve their situation.

3. **Development** is helping move people toward a right relationship with God, self, others and the rest of creation. This is also done by working *with* them, not *for* them.



**Application:**

- Most people want ongoing relief instead of rehabilitation and development.
- We should increase our relief giving % in times of crisis (ex. Hurricane or pandemic)
- Our help with relief should aim to open the door toward help with rehab and development.
- Our Family Advocacy team focuses on rehab. Discipleship along with involvement in church life and Community Groups are means of development.

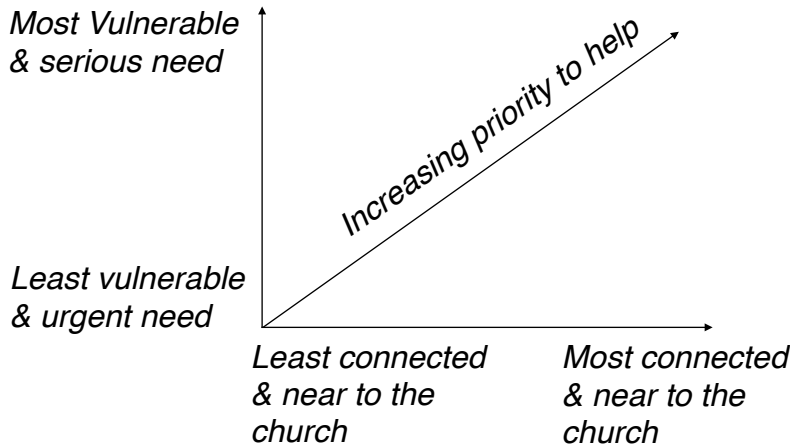
▶ **Principle #4: Be relational and ministerial**

The goal is to minister to the whole person and not just meet an immediate need. Most people are needing much more than what reveal. Many are in desperate need of heart-felt compassion and tender brotherly/sisterly love. Deacons are in a spiritual office and must remember to be relational and to love the person in the midst of meeting the need.

► **Principle #5: Priority to most connected and most vulnerable**

Biblical example and wise stewardship require a priority be given to help those who are **most connected** such as members and regular attenders. “Do good to all men, especially to the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10). Those within the covenant community receive covenant blessings. The bible also gives priority to those **most vulnerable**. These are the least likely to have others helping them. This means we must prioritize those within our church who are widows or without family, mentally ill, poor or without work, and the immigrant.

[Q: \_\_\_ on **Application for Assistance**]



**Reflected in the Budget**

- #1: Members/Regulars
- #2: Connected to Member/Ministry
- #3: Local Neighbors in the community
- #4: Disconnected Referrals/Walk-ins

**Priority for Receiving Assistance**

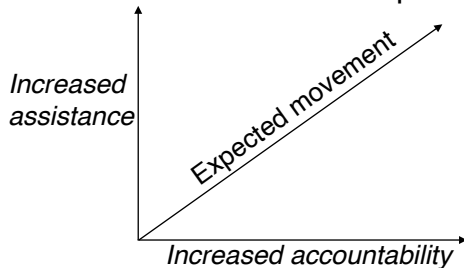
- 1) Members without local family help (most helpless and vulnerable)  
(Elderly, widows, single parents, sick and handicapped)
- 2) Members with local family help
- 3) Regular attenders (Elderly, widows, single parents, sick and handicapped)
- 4) Family of members
- 5) People connected to ministries of our church (School, MOPS, Bible studies, Camp, etc)
- 6) Neighbors of members (with which they are involved)
- 7) Neighbors living close to the church (\_\_\_\_\_)
- 8) Referrals of local people from local ministries (Pregnancy Center, Other churches, etc)
- 9) Those in the community who call or walk in (preference given to most poor and vulnerable based on funds available) without any connection.

► **Principle #6: Involve them when possible**

Doing things for people who could be trained and motivated to do them for themselves could hurt rather than help them. We do not want to “help” in a way that could possibly steal the sense of dignity and worth God intends them to have as they steward their own gifts and resources to provide for themselves and eventually others around them. We do not want to foster their feelings of inferiority. For those in the community, we must be careful to not do for them what they, their family, a local church near them, and/or other community agencies could do. When we do, we could be facilitating distance between the natural relationships God created to be helping them. Helping to reconcile broken relationships with family and friends and church community enables long-term sustainable help. [Q: #4, 6-7 on Application for Assistance]

▶ **Principle #7: Expect movement and add conditions with time**

God brought us into covenant by grace alone, but He then expects (and empowers) obedience that we might become all He created us to be. Therefore we also must help initially with grace and without conditions. But we must soon after expect (and empower) their movement towards responsibility.



Providing temporal relief to a symptom of deeper issues might only act as a bandaid, enabling a person to remain in their situation of need. We must focus energy and resources on those who are interested in moving out of their poverty and who allow us to help move them towards community and becoming more and more who God created them to be.<sup>10</sup> Those who return for help will receive more accountability and expectations.

▶ **Principle #8: Movement from their needs to their assets**

God created all with unique gifts and resources to not only build up their own lives and families but also to be a blessing to those around them. Most who come to us looking for help present their needs. We must dig into their assets. What do they have to help themselves? What do they have to be a blessing to us and others around them? This helps prevent us from having a “god-complex” (feeling a sense of superiority) and from them feeling a sense of helplessness or inferiority. We always want to help in a way that builds up their identity and dignity as an image-bearer. We want to move from thinking of ourselves as “Rescuer/Savior” to “Coach/Supporter.” We want them to move from thinking of themselves as “Victim/Helpless” to “Capable/Achiever.”

▶ **Principle #9: Let mercy limit mercy (It’s ok to sometimes say “no”)**

We always want to be merciful, but it is not always clear how to demonstrate this mercy. We are not under obligation to give people what they want, nor is that merciful if we did. It is often more merciful to cut off our aid and compassionately say, “We are not able to help you in that way at this time.” This should be considered when they are unwilling to comply with conditions, take responsibility, or be intentionally untruthful, hostile, or threatening.

▶ **Principle #10: Be reactive and proactive**

God did not wait for us to seek out His mercy. Neither should we wait for others to seek out ours. Deacons must not only respond to requests for help, but also be actively identifying those with felt needs. Let the Small Group leaders in your flock know you are there to help meet any felt needs their Small Group is not able to meet. Work with other Small Groups & leaders in the flock to meet the need if possible. Keep your eyes open on Sunday mornings especially for the elderly, poor, or any who might be distressed in need of help. In the community, it means we must actively find ways to identify the needs around us. It would be good to do a community assessment that identifies their needs as well as what churches, ministries and other agencies are meeting them so we might fill in the gaps.

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<sup>10</sup> Of course, we will often have to lead with some form of mercy before we can ask for or discern their desire for movement and relationship. Unfortunately, many who need help are unwilling to allow anyone in relationally (which might be why they are in the situation) and unwilling to move out of their situation.

▶ **Principle #11: Mobilize others to help you**

The deacons must develop a way of identifying gifts and resources of those in the congregation that they might be actively serving and meeting the needs of others in the church<sup>11</sup>. This principle is as much for the spiritual health of the church members as it is for the deacons. Every Christian is meant to be in real community with other believers around them where they are bearing each others burdens. Individuals, families, Small Groups and other ministries can and should be called upon to help meet a felt need. Deacons must be equippers and mobilizers of such ministry. [See *II. Leadership*]

▶ **Principle #12: Don't separate the ministry of deed and word**

Jesus demonstrated Word and Deed are equally necessary for the spread of the kingdom of God, just as two wings of an airplane are necessary for it to fly. Showing mercy is not simply a means to share the gospel with others, but it often provides great opportunities to do so. Deacons should always have the goal of using words to share the good news of God's mercy as you seek to demonstrate it through deeds of mercy. See the **Appendix 4-3 "How To Share the Gospel"** for practical helps any lay person can use.

▶ **Principle #13: Limit our help in the community by geography**

Our church is uniquely called to this local community of God's creation. We must confine our resources to the place God has placed us so that we are able to be faithful to their needs. As a general rule, one must live within our county in order to receive help. People will receive best help when they are encouraged to go to local churches and agencies where they live.

[See Priority for Receiving Assistance - Principle #5]

▶ **Principle #14: Record keeping and confidentiality**

Records are to be kept of who is helped and how through the church's data base. These records can be available to the session and congregation for their encouragement, but confidentiality must be maintained. Mercy calls us to protect the reputation of others.

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<sup>11</sup> The "Service-Talent Bank" will do this, including a list of members gifts, talents and resources available to help others. See *Resources for Deacons*, p. 52.

# Appendices

## **Appendix 1: One Page Summary of the Deacon Training Handbook**

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### **I. What a Deacon Is: YOUR CALLING**

- ▶ **The OFFICE:** The deacon is a lead servant ordained to the significant and spiritual office to serve the most needy and vulnerable of the church and the community.
- ▶ **The CHARACTER:** The deacon is a man striving for godliness, who compassionately cares for others out of an understanding of his own need of God's great mercy through Christ.
- ▶ **The MOTIVATION:** The heart of God, the work of Jesus, the good of our neighbor and the reward of faithfulness all provide an amazing motivation for the deacon to serve others.

### **II. What a Deacon Does: YOUR ROLES**

- ▶ **SERVE:**
  1. **Mercy** - Proactively minister with mercy to those in need, the sick, the friendless, afflicted and distressed both in the church and in the community with priority to those most connected and most needy
  2. **Stewardship of Finances**- Develop the grace of generosity, oversee collection and distribution of deacon funds and budget
  3. **Stewardship of Property & Operations** - Oversee care for church property and grounds and all teams and events associated with them
- ▶ **LEAD:** Deacons are leaders of mercy, mobilizing and equipping members to use their god-given gifts and resources to be generous, serve others, and be actively merciful
- ▶ **ADMINISTRATION:** Deacons must elect officers, keep minutes and good records



## **Appendix 2: Expansion of Summary of Benevolence Guidelines (from page 5)**

The Benevolence Ministry exists to provide financial and relational assistance to members of SRC, our ministries, and our community. All decisions made will be at the discretion of the diaconate or their appointed staff representatives. The Benevolence Ministry is primarily designed for short-term help with long-term benefits.

The Benevolence Ministry is predominantly funded through the Deacon Fund. The personal contributions designated for Benevolence are above the budgeted monies and directed to the restricted SRC Deacon Fund account to be used only for that purpose. In addition, the Deacon Fund may be the recipient of special offerings to help individuals or groups of people involved in natural disasters or devastating circumstances.

Gifts intended for the Deacon Fund can simply be designated as such at the time the gift is given. Members of the congregation, however, will not be encouraged to give to the Deacon Fund in lieu of giving to the General Fund of the church, and funds designated for the Deacon Fund must conform to the Church Organization and Policy Manual.

The Deacon Fund is intended as a source of last resort, to be used when the family or individual requesting help has explored other possibilities of help from family, friends, savings, or investments. It is intended primarily to be a temporary help during a time of crisis, though exceptions may at times be made to help those trying to achieve economic stability. Assistance will be disbursed in the order of priority listed in 4.7.2.2 for as long as funds are available.

The Deacons have acknowledged that they are committed to SRCS Christian School and may approve monetary gifts to help support them.

### **Selection/Screening Criteria**

Generally speaking, we will prioritize providing assistance to members and regular attenders of SRC (Gal. 6:10), and the greater one's connection to SRC, the more funds that are initially available. Additionally, even for those initially disconnected to SRC, aid may increase if they demonstrate a willingness for relational connection.

**Category 1:** Members and regular attenders of SRC

**Category 2:** Those connected to SRC small group, ministry, ministry partner, or families of SRCS including but not limited to: DivorceCare, GriefShare, Chronic Illness Support Group, MOPS, Teen MOPS, SRSM

**Category 3:** Citrus County residents.

Targeted financial distributions will be:

Category 1: 50% of monies spent

Category 2: 30% of monies spent

Category 3: 20% of monies spent

## **Assistance Application Process**

### **Categories 1 and 2:**

Requests for assistance may come in a variety of ways. Persons in need may reach out to the church directly, or a ministry leader or member may approach the church on someone else's behalf. For amounts under \$300, funds may be approved by either the Congregational Care Coordinator, the Benevolence Deacon, the Pastor of Discipleship and Small Groups, or the Director of Women's Ministry, at their discretion.

Amounts over \$300<sup>12</sup> will require diaconate approval. Amounts between \$300 and \$1000 may be approved via email. Funds over \$1000 must be voted on at the deacons' monthly meeting<sup>13</sup>. The Congregational Care Coordinator will speak with the requestor (or with the person making the request on their behalf) to find out relevant information about the nature of the need before bringing the matter to the diaconate. We do not require a form for those in Category 1 and 2.

For email votes, the deacons will be sent a voting form within 24 hours of the initial request and will have 48 hours to vote. Any one "no" vote sends the request to a deacons' meeting for discussion.<sup>14</sup> Upon the approval of a request, the Congregational Care Coordinator will contact the requestor and meet the need within 24 hours.

Depending on the situation of the individual, when appropriate, the asker will be connected to a Life Group or Small Group.

### **Category 3:**

When a Category 3 individual calls the church office for help, receptionists will direct them to the online Application for Assistance. Submitted applications will be sent to the Community and Congregational Care Coordinators for consideration.

For requests under \$100, the Community Care Coordinator will send an approval email to the individual within 24 if the request meets the Guidelines for Assistance (see below). To receive help, the requestor must come into the church office during normal business hours with proof of need and the approval email, at which point the Community Care Coordinator or a receptionist will pay the bill/ provide financial assistance.<sup>15</sup>

For amounts between \$100-\$300<sup>16</sup>, the process is the same, with the additional stipulation that the requestor must have a brief meeting with the Community Care Coordinator to discuss their situation and application. This meeting is primarily to establish a relationship with the individual, getting to know their story and situation and suggesting relevant community resources or points of contact with

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<sup>12</sup> This number is cumulative, meaning that an individual's prior financial aid in a year will be added to the current amount requested.

<sup>13</sup> Exceptions may be made when the request is time-sensitive (such as an impending deadline) and waiting until the next deacon's meeting would result in harm to the requestor, like a large financial penalty, the loss of an asset, the loss of housing, etc. In these situations, a vote may be taken via email. This provision applies to Category 1 & 2 only.

<sup>14</sup> Votes at deacon's meetings require a simple majority of deacons present to pass.

<sup>15</sup> Requiring the individual to come into the church office is an important part of the process since it will rule out those with low levels of commitment. However, exceptions may be made in circumstances where the requestor is disabled, elderly, or homebound, and it would be an unreasonable barrier to require the individual to come to the church.

<sup>16</sup> This number is cumulative, meaning that an individual's prior financial aid in a year will be added to the current amount requested.

SRC<sup>17</sup>. After this brief meeting, the Congregational Care Coordinator or receptionist will provide financial assistance on the spot.

For amounts between \$300-\$600, the Community Care Coordinator will email the requestor within 24 hours of receiving the application and ask them to come in for a meeting. If, after the meeting, the Congregational Care Coordinator still feels that SRC should help this individual, approval will require a diaconate vote by email<sup>18</sup>. The voting form should be sent out the same day as the meeting. If the request is approved, the Community Care Coordinator should let the requestor know within 24 hours and make arrangements to meet the need.

Requests over \$600 require the same process as above, except that the vote must be at a deacon's meeting instead of via email.<sup>19</sup>

For requests that do not meet the above criteria, the Community Care Coordinator will send the requestor an email letting them know that we are unable to help at this time.

## **Guidelines for Assistance**

The primary goal of giving is to move people into closer relationship with the church. We want to focus more on giving in a way that fosters relationship than on the specifics of what we will and will not cover. However, generally speaking, we will give towards meeting basic needs, particularly when these needs cannot be met by other agencies in the county.

Mercy is messy, and situations will arise where the righteous thing to do is to help, even though the need may not neatly fit within current guidelines.

All help will be in the form of gift cards, checks, or payments on an individual's behalf. We will not give cash. We will always require receipts and proof of need.

Generally speaking, we will give towards the following:

- Rent/mortgage
- Utilities
- Phone/internet (when necessary for continued work/school)
- Car payments
- Insurance
- Medical bills/medications
- Food
- Gas
- Essential car/home repairs

Generally speaking, we DO NOT give towards the following:

- Leisure
- Hotel rooms
- Alcohol or drugs

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<sup>17</sup> Community resources can be found on the Community Care tab on the SRC website. Connection points to SRC might be MOPS, GriefShare, DivorceCare, SRCS, Camp Seven Rivers, etc.

<sup>18</sup> See the procedure for voting under Category 1 and 2.

<sup>19</sup> If a Family Advocacy Program is created at SRC, meeting with a Family Advocate at least once will become a requirement for requests over \$600.

## Appendix 3: Deacon Budget (Example from December, 2022)

### Deacons Financial / Giving Report

For March Meeting

#### Benevolence Summary:

\*Income: \$530.00      Expenses: \$1,655.24      Current Balance: \$47,871.68

\*Category 1 & 2 (member/attende): 2      Category 3 (community): 2

#### Stories of Mercy:

Susan is a 36-year-old mother of 3 children (17, 16, and 4). Her husband has a difficult medical issue to diagnose, and he has been on oxygen 24/7. Due to the care he has needed, she lost her job. She has applied for a health and rehab position and is cleaning houses as well. She came to the church to talk with us. We paid her electric bill. She was concerned if it was turned off, her husband's oxygen equipment would be compromised. She was referred by Citrus United Basket.

#### Deacons Fund Account Summary for 2022-2023

Fund Overview		Budget - October 2022 to September 2023				
Current Balance/Reserve:	\$47,871.68	2/28/23				
	MTD Actual	Monthly Budget	YTD Actual	*Budget	Balance	
Gifts/Credits:	\$530.00	\$1,750.00	\$19,323.92	\$21,000.00	(\$1,676)	
Expenses/Debits:	\$1,655.24	\$2,500.00	\$10,396.25	\$30,000.00	\$19,603.75	
Benevolence						
	MTD Actual	Monthly Budget	YTD Actual	Projected Budget	Balance Available	% Spent MTD    % Spent YTD
Category 1 <i>(Member/Regular Attender)</i>	\$552.00	\$1,250.00	\$4,559.78	\$15,000.00	\$10,440.22	44.16%    30.40%
						Target: 50%
Category 2 <i>(Connected to SRC/SRCS/Member)</i>	\$500.00	\$750.00	\$1,505.76	\$9,000.00	\$7,494.24	66.67%    16.73%
						Target: 30%
Category 3 <i>(Citrus County Resident)</i>	\$603.24	\$500.00	\$4,330.71	\$6,000.00	\$1,669.29	120.65%    72.18%
						Target: 20%

\*Budget comes from \$21,000 in projected gifts to Deacons Fund + \$9,000 from reserves

#### Income Log

Receipts from Realm Giving	2/28/23	\$510.00
Receipts from Realm Giving	2/28/23	\$20.00
<b>February Totals:</b>		<b>\$530.00</b>

	2/27/23	\$300.00	Mavis Tire Supply
	2/8/23	\$190.00	Sumter Electric CO.
	2/27/23	\$150.00	Giftcards
	2/20/23	\$263.24	Withlatchoochee Electric
	2/15/23	\$82.00	Dinner
	2/15/23	\$200.00	Gas Giftcards
	2/22/23	\$320.00	
	2/15/23	\$150.00	Giftcards
<b>February Category Totals:</b>		<b>\$552.00</b>	<b>\$500.00</b>
		<b>\$603.24</b>	<b>\$1,655.24</b> - Total All Categories

► **Mercy** section shows the priority of spending towards the most connected

► 40%, 30%, 20%, 10% goes to each group respectively. This should help us be aware of how much is going to each group and to be more proactive in meeting needs of those who are most connected and most vulnerable.

## Appendix 4: Deacon Training and Ordination Questions

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### **Deacon Training:**

Your training will include this Deacon Manual, reading through the Westminster Confession of Faith, the PCA Book of Church Order, along with a few chapters of other books. You will meet with one of the pastors over a few months for study and discussion of these. You will be examined on your 1) Christian experience, 2) basic Bible content, 3) knowledge of PCA doctrine, government & discipline, 4) deaconal duties, and 5) your willingness to give assent to the ordination questions. [BCO 24-1]

### **Ordination Questions:**

Ordination is a significant calling. It is important that you understand the vows you are taking. Take time to read through and study the questions you will be asked. [From BCO 24-6]

- 1. Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New testaments, as originally given, to be the inerrant Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?**
  - ▶ *Do you have any major theological hangups?*
- 2. Do you sincerely receive and adopt the Confession of Faith and the Catechism of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures, and do you further promise that if at any time you find yourself out of accord with any of the fundamentals of this system of doctrine, you will, on your own initiative, make known to the Session the change which has taken place in your views since the assumption of this vow?**
  - ▶ Have you read the Confession and Catechism? Do you have any *major* exceptions?<sup>20</sup>
- 3. Do you approve of the form of government and discipline of the Presbyterian Church in America, in conformity with Biblical polity?**
  - ▶ Have you read through the Book of Church Order? Do you feel like have a basic understanding of Presbyterian church government and discipline?
- 4. Do you accept the office of Deacon in this church, and promise faithfully to perform all the duties thereof, and to endeavor by the grace of God to adorn the profession of the Gospel in your life, and to set a worthy example before the church of which God has made you an officer?**
- 5. Do you promise subjection to your brethren in the Lord?**
- 6. Do you promise to strive for the purity, peace, unity, and edification of the Church?**

The congregation makes this vow to you as a deacon:

*Do you, the members of this church, acknowledge and receive this brother as a deacon, and do you promise to yield him all that honor, encouragement and obedience in the Lord to which his office, according to the Word of God and the Constitution of this Church, entitles him?*

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** It is important to realize how most everyone feels a great gap between their condition and their calling. Most men feel very inadequate and unworthy to such a high calling. Be encouraged that this is not only normal but healthy! Moses (Ex. 3:11), David (1 Chron. 17:16), Jeremiah (Jer. 1:6-7), Paul (1 Cor. 15:9-10) and others felt the same. Remember that it is God who calls, and that it is God who makes you worthy to His calling. God loves to use small, unworthy yet willing tools to produce His greatest fruit so that He alone will get the credit (1 Cor. 1:26-29)

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<sup>20</sup> You have a “good-faith subscription” to the WCF, where your exceptions are not out of accord with a fundamental of our system of doctrine because the difference is neither hostile to the system nor strikes at the vitals of religion.”- BCO 21-4f

## Appendix 5: Deacon Installation Service (Example from July 2021)

### Deacon Installation

Saturday, July 31, 2021

- Ask Deacons and Elders to come forward

#### I. THE MEN

*Marco Leene, Scott McKee, Caleb Nelson*

#### II. THE JOB

It is the duty of the deacons to minister to those who are in need, to the sick, to the friendless, and to any who may be in distress. It is their duty also to develop the grace of liberality in the members of the church. They shall have the care of the property of the church.

#### III. THE CHARACTER

(I Timothy 3:8-10,12-13) "Deacons 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. And let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach. Let deacons be husbands of only one wife, and good managers of their children and their own households."

#### IV. THE CHARGE

(Matthew 5:16) Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

#### V. THE QUESTIONS

1. Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as originally given, to be the inerrant Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?
2. Do you sincerely receive and adopt the Confession of Faith and the Catechisms of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures; and do you further promise that if at any time you find yourself out of accord with any of the fundamentals of this system of doctrine, you will, on your initiative, make known to your Session the change which has taken place in your views since the assumption of this ordination vow?
3. Do you approve of the form of government and discipline of the Presbyterian Church in America, in conformity with the general principles of biblical polity?

4. Do you accept the office of deacon in this church, and promise faithfully to perform all the duties thereof, and to endeavor by the grace of God to adorn the profession of the Gospel in your life, and to set a worthy example before the church of which God has made you an officer?

5. Do you promise subjection to your brethren in the Lord?

6. Do you promise to strive for the purity, peace, unity and edification of the church?

#### VI. QUESTION TO MEMBERS

Do you, the members of this church, acknowledge and receive these brothers as deacons, and do you promise to yield to them all that honor, encouragement and obedience in the Lord to which their office, according to the Word of God and the Constitution of this church, entitles them!

#### VII. PRAYER Invite officers to lay on hands for newly ordained—

kneel. \_\_\_\_\_ to pray.

#### VIII. PRONOUNCEMENT

I now declare that Bill Albright, Jamey Gage, Tom Loughridge, Chris Nast and Michael Poloske have been regularly elected and installed as deacons in this church, and that this is agreeable to the Word of God, and according to the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in America; and that as such they are entitled to all encouragement, honor and obedience in the Lord: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

## **Appendix 6: Deacons Role and Relationship with Session and Staff**

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### **1. Diaconate Relationship with the Session**

*“In the discharge of their duties the deacons are under the supervision and authority of the Session. In a church in which it is impossible for any reason to secure deacons, the duties of the office shall devolve upon the ruling elders.”* - BCO, last paragraph of 9-2

- ▶ **The diaconate is primarily one of service, not authority. Your role is to come alongside, assist, and serve the elders in their role of shepherding the flock, teaching and guarding sound doctrine, equipping the saints, and setting an example of godliness. Elders take primary responsibility for Word-related ministries and deacons deed-related ministries. Because of this, there should be a united partnership between the two in gospel ministry.**

*“The deacons have as much authority as the elders delegated to them. The elders are required by Scripture and Presbyterian polity to delegate to the deacons at some level of authority the work of mercy and stewardship. Deacons are not a separate legislative body. Though the elders may overrule the deacons on any matter, a wise and godly session will seldom overturn deacons’ decisions. Elders are not to rule in a domineering way, always “pulling rank” (1 Peter 5:3). The session should routinely review all diaconal decisions and work.”* - Timothy Keller,

#### **Commonalities Between Elders and Deacons**

- Both are characterized by godliness and spiritual fruit as examples to the congregation.
- Both are recognized and elected by the congregation for being full of the Spirit and wisdom.
- Both are publicly ordained... through prayer and laying on of hands.
- Both roles involve spiritual leadership and care for the congregation.
- Both are “embedded” in the congregation and therefore have a pulse on how things are going.

#### **Differences Between Elders and Deacons**

- Elders lead the church in governance/shepherding, while Deacons lead in service/support.
- Elders emphasize ministry in the Word, while Deacons emphasize ministry in Deed.
- Elders are expected to embrace and be able to teach Gospel truths, while Deacons are only expected to embrace Gospel truths. - Taken from “Deacon Vision: Covenant Presbyterian Church Palm Bay”

*“Keep minutes, including funds and their distribution, and submit them to the session regularly”  
“Meet with the session jointly once a quarter...”* - Excerpts from BCO 9-4

### **2. Diaconate Relationship with the Staff**

Office staff are to support and help the deacons in their calling to be ministers of mercy to the church and congregation along with their calling to stewardship and operations.

The Business Manager is the point person for all things regarding finances and facilities.

The Administrator of Care is the contact regarding all things related to benevolence along with church events and calendar

- ▶ There should be constant effort to have good communication and keep all unity between office staff and the deacons as they work together in Jesus name for the good of the people.

## Appendix 7: How To Share the Gospel:

As explained in **Principle #10** under “**Principles for Mercy Ministry**,” although the office of deacon is primarily one of service, it must not be separated from the ministry of the Word. Mercy ministry was integrated into the preaching and teaching ministry of Jesus and the early church (see page 3). The first deacons shared the gospel (Acts 6:10, 8:5). Deacons should always hope that the meeting of felt needs will result in opportunities to share the gospel.

Here are some basic helps in sharing the gospel:

### 1) **MOTIVATION to share the gospel**

- ▶ Most Christians feel a lack of courage, giftedness, knowledge and time to share the gospel.
- ▶ God is holy and just. All of your neighbors are convicted of treason by their Creator because of their sin. There are no ordinary people around you on a given day. All will be judged and spend eternity in either hell or heaven, depending on whether by God’s grace they hear and believe the gospel of Christ.
- ▶ We can’t win anyone to Christ. It is God’s pleasure to pursue and draw to Himself lost sheep that he chooses to love. God uses, equips and empowers us to simply be faithful to tell them the good news.

### 2) **PRINCIPLES of sharing the gospel**

- ▶ **Everyone:** Every Christian is called to use whatever unique gifts God has given them to share and show the gospel of Christ to others around them.
- ▶ **Relationships:** Begin with intentional relationships with unbelievers around you. Share the gospel message in the midst of loving and serving them well.
- ▶ **Process:** Much cultivating and sowing usually happens before harvesting a response. Look for many mini-decisions as you help them move along the process of believing.
- ▶ **Intentionality:** Have a plan and accountability in building intentional relationships with the lost.

### 3) **METHODS to share the gospel**

#### ▶ **Love Your Neighbor Card**

Write down names of 3 lost “neighbors” you meet

1. **PRAY:** Start praying for them
2. **KNOW:** Spend time with them, getting to know what they believe and sharing what you believe
3. **SERVE:** Look for opportunities to serve them in deed & word  
**(LYN Cards are in the office)**

▶ **Conversation:** Ask questions and listen a lot! Look to go deeper.

▶ **Testimony:** Share about your life before Christ and how you came to understand the gospel. Have a one minute version as well as a 5 minute version

- ▶ **Presentation:** Have a structure in your head to talk through the gospel
  - 1) The “Gospel Card” - God... Man... Christ... Response...
  - 2) “The Bridge Diagram” or “2 Ways to Live” (resources available)
  - 3) A 4-6 week bible study - “Life Issues” - “You, Me, and the Bible”

LOVE <sup>your</sup> NEIGHBOR

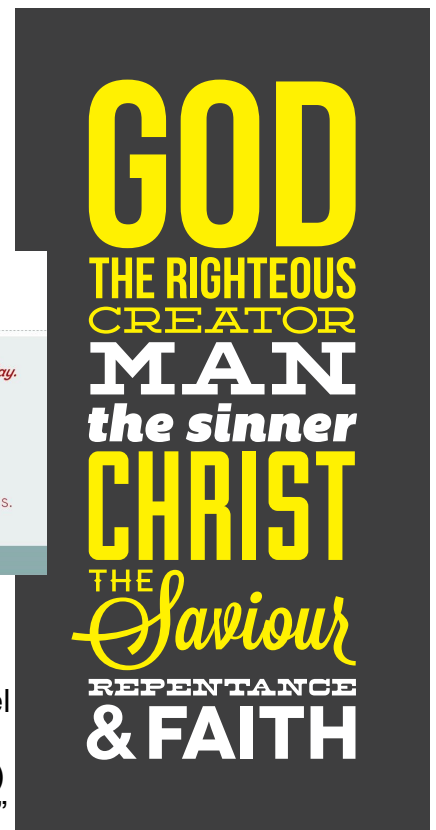
1. \_\_\_\_\_  
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
3. \_\_\_\_\_

Matthew 22:39

LOVE <sup>your</sup> NEIGHBOR

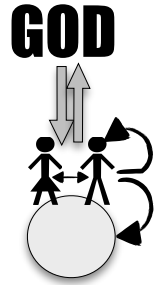
*Write down the names of 3 “neighbors” where you live, work, and play.*

- **PRAY:** Pray regularly for them and their specific needs.
- **KNOW:** Seek to develop real relationships with them.
- **SERVE:** Seek opportunities to serve them in tangible ways.





# GOSPEL CARD



## **PART 1** GOD the RIGHTEOUS CREATOR

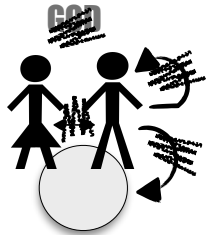
- Read it in the bible: **Genesis 1, Genesis 2, Psalm 95, Acts 17**
- **Genesis 1:1 - "In the beginning, God created..."**

The Bible tells us that there is only one God who is holy and righteous, completely pure and hating all evil. God created the universe and everything in it as good, including you and me. He gave us the purpose of honoring Him by reflecting his character and enjoying living under His loving authority. In the beginning, humanity had a satisfying relationship with God, the creation, each other and our selves.

(Read More: Is. 43:6-7; Acts 17:24-28; 1 Cor. 10:31; Rom. 11:33-36; 1 Tim. 6:15-16; Rev. 4:11)

## **PART 2** MAN the SINNER

- Read it in the bible: **Genesis 3, Romans 1, Romans 3, 1 John 1**
- **1 Jn 1:8 - "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves..."**



The truth is that we do not honor God, reflect His character, or enjoy living under His loving authority. If we are honest, we value other people and things more than God. We live under our authority. The Bible calls such rebellion 'sin'. Sin has brought separation and misery in our relationship with God, and as a result, to creation, each other and our selves. God is just to judge our sin and hold us accountable for every unrighteous thought, word and deed. We deserve to be cut off from His goodness and love forever.

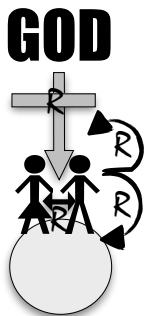
(Read more: Ps. 51:6; Is. 64:1-7; Jer. 17:9; Rom. 5:12-21; 14:23; Eph. 2:1-3; 2 Thes. 1:8-9; )

## **PART 3** CHRIST the SAVIOR

- Read it in the bible: **Mark 2, John 3, Philippians 2, Colossians 1**
- **Acts 4:12 - "There is salvation in no one else..."**

The good news is that God so loved us that He sent His Son Jesus to live the perfect life we didn't live and suffer the punishment we deserve. Jesus lived perfectly righteous under God's loving authority. But he accepted our sin upon himself as if he had done it and was killed by hanging on a cross. There he suffered God's justice against our sin. Three days later Jesus rose to life, thus securing forgiveness of sin, restored relationship to God and eternal life for all who believe. Restoration in our relationship with God leads to restoration with creation, each other and our selves.

(Read more: Is. 53:3-12, Mark 10:33-34,45; Rom. 5:6-11; Eph. 2:1-10; Titus 2:11-3:7)



## **PART 4** RESPONSE - Repentance & Faith

- Read it in the bible: **Luke 15, John 1, Romans 10, Revelation 2**
- **Mark 1:15b - "...repent and believe in the gospel"**

How does this apply to us? We have two choices. 1) We can continue to rebel against God's loving authority by either valuing other people and things more than God or by trying to save ourselves by our own good works. Or 2) we can turn from our unsatisfying sin (called "repentance") and receive God's free gift of salvation through the work of Jesus ("faith"), whereby you are completely forgiven of sin, made right with the God, and promised eternal life with Him forever.



**WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS? DO YOU BELIEVE THIS? HOW DO YOU CHOSE TO LIVE?**

### **A Summary of Poverty in the Story of Redemption**

#### **Beginning**

All things were created good - all places, natural resources, people, and families - all communities, schools, businesses, governments and cultures should thus reflect the goodness of God's creation. We should therefore see the poor and their communities as having been created by God and currently reflecting much of His image and goodness.

#### **Fall**

In the fall, man turns from God to worship the creation. Because of this all mankind would experience poverty in his relationship with God (poverty of spiritual intimacy), with himself (poverty of identity), with others (poverty of community), and with the rest of creation (poverty with created things). Nothing would be rich and whole like it was meant to be.

#### **Redemption**

Christ who was rich became poor so that he might redeem us out of every aspect of poverty. In his work on the cross and resurrection, he brings reconciliation and restoration into our poverty with God, ourself, others and creation. Those who are in Christ have a renewed passion to see such restoration come to all people and things around them. As Christ reigns through us, we hope families, neighborhoods, schools and government would be relieved of their poverty and reconciled to God.

#### **Consummation**

We read in the last chapters of the Bible that one day all things will be made new and no one and nothing will experience any more poverty for all of eternity. There will be no more death or pain (wealth with self), for God will dwell with (spiritual richness) the whole of God's people (richness in community) in the new heavens and new earth (richness with creation) forever.

## Important passages on mercy, justice and the poor

### Pentateuch - The Poverty Mandate

**Ex. 22:21-24** - "You shall not wrong a sojourner or oppress him, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. 22 You shall not mistreat any widow or fatherless child. 23 If you do mistreat them, and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry, 24 and my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless.

**Lev. 5:7,11** - "But if he cannot afford a lamb, then he shall bring to the LORD as his compensation for the sin that he has committed two turtledoves or two pigeons, one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering. ...11 "But if he cannot afford two turtledoves or two pigeons, then he shall bring as his offering for the sin that he has committed a tenth of an ephah of fine flour for a sin offering.

**Lev. 19:18** You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.

**Lev. 25:25,28** "If your brother becomes poor and sells part of his property, then his nearest redeemer shall come and redeem what his brother has sold... 28 But if he does not have sufficient means to recover it, then what he sold shall remain in the hand of the buyer until the year of jubilee. In the jubilee it shall be released, and he shall return to his property.

**Lev. 25:35** - "If your brother becomes poor and cannot maintain himself with you, you shall support him as though he were a stranger and a sojourner, and he shall live with you.

**Deuteronomy 15:7-14** - "If among you, one of your brothers should become poor, in any of your towns within your land that the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, 8 but you shall open your hand to him and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be. 9 Take care lest there be an unworthy thought in your heart and you say, 'The seventh year, the year of release is near,' and your eye look grudgingly on your poor brother, and you give him nothing, and he cry to the LORD against you, and you be guilty of sin. 10 You shall give to him freely, and your heart shall not be grudging when you give to him, because for this the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake. 11 For there will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore I command you, 'You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in your land.' 12 "If your brother, a Hebrew man or a Hebrew woman, is sold to you, he shall serve you six years, and in the seventh year you shall let him go free from you. 13 And when you let him go free from you, you shall not let him go empty-handed. 14 You shall furnish him liberally out of your flock, out of your threshing floor, and out of your winepress. As the LORD your God has blessed you, you shall give to him.

### Wisdom Literature - The Way Redeemed People Live

**Psalms 41:1** - Blessed is the one who considers the poor! In the day of trouble the LORD delivers him...

**Psalms 82:3-4** - Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute. 4 Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked."

**Psalms 112:5** It is well with the man who deals generously and lends; who conducts his affairs with justice.

**Proverbs 14:21, 31** - Whoever despises his neighbor is a sinner, but blessed is he who is generous to the poor. 31 Whoever oppresses a poor man insults his Maker, but he who is generous to the needy honors him.

**Proverbs 19:17** - Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will repay him for his deed.

**Proverbs 21:13** - Whoever closes his ear to the cry of the poor will himself call out and not be answered.

**Proverbs 22:2** - The rich and the poor meet together; the LORD is the maker of them all.

## **Prophets - The Heart of God**

**Isaiah 1:13-14,16** - Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations— I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them...  
16 Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause.

**Isaiah 58:6-7,10** - "Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? ...10 if you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday.

**Jeremiah 22:15-16** - Do you think you are a king because you compete in cedar? Did not your father eat and drink and do justice and righteousness? Then it was well with him. He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Is not this to know me declares the LORD.

**Micah 6:8** - He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

**Zech. 7:9-10** "Thus says the LORD of hosts, Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another, 10 do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, or the poor, and let none of you devise evil against another in your heart."

## **Gospels - The Teachings and Example of Jesus**

**Matt. 4:23** (see also 9:35; 10:1) And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people.

**Matthew 5:7** - "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

**Matt. 6:2-4** - Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. 3 But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

**Matthew 25:31-46** - "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. 32 Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. 34 Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, 36 I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' 37 Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? 38 And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? 39 And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' 40 And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.' "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. 42 For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' 44 Then they also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?' 45 Then he will answer them, saying, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' 46 And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

**Mark 10:45** - For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

**Luke 3:10-11** - And the crowds asked him, “What then shall we do?” 11 And he answered them, “Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise.”

**Luke 4:18-19** (from Is. 61:1-2) - “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

**Luke 5:13** - And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, “I will; be clean.” And immediately the leprosy left him.

**Luke 6:35-36,38** - But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. 36 Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful... 38 give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you.”

**Luke 10:25-37** - And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” 26 He said to him, “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?” 27 And he answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” 28 And he said to him, “You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.”

But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” 30 Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. 31 Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. 32 So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. 34 He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. 35 And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, ‘Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.’ 36 Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?” 37 He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” And Jesus said to him, “You go, and do likewise.”

**Luke 14:12-14** - He said also to the man who had invited him, “When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. 13 But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, 14 and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.”

**Luke 21:2-4** - ...and he saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. 3 And he said, “Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them. 4 For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.”

### **Acts - The Model of the Early Church**

**Acts 2:44-45** - And all who believed were together and had all things in common. 45 And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.

**Acts 4:32** - Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common.

**Acts 6:2-4** - And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. 3 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. 4 But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”

## **Epistles - The Instruction to Churches**

**Romans 15:25-27** - At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints. 26 For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. 27 For they were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings.

**1 Corinthians 16:1-2** - Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. 2 On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come.

**2 Corinthians 9:6-8,10-12** - The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. 7 Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work... 10 He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. 11 You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. 12 For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God.

**Galatians 2:10** - Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.

**Gal. 6:2** - Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

**Galatians 6:9-10** - And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. 10 So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

**Ephesians 4:28** - Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.

## **Pastoral Epistles - Advice to All Believers**

**1 Timothy 6:17-19** - As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. 18 They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, 19 thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.

**Hebrews 13:16** - Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

**James 1:27** - Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

**James 2:15** - If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?

**James 2:5-6,8-9** - Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him? 6 But you have dishonored the poor man... 8 If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well. 9 But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

**1 Peter 4:10** - As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace:

**1 John 3:17-18** - But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? 18 Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

# “A Historical Survey of the Diaconate”

PCA Digest Position Papers: 1973-1993 - 15th General Assembly, 1987, Appendix T, pages 506-514 & Historical Survey.  
[This survey is based on a much longer documented article produced by the Study Committee]

## THE EARLY CHURCH

It can be seen from the earliest writings, such as the "Didache" (A.D.120), that each congregation had multiple elders/bishops and deacons, all elected by the people. Deacons were ministers of mercy to the poor and widows. They were clearly patterned after "the Seven" of Acts 6, even to the point that many churches appointed only seven. Early deacons visited to find needs and meet them (see Pseudo-Clement). They cared for the widows and supervised the "agape" fellowship meals. In addition, Justin Martyr tells us they were helpers with the Eucharist and other worship meals, since they took the gifts to the poor. Deacons were also assistants to the elders and especially the bishops. As time wore on, the deacons' main purpose becomes to serve the bishops as secretaries and helpers. In brief, the function of "helps", which was always a purpose of the deacon, eventually came to eclipse all others. As the diaconal office became deformed by the mid-3rd century, deacons became nothing more than liturgical assistants.

## THE REFORMATION

Luther envisioned a diaconate in each town carrying on distribution to the city's poor as its main focus (see The Babylonian Captivity of the Church). For various reasons, however, the Lutherans did not carry this out and the diaconate disappeared from the Lutheran scene.

John Calvin was the most clear in explaining the theological connection between almsgiving and worship. He placed almsgiving in the liturgy after the sermon and as part of the Supper liturgy. He stated categorically: "Thus we ought always to provide that no meeting of the church should take place without the word, prayers, partaking of the supper, and almsgiving." *Institutes*, IV. 17. 44.

The Catholic exegetes taught that deacons were primarily helpers who assisted the priest in his work of teaching and worship. Calvin, however, was quite careful to say in his exegesis of I Tim.3:8ff. that the deacon is a representative of the church, not of the pastor. Therefore, the diaconate has an integrity all its own. They are not mere "domestic servants". For example, the diaconate should not ordinarily be a stepping stone or trial arena for junior elders. They do not merely carry out orders, but they are a holy office in which they look for needs and make decisions. Deacons are subordinate to Elders, but they are not the immediate subordinates of the elders, in a chain of command. Calvin allows that deacons are "Levites" and do give assistance to the elders and pastors, but he insists on the primacy of mercy and on the distinctiveness of the office (*Institutes* IV. 19. 32)

Calvin established two orders of deacons. First there were those who administered alms for the poor ("procurators"). They were to receive, dispense, and hold funds, possessions, rents and pensions for the poor. The second order ("hospitallers") consisted of deacons who actually ministered to the sick and to the poor. Their chief work was the administration of a "hospital" in which there were not only those too sick to work, but also the aged, widows and orphans, and "other poor creatures".

## LATER DEVELOPMENTS

### Scotland.

The First Book of Discipline (Heading VI.) established deacons as the chief financial officers of the church. They supported the pastor, the schools, and the poor within their parishes. Their functions are administrative and financial. Deacons were to care for the poor in their parishes. On the one hand, the Second Book of Discipline mentions the diaconal ministry as being directed to the saints, yet later it speaks of aiding the poor and the strangers within a parish (See Chapters VIII. and IX.) This indicates that the church's whole neighborhood was envisioned as a ministry area for the deacons.

Deacons were not admitted to church councils and were completely under the authority of the Session. Mercy was one of their duties along with general administration.

### The Netherlands.

The Dutch churches spoke more emphatically that mercy was the prime purpose of the diaconate. At the Synod of Dort (1574) deacons were charged to cooperate with the civil magistrates and others who were seeking to help the poor in their communities. Article 25 of the Church Order of Dort (1618-19) tells deacons to distribute alms not only among the members of the church, but also to the poor among "inhabitants and strangers". The deacons of the 17th century Reformed churches in many cases formed the central social service agency of the city, supporting

orphanages, homes for the elderly, schools, several clothing manufacturing shops and bakeries for distribution to the poor.

Deacons in the Dutch churches definitely wielded more authority and oversight over the congregation than deacons in the Presbyterian churches. They sat on the Church Council or consistory with the elders. Thus, deacons took part in the nomination procedure of both elders and had a regulative voice together with the elders in electing a pastor. No pastor could leave a field without consent of the consistory, which included deacons.

### **England.**

Many of the Puritans saw Presbyterianism as the truest Scriptural church order. In The Second Parte of a Register, deacons are described as those whose office "consisteth only in the oversight of the poor". Deacons were to be elected in every church. The Westminster Assembly, though it discussed the elder and powers of presbytery for months, spent only one day on the diaconate, and provided only the briefest of statements. "The Scripture doth hold out deacons as distinct officers in the church, whose office is perpetual. To whose office it belongs not to preach the word or administer the sacraments, but to take special care in distributing to the necessities of the poor." (The Form of Presbyterian Church Government)

## **THE AMERICAN REFORMED CHURCHES**

### **Presbyterian.**

The first American General Assembly pronouncement regarding the duties of deacons was that of the 1833 Assembly which stated that the deacons of a congregation primarily were to care for the poor of their own church. Secondly, the "temporalities of the church" (care of general care, maintenance of property, etc.) could be committed to them. This latter pronouncement was balanced by a 1752 Assembly statement allowing for trustees who could handle "temporalities" instead of deacons. In this, the Americans followed, not the Dutch churches (which made mercy the exclusive purpose of the diaconate) but the Scottish Books of Discipline, which gave deacons all financial affairs of the church. Giving deacons the trusteeship, however, was definitely an addition to the statement of the Westminster Assembly. Under the influence of Thornwell, the Southern Presbyterian Church, trustees were discouraged and the "trusteeship" duties of deacons became mandatory.

As for the scope of the diaconate, we have seen that the earlier American understanding was for deacons to care for the poor of their congregation only, not of the neighborhood in general (e.g. Samuel Miller's "Essay" on the Office of Ruling Elder). This was not the unanimous position of the Old School Presbyterians, however (e.g. Thomas Smyth of South Carolina). By the 1871 General Assembly, however, deacons were charged to give charity to non-Christians "as will aid in ... opening the door for more direct spiritual ministrations."

As for the authority of the diaconate, American presbyterians forbade deacons to sit on any church courts. The 1715 Assembly stated that deacons had "no juridical power". However, in the area of work among the poor, deacons had surprising policy making power. The 1857 Old School General Assembly answered in the negative the question "Has a Church session any original or direct control over the management and distribution of the fund collected and in the hands of the Deacons for the benefit of the poor of the Church?" Instead, they pronounced that the Session "may advise respecting use of the funds". In addition, it was left up to local congregations whether Deacons could officiate the Sacraments.

In the final analysis, it cannot be said that the diaconate has flourished in American Presbyterianism at all. All the General Assembly pronouncements and guidance on the subject from 1706-1873 fill only a page and a half. Very little unity of mind existed on the function and scope of the office. At no point during the 19th century did the majority of Presbyterian churches have deacons.

### **Reformed.**

The Dutch Reformed churches in America maintained from their fatherland a clearer concept of the deacon as a primarily a minister of mercy. Unlike the Presbyterian Forms of Church Government, their Church Order Article on the Ministry of Deacons does not include the duties of Trusteeship at all. And though in some Reformed churches deacons assume the duties of trustees, the prevailing force of all Church pronouncements was to define diaconal ministry as mercy ministry.

As stated above, the Dutch Reformed churches have been much more inclined to encourage the ministry of deacons in their communities as well as their congregation. R.B.Kuiper of the Christian Reformed Church wrote: "Does it follow that deacons should never extend aid to needy persons outside the fold of the church? The answer must be negative. Did not the merciful Christ heal the daughter of a Syrophoenician woman and thus permit a Greek to eat the crumbs that fell from the table of God's covenant people (Mark 7:24-30)?"



# The Deacon

*More humble and less conspicuous their office may be than that of the elder; but it is not the less divinely warranted, nor is it unilluminated by the splendor of a glorious example. It is a striking fact that the Lord Jesus, in his sojourn on earth, did not occupy the outward seat of the ruler—he condescended to appear as a prisoner at the bar of the eldership of his own visible Church. But, as the great Deacon of Israel, he declared that he came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and illustrated the noble unselfishness of that utterance by the untiring dispensation of healing to the suffering bodies of men. Having closed his wondrous mission of beneficence to the poor diseased body, it is affecting to contemplate him, entitled, as he was, to the submission and the homage of a prostrate universe, bearing a towel and a basin, the symbols of a servant; him, before whom every knee shall bow in heaven, earth, and hell, bending his knee and washing his disciples' feet. In the discharge of their peculiar duties, it will be glory to deacons to walk in his footsteps, and imitate his example of compassionate ministrations to the temporal wants of men. Their office will not be lacking in dignity, even though sometimes in the estimation of a sensitive nature, it may seem to wear a crown of thorns. It is Christ-like, and therefore sublime.*

*...Constrained by his love, and supported by his grace, let them go on in the performance of their beneficent and important functions, satisfied with his approval and consoled by the conviction that they represent, in part, his ministry of mercy on earth. Let them use the office of a deacon well, and purchase to themselves a good degree and great boldness in the faith that is in Christ Jesus. And amidst the trials which must attend their service to their Lord, let them sustain themselves by the assurance that, the final conflict past, their disembodied spirits will be welcomed by the once poor, but glorified saints of Jesus, to everlasting habitations; and that in that tremendous day, when the great Minister of pity to suffering men shall take the seat and wear the crown of the Judge, he will publicly own their fidelity to him, and place an imperishable chaplet of honor on their heads.*

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