



THE ROLE OF DEACONS IN MERCY CHURCH

The purpose of this document is to articulate the position of Mercy Church on the role of deacon in church life. This document will cover a summary of the Bible's teaching on the qualifications and role of deacons, and what the role looks like at Mercy Church.

DEACONS IN SCRIPTURE

The first deacons were appointed in the early church to free up the elders to focus on *"the ministry of the word of God."* The situation is recorded.

In Acts 6:1-7 the church was growing, and with this numeric growth, the practical needs of the members of the church were growing. The culturally/linguistically Greek Jews complained they were not receiving the same care as the culturally/linguistically-Hebrew Jews. The need arose for someone to care for practical needs in the church.

How did the Apostles respond to the situation? Acts 6:2-4

[2] 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."

The apostles recognized the importance of prioritizing the preaching of God's word. As Martin-Lloyd Jones said, "It is wrong to put 'serving tables' before the preaching of the word of God because it is always wrong to put man before God."¹ Their response was not to neglect the needs of the people, but to appoint faithful believers to serve those in need. They called these appointed men and women the servants of the church. The Greek word for servants is 'diakonoi.' This is where we get our term 'deacons,' which we use to identify these brothers and sisters in the body today. The apostles needed to devote themselves to what they would later appoint elders in each church to devote themselves to: prayer and the ministry of the word.

¹ Martin Lloyd-Jones, *Victorious Christianity*

THE ROLE OF DEACON

Deacons facilitate the ministry of the elders through serving the needs of the church. If the church is a car, the deacons are the shock absorbers. They are there to keep the ride as smooth as possible for the church so it can get to where God is taking it. When the church hits potholes, the absorbers take the brunt of the impact and help re-stabilize the church as quickly as possible. They are not responsible for steering, but for protecting and stabilizing so that the elders can continue steering as God leads.

Deacons play such a vital role that scripture calls the church to ensure those they appoint to the office have a good reputation, are full of the Spirit and of wisdom, and are clearly willing to serve (Acts 6.2).

While the term *deacon* is the universal term for this office, the Greek word we get it from, *diakonos*, is most commonly translated by terms like “servant” or “minister. The verb *diakoneo* is found 36 times in the New Testament, reflecting the same uses of the term as secular Greek: to wait on someone at a table, to care for someone’s basic needs, or to serve in a general sense. The related noun *diakonia* is usually translated as service and *diakonos* as servant.

The major importance of knowing the broader background of *diakonos* is in understanding the role deacons were designed to play. Theologians have taken the normal meanings associated with *diakonos* as indicating the types of activities appropriate to deacons, namely, caring for material needs and general serving.²

In short, this is the role of an exemplary servant of God's people.

THE QUALIFICATIONS OF DEACONS

The New Testament lays out specific qualifications for deacons.

1 Timothy 3.8-13

8 Deacons, likewise, should be worthy of respect, not hypocritical, not drinking a lot of wine, not greedy for money, **9** holding the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. **10** They must also be tested first; if they prove blameless, then they can serve as deacons. **11** Wives,^[a] likewise, should be worthy of respect, not slanderers, self-controlled, faithful in everything. **12** Deacons are to be husbands of one wife, managing their children and their own households competently. **13** For those who have served well as deacons acquire a good standing for themselves and great boldness in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

² Hammet, John S. *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches* (Kregel; Grand Rapids, MI 2005) 191-192.

The Bible teaches that deacons lead by serving (Acts 6). The qualifications for elders and deacons are the same regarding an individual's character, but they differ in aptitude or gifting. The elders are to be able teachers while the deacons are to be able servants. Think about all of the qualifications in these few verses.

Above/beyond reproach	Husband of one wife
Individual of dignity	Good manager of their children
Not double-tongued	Spouses must be faithful
Not addicted to wine	Not malicious gossips
Not fond of sordid gain	Temperate
Holding to the mystery of faith	First tested as servants

The emphasis on the nature of the qualifications cannot be overlooked. It is notable that, when laying out qualifications for deacons in this passage, Paul focuses on issues of character rather than administrative skills.³

Deacons are not appointed for their skills, but for their character. They are exemplary Christ-like believers who show a pattern of serving the body faithfully before they were ever asked.

Can Women Serve as Deacons?

For Mercy Church, the answer is yes. The elders of Mercy Church have read and studied the two primary passages that discuss women in the role of deacon. We hold our position humbly recognizing throughout Church history scripture-loving, Christ-exalting churches have held differing understandings of these passages and still brought glory to God in their churches.

- **1 Timothy 3.11** – the Greek word “*gynaikas*” can be translated either “women” or “wives.” It is an important translation note that the English word ‘their,’ found in many English translations, does not appear in the original Greek text. We hold the translation of this word to be ‘women’ as verse 11 echoes verse 8 in structure and the same word ‘*gynaikas*’ is used in Titus 2.3.
- **Romans 16.1** – Phoebe is referred to as a *diakonos* of the church in Cenchrea. She is recognized for the type of character and service congruent with the role of deacon Paul puts forward in 1 Timothy 3. Even if Paul is simply commending her service and not referring to the formal office of deacon, he is exalting her as an example of the very kind of service deacons are to perform in the church.

We stand with many before us throughout church history and in present day churches who affirm women, married or single, as able to serve in this all-important role in the church.⁴

³ Jamie Dunlap, *IX Marks Ministries*

⁴ For further reading on women serving as deacons, please see the articles listed at the end of this document

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The role of the deacon team is to support the church in such a way that frees the pastoral team to focus on shepherding Mercy Church. Practically the deacons of Mercy Church will serve the needs of the Mercy family as they arise. While there are no specific boundaries on their service, common areas of ministry include:

- Care for the physical needs of the church family
 - Care visits (ex: hospital & home visits for the sick)
 - Mobilizing provision for crisis situations (ex: unexpected death of a member)
- Directing ongoing supportive needs (ex: set-up & tear down)
- Meeting benevolence requests either by mobilizing Mercy members or requesting financial assistance from the Mercy Benevolence fund.

We anticipate expanding the ministry responsibilities of our deacons as the number of deacons increases and, Lord willing, the spiritual giftings of our deacons continue to diversify as their number increases.

FOR FURTHER READING

- [What Did Deacons Do?](#) - John Piper, Desiring God
- [A Case for Women Deacons](#) - Jeff Medders, Acts 29
- [Does the Bible Allow for Women Deacons?](#) - Tom Schreiner, 9Marks
- [Does the Bible Support Female Deacons?](#) - Thomas Schreiner, The Gospel Coalition
- [The Role of women at the Village Church](#)
- [Leadership: Deacons + Elders](#) - The Summit Church