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TEACHING THE BIBLICAL QUALIFICATIONS AND  
RESPONSIBILITIES OF DEACONS AT LEBANON  
BAPTIST CHURCH IN LEBANON, VIRGINIA

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the Faculty of  
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Doctor of Ministry

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by  
Steven Daniel Stutzman  
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**APPROVAL SHEET**

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RESPONSIBILITIES OF DEACONS AT LEBANON  
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Steven Daniel Stutzman

Read and Approved by:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Joseph C. Harrod (Faculty Supervisor)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Matthew D. Haste

Date \_\_\_\_\_

I dedicate this dissertation primarily to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. I am overwhelmed with his continual love, patience, and grace. He has allowed me to grow despite my inadequacies and has brought me safely thus far. I am convinced, as he has promised, he will keep me until the very end (Phil 1:4).

I also dedicate this work to my beloved wife, who has been a constant source of love, understanding, and encouragement. She has sacrificed much for my sake. The words of Proverbs 31:10 are true for her; my wife is more precious than jewels or any other earthly treasure.

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## PREFACE

I am indebted to the thorough theological education I received at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary under the Christ-centered leadership of Dr. R. Albert Mohler Jr. Through the thoughtful biblical training at Southern Seminary, I received what was promised from Scriptures, to be “thoroughly equipped for every good work” (1 Tim 3:17b). I also wish to thank my doctoral supervisor, Dr. Joseph Harrod, for his continual patience and care over the span of this project.

I want to thank Lebanon Baptist Church, who called me as lead pastor in October 2018. Serving here has been a refreshment for my soul, and their kindness has continued to overwhelm me and my family. To all the deacons who serve Lebanon Baptist Church, thank you for your continual support as I finish this great work, and for enduring with me during this season.

To my wife and family, I am grateful for you above all earthly treasure. Your warmth, support of my work, and continual understanding has aided me throughout these pages. To my wife, Kristin, your beautiful adornment is not external alone but with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious to God; I have learned much from you. To Zachary, Noah, Lindsay, and Amelia, you have made many sacrifices for this work. You are more precious and loved by me than you will ever know. To Robert and Karen Stutzman, my father and mother, thank you for always being proud of me whatever path God led me.

Steven Stutzman

Lebanon, Virginia

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In Acts 6:1-7, the early church in Jerusalem received a complaint against the Hebrews as Greek widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. This disruption created tension within the church and required calling together church leaders. The apostles discussed how to continue with the current ministry needs of prayer and God's Word, yet still minister to these widows.

The apostles understood the great demand of ministering to these widows. Despite the workload, these women's needs could not be ignored. To address the problem, the disciples chose to appoint seven Christian men to serve. These seven men, argued in this work as early deacons, were to be of good repute, and full of the Holy Spirit and of wisdom. This decision pleased the whole gathering and brought restoration, and eventual growth, to the early church during this tumultuous time.

These seven men served the church by ministering to the needy and allowed the apostles to continue in prayer and the ministry of God's Word. When these men fulfilled their God-given role, their service allowed the apostles to fulfill theirs. By working together, the early church began to thrive once more.

Many twenty-first century churches in America struggle to understand how pastors and deacons work together. Without a biblical understanding of ecclesiastical offices, churches can fall into division or power struggles over who should be leading and who should be serving. Instead of being like the early church in Acts 6, who eventually worked together and grew together, a church that remains divided against itself over leadership will find it difficult to grow.

The role of the deacon can differ widely from church to church. In some churches, deacons function as a board of directors, who believe their primary service to the church is to oversee it and even direct the pastor. This misunderstanding can make the pastor's work difficult as he may be forced to take an entire ministry, and its needs, upon himself. However, in churches where deacons serve the church, including the pastor, they bring much needed assistance. Like the seven men in Acts 6, deacons take unnecessary burdens from the leadership. Deacons can serve in a multitude of areas where help is needed, like church finances, benevolence ministries, guest services, and greeting new families in Sunday worship. When deacons serve well, they multiple the caregiving and help inside and outside the church.

### **Context**

This ministry project took place at Lebanon Baptist Church (LBC) in Lebanon, Virginia. LBC was established in April of 1856. The church was founded with the strong conviction to fulfill the Great Commission, to witness and evangelize locally and abroad. In the nineteenth century, church membership grew greatly and allowed LBC to establish other churches. In 1868, twelve letters of petition were granted to organize Cedar Hill Baptist Church. In 1894, thirty-two members helped to establish Green Valley Baptist Church. In 1912, Glade Baptist Church was largely reestablished by members of LBC. In 1982, Community Heights Baptist Mission Church, near Southwest Virginia Community College, was organized by LBC.

LBC is located in the downtown area of Lebanon, Virginia. The town of Lebanon resides in Russell County, which has a population of about 3,400 people and was established in January of 1831.<sup>1</sup> The many cedar trees surrounding the area is believed to have inspired the town's name in reference to the Bible's "Cedars of

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<sup>1</sup> Town of Lebanon, Virginia, "History," accessed October 10, 2019, <https://lebanonva.net/about-lebanon/history/>.

Lebanon.” While a small community, Lebanon is making strides to be a forerunner in the twenty-first century.

The context of LBC is rural with many of its members, previously or currently, working in the coal mining industry or as school teachers. Total membership of LBC is 498 as of 2018. The average worship attendance has dwindled from 150 weekly in 2016 to 95 in 2018—in this largely older congregation.

At LBC, deacons serve three-year terms unless becoming inactive, unable, or disqualified to serve. The deacons who serve have five major responsibilities as laid out in the LBC Deacon Covenant: to set a godly example for others in the congregation; to spiritually shepherd the congregation of LBC alongside the pastor; to take personal responsibility for the spiritual nurture of the families assigned to their care; to guard and keep confidential deacons’ meetings and those who they shepherd; and to fulfill duties designated to the deacon of the week.<sup>2</sup> Deacons must be qualified, voted upon by the congregation, and have signed the LBC Deacon Covenant, to serve.

The LBC Deacon Covenant is a good, general, layout for the expectations of deacons. However, there are some concerns with this document. First, the deacon covenant states that deacons are “to lead a life that honors the Word of God (and especially the biblical qualifications as outlined in 1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus), the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Baptist Faith and Message, and the Church Covenant of Lebanon Baptist Church.” This statement is troubling since the biblical qualifications for deacons are found in 1 Timothy 3:8-13. Either 2 Timothy and Titus are used as general passages of Christian conduct or else deacons’ qualifications overlap with elders. Furthermore, the deacon covenant places Holy Scripture, “the Gospel of Jesus Christ,” the 2000 Baptist Faith and Message, and the Church Covenant of LBC in the same sentence, appearing to make them equal influences.

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<sup>2</sup> See appendix 6 for LBC Deacon Covenant.

Second, LBC Deacon Covenant states that deacons are to “spiritually shepherd the congregation of Lebanon Baptist Church” alongside the pastor without any further explanation of what this entails. While shepherding here could mean “to care for,” shepherding in the New Testament alludes to leadership. Peter writes concerning elders: “Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight” (1 Pet 5:2a). Here, to *shepherd* means to exercise oversight. Only elders are to shepherd the flock and give oversight. It is concerning if LBC expects deacons to lead the flock.

Third, while the LBC Deacon Covenant states their responsibilities, such as locking and unlocking the church facilities, moderating church business meetings, and more, there is no biblical framework given for these tasks. The deacons’ qualifications and responsibilities are only given the general outline of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus. Deacons’ ministries are limited by the work defined in this covenant.

Fourth, nearly all decision making within the church passes through LBC deacons. Deacons are a part of many church committees and influence directional changes of the church. Conversely, the pastor struggled to enact decisions without the deacons’ recommendation. While deacons offer a great service through these helps, the pastor and deacons may be viewed as coequals or deacons may have higher authority. There are concerns that deacons are the true leadership of LBC.

Two factors are key in understanding how LBC has historically used deacons. Given that LBC was established in 1856, it has had thirty-six pastors serving as of 2018. This means that in 162 years, LBC has had a new pastor, on average, every four and a half years. This average does not consider vacant time between pastorates. During vacancies, deacons rose to the task of leadership. This can be a helpful arrangement if temporary. However, the congregation may become confused to the deacons’ role if they are constantly in a place of leadership. Second, each pastor inevitably brings his own perspectives on deacons. If one pastor uses deacons as lay leaders and the next as servants, this may result in conflict.

One of the goals of this project was to help the deacons of LBC to understand their role of service within our church. Their service to this church includes the pastor. Also, deacons, in a biblical framework, can serve a variety of roles outside what is stipulated within the LBC Deacon Covenant.

### **Rationale**

The LBC Deacon Covenant and deacons' practice showed a lack of understanding for diaconal service. Without a biblical framework, ministries of the church may be neglected. Deacons may not realize a ministry falls under their service since it is not defined by the deacon covenant.

Additionally, a biblical framework for deacons will help them understand their relationship to the pastor. Currently, some LBC deacons understand their role to be one of leadership and spiritual guidance of the church. This can place deacons in opposition to the pastor as headship of LBC. If deacons serve as leaders, then they are quasi-elders and are possibly failing to meet a different set of qualifications as an overseer.

Establishing the biblical roles of deacons with the LBC deacons was essential because they influence the congregation. At LBC, deacons traditionally compose part of the pastor search committee, help lead outreach events, take initiatives in church discipline with the pastor, provide direction for the personnel committee, and, generally, every change in the church begins from the monthly deacons' meeting. Given their influence, changes in thinking about the diaconate needed to begin with the deacons.

Furthermore, without a biblical framework, LBC deacons' work could have become exhausting. Deacons may be expected to serve *and* to lead the church. Handling both expectations could prove overwhelming to deacons.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to teach the biblical qualifications and responsibilities to deacons at Lebanon Baptist Church.

## **Goals**

Several goals determined the success of this project.

1. The first goal of this project was to assess the current knowledge of church members and deacons concerning the qualifications and responsibilities of deacons.
2. The second goal of this project was to develop a training curriculum to increase the knowledge of deacons regarding their biblical qualifications and ministries.
3. The third goal was to assess any change in knowledge among current deacons concerning the qualifications and responsibilities of deacons.

The success of these goals was determined by using specific research methodology. This methodology is described in detail in the following section.

## **Research Methodology**

The first goal of this project was to assess congregants' current level of knowledge concerning deacons.<sup>3</sup> Church members, who are aged eighteen years old and older and attending Sunday school, were asked to complete a pre-project survey. The church was surveyed to see if there were any differences in understanding between deacons and non-deacons. The surveys were distributed before Sunday school and results were collected by its end.<sup>4</sup>

Three weeks prior to distributing the survey, a Sunday morning announcement, both verbal and in the bulletin, informed the congregation about the upcoming survey with a brief explanation. Congregants were informed that the survey was essential to assess the church's current understanding about deacons and would be used in this project. This survey was anonymous, completed on a voluntary basis, and took a short time to complete. To ensure anonymity, a volunteer collected the surveys from each class and tallied the results for this project. This announcement was repeated in the same manner for the following weeks until the survey was available.

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<sup>3</sup> See appendix 1.

<sup>4</sup> All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.

The survey began by stating its purpose in assessing knowledge about deacons, that it was anonymous, and steps would be taken to ensure it was, the necessity for truthfulness, and how their responses would help to complete this project. Each participant was given three preliminary statements to answer to ensure that participants are church members, eighteen years old or older, and to separate current and previously serving deacons from the rest of the congregation. The purpose for this separation was to reveal any discrepancies between the deacons' understanding and non-deacons' understanding. Participants were evaluated in the survey on their understanding of deacons, reflected in a six-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." These statements reflected Benjamin Merkle's understanding of the qualifications and responsibilities of deacons.<sup>5</sup>

A volunteer collected and compiled the survey into a database to ensure anonymity. This data was then examined to see if there were any outstanding concerns. The results were compiled and shared with the deacons and made available to church members in printed form at the church office.

The second goal of this project was to develop a training curriculum to increase the knowledge of deacons regarding their biblical qualifications and ministries. To facilitate this goal, I created a six-session teaching series on the biblical, theological, and historical considerations of the role of deacons in Baptist churches. A ministry expert reviewed this teaching series using a rubric to assess the teaching series' strengths and weakness. This goal was considered successful when the reviewer had indicated that each lesson met the "sufficient" level from each rubric criterion. If any criterion did not meet this level initially, it was revised and resubmitted for evaluation until this standard was met.

I taught this teaching series on deacons to previous and currently serving deacons at LBC over the course of a two-day teaching seminar. This seminar was

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<sup>5</sup> Benjamin L. Merkle, *40 Questions about Elders and Deacons* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 234-43.

completed over six sessions, covering the biblical, theological, and historical considerations of Baptist deacons. Half of the sessions were taught on Tuesday, December 3, 2019, and the other half on Thursday, December 5. The purpose of teaching this six-session series in two days was to ensure attendance of LBC deacons.

The third goal was to assess any change in knowledge among current deacons concerning the qualifications and responsibilities of deacons. Since the deacons were separated from the rest of the congregation in the pre-project survey, and eight deacons attended the teaching series, their previous results could be compared to the results after the teaching series. The deacons retook the original survey to determine any changes in thinking. A *t*-test for two-sample assuming equal variances was used to examine the two sets of unmatched data. The data was examined to see if there were any changes in patterns of thinking amongst LBC deacons. This third goal of the project was completed when the deacons retook the survey and the data was compiled. Unlike the initial survey, I collected and compiled the data from these forms. This final survey was fulfilled and returned by Monday, December 9, 2019, by the eight participating deacons.

### **Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations**

The following definitions of key terms are used in the ministry project:

*Deacon(s)*. A *deacon* is a biblically-qualified Christian man, commissioned by God, and ordained by the church to bring unity and practical service to the church.<sup>6</sup>

Two limitations applied to this project. First, the accuracy of the pre-project survey depended on the willingness of volunteers to be honest. To encourage truthfulness, each survey remained anonymous and did not require using the participants' names. The survey itself stated and encouraged the need for truthfulness. The only designations on the initial survey were identified if the participant was a church member, was age eighteen or older, and whether the participant had served as a deacon in the last year.

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<sup>6</sup> The issue of gender in serving as a deacon will be more fully addressed in chap. 2.



These initially completed surveys were collected and tallied by a volunteer of the church. The second limitation of this project depended on the attendance of the deacons during the teaching series. These teaching sessions were audio recorded in case a deacon could not attend the entire series. Deacons who missed any of the teaching sessions were required to listen to missed sessions. To ensure all eight deacons participated in the post-training survey, they were given four days to complete the survey.

One delimitation was placed upon this project. The project was confined to a sixteen-week timeframe. This timeframe ensured the proper time was given to prepare and distribute the initial survey to the congregants, compile the data from these initial surveys, complete the training with the deacons and then retest, and compile results from the deacons' surveys.

### **Conclusion**

The church is both a spiritual and physical entity that requires biblical structure. While biblical structure does not guarantee church growth, it does allow for growth to take place. Chapter 2 of this project outlines the biblical foundation for deacons' ministry.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR THE QUALIFICATIONS OF DEACONS

This chapter provides the biblical and theological basis for understanding that deacons are Spirit-led men who exemplify Christian character, wisdom, and godliness to serve the local church. The three main passages for this section are Acts 6:1-7, 1 Timothy 3:8-13, and Romans 16:1-2.

In Acts 6:1-7, the early church ordains and appoints seven men, argued in this paper as early deacons, who are men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, to serve the needs of the church. In 1 Timothy 3:8-13, Paul writes to Timothy to appoint qualified men to serve as deacons, whose qualifications parallel those found in Acts 6:1-7. Additionally, in Romans 16:1-2, Phoebe is called “a servant of the church” in the ESV. However, in the NRSV, Phoebe is called “a deacon of the church.” These versions differ on their translations of *διάκονον*, as the Greek word that can mean either servant or deacon.

#### **Acts 6:1-7**

As the early church grew and spread in Acts, the church experienced many problems. Peter and John preached the gospel in Acts 4 and were imprisoned as a result. Ananias and Sapphira, members of the early church, die from their sin against the Holy Spirit in Acts 5. As the narrative continues, the apostles heal the sick and spur the jealousy of the Sadducees. Eventually the apostles are released from prison, beaten, and strictly charged to not preach about Jesus (Acts 5:40). The church grew despite these external difficulties. Yet the church failed to sustain fair treatment of widows in Acts 6:1-7, which resulted in internal difficulties.

## Division Over the Distribution (6:1)

Acts 6:1 begins, “A complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution” (ESV). Modern commentators are unsure what these provisions were. The provisions could have been food, material goods, or a mixture of things.<sup>1</sup> Whatever the distributions were, the widows depended on them.

Widows received little support from the Greek society. They were typically supported by male relatives or encouraged to remarry.<sup>2</sup> Otherwise, they were dependent on the generosity of the church. In the Rabbinic system before the church, the poor only received weekly allotments, not daily.<sup>3</sup> These daily distributions were important, especially since widows were prone to abuse. Fitzmyer writes, “Widows were often in particular need and vulnerable to abuse and neglect, because they had lost their main source of companionship and support, their husbands.”<sup>4</sup> Without special care, these widows would suffer needlessly.

The lack of distributions created an uproar when some widows did not receive it, especially since others did. The biblical text suggests this neglect was unintentional, a by-product of rapid church growth. Keener notes, “The church was growing faster than the apostles could supervise adequately.”<sup>5</sup> This problem was compounded as there appeared to be an unfair preference toward some widows over others.

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<sup>1</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 257.

<sup>2</sup> Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015), 2:1265.

<sup>3</sup> Brian Capper, “The Palestinian Cultural Context of Earliest Christian Community of Goods,” in *The Book of Acts in Its Palestinian Setting*, ed. Richard Bauckman (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 4:351.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries, vol. 31 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 345.

<sup>5</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 2:1253, 1260.

Scholars have debated about what divided Hebrew and Hellenist widows, and why one was preferred over the other. Keener suggests the Hebrew widows presumably spoke Aramaic and Greek and the Hellenists spoke mainly Greek.<sup>6</sup> Hellenists may never have learned Aramaic, which would create a barrier between widows and workers.

### **Appoint Faithful Men for Service (6:2-4)**

As the complaint arose, the church needed to act quickly to address the immediate needs of these widows. In Acts 6:2, the twelve disciples and the full number of disciples came together to address this problem. However, another problem arose: who would care for these widows?

The group of apostles and disciples agreed: “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables” (Acts 6:2). They had other binding work of prayer and of the Word, which restricted their ability to adequately serve. The apostles and disciples proposed and agreed to appoint seven faithful men to this task.

These seven Christian men were to be of “good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom” (Acts 6:3). These men were led by the Spirit, trustworthy representatives of the church, who had the integrity to handle the church’s distributions. Bock simplifies this verse by stating two qualifications of these seven men: “That they be spiritual men, and that their character be well accepted by others.”<sup>7</sup>

This wise choice from the leadership pleased the whole church. The church chose seven faithful men, which included two men (Stephen and Philip) whose role would continue the Acts narrative. The leadership approved the election of these seven men by praying and laying hands on them (Acts 6:6). However, the pressing question for this project is: were these seven men appointed to a specific office or simply servants?

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<sup>6</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 2:1253.

<sup>7</sup> Bock, *Acts*, 260.

## Deacons or Servants of the Church

Many scholars are reluctant to call these seven men deacons.<sup>8</sup> There are two general hesitations. First, the Greek noun *διάκονος*, translated as deacons, is not used in Acts 6:2, only its verbal equivalent. F. F. Bruce states this verbal form of deacon, *διακονειν*, is not indicative of an office of the church but simply to indicate service.<sup>9</sup> The second reason is that Stephen and Philip are gifted far beyond the office of a deacon as specified in 1 Timothy 3:8-13. Stephen was an exceptional preacher and Philip was an effective evangelist; they appeared to be more like elders.

Some scholars avoid taking any position on these seven men given the passage is brief and certainty is difficult. Other scholars attempt to bring understanding to what these men represented. First, Bruce suggests these men may have been almoners: those who simply distributed goods.<sup>10</sup> Second, David Peterson proposes these men cared for the needy but could grow into becoming elders. He writes that these men could “still develop as preachers, as the narrative goes on to demonstrate.”<sup>11</sup> Peterson’s approach is like an elder-in-training program. Third, C. K. Barrett disagrees these seven were deacons but were a new class of ministers.<sup>12</sup> This Acts narrative, he advocates, introduces serving elders, an addition to the existing teaching elders.

## Arguments against Other Views

These three views on these seven men struggle, however, under closer

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<sup>8</sup> Bock, *Acts*, 259. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 344. Keener, *Acts*, 2:1272. David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 228.

<sup>9</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 122.

<sup>10</sup> Bruce, *Book of the Acts*, 122.

<sup>11</sup> Peterson, *Acts of the Apostles*, 232-33.

<sup>12</sup> C. K. Barrett, *Acts 1-14*, International Critical Commentary (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2004), 304, 313.

scrutiny. First, Bruce suggests these seven men were simply almoners, or distributors of alms, whose responsibilities were to issue goods. This practice would parallel local Jewish communities that would organize charities and help to distribute to those in need.<sup>13</sup> However, this position is difficult to maintain. Scholars disagree as to whether the Jewish charity existed wide-scale before AD 70. Brian Capper argues that the origins of the rabbinic system would come later after the destruction of the temple even until the second century AD.<sup>14</sup> Arguments against an earlier dating of these rabbinic systems include the frequent begging poor in the Gospels and the lack of support by church historian Josephus.

Craig Keener defends an earlier dating for the rabbinic system arguing the sources only affirm a later existence. The rabbinic system could still exist earlier. Like many benevolence ministries, the needs of the poor outweigh what could be served.<sup>15</sup> Josephus' silence is hard to substantiate since nothing is said. Keener admits that no one is sure how organized any charity group was in Jerusalem and it was, at best, sporadic.

Even if the rabbinic system did exist, it was fundamentally different from Acts 6:1. Historically, the rabbinic system gave weekly allowance of food, not daily as required by these early widows. Additionally, Capper argues that caring for the poor was always associated with table-fellowship in early Christianity—a requirement greater than simply distributing food.<sup>16</sup> Perhaps the simplest argument against these men being almoners is, if Luke had meant almoners, why did he not use the ancient Greek word *ἐλεημοσύνη*? Arndt and Gingrich define *ἐλεημοσύνη* as “kind deed, alms, or charitable giving.”<sup>17</sup> This precise word could have clarified Luke's position; however, it is missing.

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<sup>13</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 2:1263.

<sup>14</sup> Capper, “The Palestinian Cultural Context,” 4:351-52.

<sup>15</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 2:1263.

<sup>16</sup> Capper, “The Palestinian Cultural Context,” 351.

<sup>17</sup> William Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and*

Second, Peterson disagrees that Luke could have meant Acts 6:1-7 to give an early picture into the diaconate. He viewed these men as faithful servants until they could develop into new elders. He argues these men initially helped free the leadership of the church to perform their ministerial duties. Eventually, these men would grow in ability, having served and loved the congregation, and would be ready to be involved with the greater ministries like the apostles.<sup>18</sup> This servant training would account for how Stephen and Philip began in Acts 6 and grew into leaders as the narrative progressed. However, there is no biblical basis that the office of overseer required previous practical service. Overseers are called to be self-controlled, respectable, and hospitable toward others, yet they are uniquely called to be able to teach as 1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:9-11 affirm. Nowhere does it state in Acts 6:1-7 about these men growing in biblical understanding, only growing in practical service. Previous practical service to the church is not one of the qualifications required for an overseer—the ability to teach is.

Third, Barrett suggests these seven men were a new class of elders. He argues that while these seven would be elders appointed to the new “work of charity,” the twelve elders would continue in prayer and ministry of the God’s Word.<sup>19</sup> While this approach explains the ongoing ministries of Stephen and Philip, there is one flaw. There is little biblical basis to suggest different classes of elders.

Currently, the Presbyterian Church in America does affirm two offices in the church: the elders and the deacons. There are two orders within the elders: teaching elders and ruling elders. “The Book of Church Order of the Presbyterian Church in America” states, “Within the class of elder are the two orders of teaching elders and ruling elders.”<sup>20</sup>

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*Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 279.

<sup>18</sup> Peterson, *Acts of the Apostles*, 228.

<sup>19</sup> Barrett, *Acts 1-14*, 313.

<sup>20</sup> The Office of the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America, “The Book of Church Order of the Presbyterian Church in America,” 2018, 6th ed., accessed

The teaching elders proclaim and teach God’s Word and ruling elders oversee the spiritual health of the church, both based upon 1 Timothy 5:17.

Baptists would contend this is a misunderstanding about the office. J. L. Dagg makes a strong argument against two types of elders in his *Manual of Church Order*.<sup>21</sup> Elders in Titus 1:7-9 and 1 Peter 5:1-4 are a single office. Dagg argues that 1 Timothy 5:17 does not address different classes of elders but “different modes of exercising the same office.”<sup>22</sup> All elders may rule but only the elders who rule *well*, laboring intensely in preaching and teaching, they are worthy of double honor.

Additionally, the men described in Acts 6 do not match the two classes of elders in Presbyterian churches either. Ruling elders are responsible to exercise governance and discipline of the church for its spiritual good while these seven men served tables. Nowhere in Acts 6 are these men responsible for more than serving in the distribution to church widows.

### **Argument for Early Deacons in Acts 6**

Three arguments will be made to support these men as early deacons or at least early models for the diaconal office. First, these seven servants’ qualifications bear a striking resemblance to the qualifications for deacons in 1 Timothy 3:8-13. In Acts 6:3, these seven men were to be of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom. In a similar tone, Paul writes in 1 Timothy 3:8-13 that deacons are to be men who are dignified, hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience, are proven and blameless, and are faithful in all things. Good repute means one who has a favorable reputation, a good name, or public respect, which parallels the language of being dignified, blameless, and faithful in

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March 7, 2019, <https://www.pcaac.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/BCO-2018-with-bookmarks-for-website.pdf>, 7-2.

<sup>21</sup> J. L. Dagg, *Manual of Church Order* (Berryville, VA: Hess Publications, 1990), 266.

<sup>22</sup> Dagg, *Manual of Church Order*, 266.



all things. Full of the Spirit and of wisdom suggests one who is a Christian, compelled by the wisdom of Christ, mature, and faithful. These, too, parallel Paul's language of holding fast to the mystery of faith, proven, and faithful in their home life. Overall, these two accounts of qualified men from Acts 6 and 1 Timothy 3:8-13 bear striking resemblances.

Second, both the seven men's and deacons' ministries are described as ones of service. In Acts 6:2, the gathered leadership was looking for ones who could serve tables or *διακονεῖν τραπέζαις*. This service to the church through tables uses the Greek word *διακονέω*, meaning to wait on someone or care for. In Paul's description of deacons' work, he writes, "Let them serve as deacons" (1 Tim 3:10), and "Those who serve well as deacons" (1 Tim 3:13), both using Greek verbal root *διακονέω*. While 1 Timothy 3:8-13 describes the ecclesiastical office, both the men from Acts 6 and deacons from 1 Timothy 3 are regarded as ones who serve. While the New Testament contains other passages using the Greek word *διάκονος*, like Matt 20:26 and John 2:5, Acts 6:3 and 1 Tim 3:8-13 show service coupled with necessary qualifications.

Third, Acts 6:1-7 and 1 Timothy 3:1-13 appear to show paralleling ministries: oversight by leaders and service by servants. In his commentary *The Pastoral Epistles*, George W. Knight III writes suggesting this paralleling pattern:

1 Tim. 3:1-13 thus presents a twofold pattern for the official ministry of the church, that of oversight and that of service. This same twofold pattern is also seen in Phil 1:1 and seems to be reflected in early division of labor at Jerusalem between the oversight ministry of the apostles (of prayer and of the ministry of the Word, Acts 6:1, 4) and the aid to widows on part of the Seven.

These three passages show, then, a twofold division of labor in early, middle, and later time periods in the NT church, in key cities in three various geographical areas (Palestine, Greece, and Asia Minor), and in both Jewish and Greco-Roman settings.<sup>23</sup>

If Knight is correct, then the ministries of oversight and of service have existed throughout the history of the church. In Acts 6, the apostles had oversight while these seven men had service. Similar in 1 Timothy 3, overseers had oversight and deacons had service.

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<sup>23</sup> George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 175.

## **What about Stephen and Philip?**

The remaining question from Acts 6:1-7 is, if these seven men were at least a model for later deacons, what about the ministries of Stephen and Philip? They are gifted in preaching, teaching, and evangelizing, as shown in Acts, and appear equipped to be overseers.

Alexander Strauch suggests a helpful solution: deacons have a minimum set of qualifications but not a maximum.<sup>24</sup> Deacons could preach or teach, if gifted, though they are not expected. William Mounce says similarly, “A deacon is not required to teach . . . however, this does not mean a deacon could not teach.”<sup>25</sup> Strauch writes that deacons can be seminary trained, have pastored before, or be a faithful Bible teacher, and still hold the office of deacon.<sup>26</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The seven men described in Acts 6:1-7 bear a striking resemblance to the qualifications of deacons found in 1 Timothy 3:8-13. These seven men had good repute, were full of the Spirit and of wisdom, and called to serve widows. While these seven men did not have the title of deacon, *διακονους*, they were called to a similar service.

### **First Timothy 3**

Paul writes 1 Timothy 3:1-13 to address the internal structure of the local church. He commends Timothy to appoint faithful elders and deacons who will oversee and serve the church. Both elders and deacons are men set apart by the church who exemplify Christian character, wisdom, and godliness in their service.

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<sup>24</sup> Alexander Strauch, *The New Testament Deacon: The Church's Minister of Mercy* (Littleton, CO: Lewis and Roth, 1992), 50.

<sup>25</sup> William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 46 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 195.

<sup>26</sup> Strauch, *New Testament Deacon*, 50.

## Qualifications of Deacons

Paul writes in 1 Timothy 3:8-13 that deacons ought to be men of Christian character and devotion to the service of the church. Luke Johnson, in his own words, translates *διακονους* as helpers.<sup>27</sup> Towner speaks of *διάκονος* carrying numerous meanings that help understand the deacons' role: "The noun *διάκονος* can carry various nuances from that of being a servant/representative of a master to being a work of any kind in a church setting."<sup>28</sup> While the New Testament does not detail the exact responsibilities of deacons, their title implies they are servants. Naturally, this means that anyone called to this high office ought to serve in the highest of character.

Paul wrote 1 Timothy 3:1-13 to inform Timothy about the qualifications of elders and deacons.<sup>29</sup> What is remarkable is how closely elders and deacons' character qualifications mirror one another. As Mounce notes, of the nine characteristics listed for deacons, six overlap with overseers: dignified, not drunkards, not greedy for gain, blameless, one-woman men, and good managers of their homes.<sup>30</sup> This passage shows that with both elders and deacons every position of authority in the church requires similar Christian character. In addition to these six qualities shared with overseers, deacons should not be double-tongued, must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience, and are to be tested.

However, there is some differentiation between scholars as to how many qualifications there are for deacons. Strauch notes nine qualifications for deacons.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries, vol. 35a (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 226.

<sup>28</sup> Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 487.

<sup>29</sup> Towner, *Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 239.

<sup>30</sup> Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 195.

<sup>31</sup> Strauch, *New Testament Deacon*, 89-90.

Benjamin Merkle simplifies Paul's list to six: dignified, not double-tongued, sound in faith and life, tested, and having a godly wife.<sup>32</sup> I. Howard Marshall lists four qualities of deacons: dignified and serious behavior, one who holds fast to the faith, tested in service, and one who manages their household well. Since the qualifications of deacons in 1 Timothy 3:8-13 are listed in both positive and negative terms, with overlapping traits, numbering them can be difficult.<sup>33</sup>

### **Wives or Female Deacons**

Yet, the great controversy in 1 Timothy 3:8-13 concerns whether Paul is addressing wives of deacons or female deacons in 3:11. The difficulty of translation lies within the Greek word *γυναικας* that can mean wife or woman. Scriptural context dictates how words are to be used but here it is unclear. Some Bibles interpret *γυναικας* as women, as in the case of the NASB and NRSV, while wives is used in the ESV and KJV.

Marshall begins as a helpful resource to understanding 1 Timothy 3:11. He states there are four possible translations of *γυναικας* in this verse: women in the church in general, female deaconesses, wives of deacons, and female deacons.<sup>34</sup> He dismisses the first two and considers them unlikely. Mounce agrees that *γυνή* could mean both wife or woman, and it is not clear which Paul meant. However, Mounce does argue that *διακόνισσα*, which is translated deaconesses, the feminine form of *διάκονος*, has not been created yet and therefore Paul could not be addressing deaconesses.<sup>35</sup> Knight also agrees with Marshall that this passage could not address all women in the church but only to a

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<sup>32</sup> Benjamin Merkle, *40 Questions about Elders and Deacons* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007), 233-37.

<sup>33</sup> Knight, *Pastoral Epistles*, 167.

<sup>34</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, International Critical Commentary (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2000), 492.

<sup>35</sup> Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 202.

particular set of women needing these characteristics.<sup>36</sup> These scholars agree that mostly likely Paul was addressing wives of deacons or female deacons.

### **Arguments for Female Deacons**

Scholars such as Johnson, Marshall, Schreiner, and Towner, defend that *γυναικας* in 1 Timothy 3:11 should be translated as female deacons. Several arguments are made for this position. First, Paul often uses the Greek word *ὡσαυτως*, translated likewise, to introduce a new, distinct, but similar group as the preceding audience.<sup>37</sup> As argued, Paul begins 1 Timothy 3:8, from his discussion on overseers, he uses the word *ὡσαυτως* to introduce deacons. Therefore, since Paul uses *ὡσαυτως* again in 1 Timothy 3:11, he must be introducing a new, distinct, and similar office, which means female deacons. As Schreiner asserts, *likewise* is naturally translated as continuing the list of those who serve as deacons.<sup>38</sup>

However, Paul has used *ὡσαυτως* simply to introduce a new audience without being similar. For example, in 1 Timothy 2:8, “I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling.” In 1 Timothy 2:9, he writes, “Likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire.” Paul does use *ὡσαυτως* to transition from men to women, though his comments are not the same.<sup>39</sup> Men are called to pray, and women are called to respectable apparel. In 1 Timothy 3:11, Paul does use of *ὡσαυτως*, but this does not assure the reader he meant female deacons.

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<sup>36</sup> Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 171.

<sup>37</sup> Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 493. Martin Dibelius and Hans Conzelmann, *The Pastoral Epistles*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 58.

<sup>38</sup> Thomas Schreiner, “Does the Bible Support Female Deacons? Yes,” *Together for the Gospel*, February 19, 2019, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/bible-support-female-deacons-yes/>.

<sup>39</sup> Merkle, *40 Questions*, 254.

Second, if Paul had meant wives of deacons, then he should have indicated this with a possessive pronoun or the definite article.<sup>40</sup> Either of these verbal cues would indicate that Paul meant wives, but they are missing. The conclusion is that Paul meant female deacons as a possessive pronoun or definite article are missing. However, Mounce suggests that Paul may not have thought such wording were as necessary.<sup>41</sup> After all, Paul writes 1 Timothy 3 without possessive pronouns and definite articles throughout the pericope. Knight supports this idea: “That no indication of relationship is found in the text, not even a definite article before *γυναικας*. It may be responded that in the whole pericope Paul refers to people anarthrously.”<sup>42</sup> Paul seems to continue his informal address with *γυναικας*, like how he addresses *επισκοπης* and *διακονους*.

Third, Paul must be addressing female deacons as this reflects Phoebe as a deacon in Romans 16:1. Phoebe, as deacon or servant, will be addressed more fully in the following section. However, Romans 16:1 is contentious as Bible translations vary on whether Phoebe is a deacon or a servant.

### **Translating as Wives of Deacons**

The question remains: is there enough evidence to support translating *γυναικας* as wives of deacons? Several arguments support the view that Paul is addressing wives.

First, the flow of 1 Timothy 3:8-13 fits well if Paul is speaking to wives of deacons. If Paul meant female deacons in 3:11, then this is an unusual placement in the passage. For Paul to write to male deacons from 1 Timothy 3:8-10, then to address female deacons in 3:11, then back to male deacons in 3:12, and finally his general conclusion in 3:13, would be an unusual structure. Mounce writes, “The unnatural change of topics,

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<sup>40</sup> Towner, *Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 266.

<sup>41</sup> Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 204.

<sup>42</sup> Knight, *Pastoral Epistles*, 172.

twice in two verses without a clear transition, seems awkward.”<sup>43</sup> To support this transitioning from male deacons to female deacons and back, Marshall suggests that Paul covered his main points on male deacons, then addressed female deacons, and then returned to a point about male deacons he forgot to address.<sup>44</sup> While this is possible, there may be a more fluent solution.

If Paul was addressing wives, then he continued his qualifications of male deacons. Knight argues that wives continue the natural flow of 1 Timothy 3:8-13. Faithful wives who are dignified, not slanders, sober-minded, and faithful in all things would be an asset to their serving husbands. If Knight and Merkle are correct, then a faithful wife would fit as another qualification for deacons.<sup>45</sup>

However, if Paul is addressing deacons’ wives, why does he neglect any reference to elders’ wives? Schreiner argues that this is a glaring omission, as her character may be more important than a deacon’s wife.<sup>46</sup> He suggests that female deacons fix this problem. Yet, one possible solution is that overseers have ministries of oversight and of teaching, while deacons to service. A deacon’s wife may be able to aid him to serve well. Though, an elder’s wife would not be able to do likewise without violating 1 Timothy 2:12.

The second argument for understanding Paul meant wives lies in the omission of characteristics one would expect of female deacons; namely, marital fidelity and faithfulness in the home. Paul commands that both overseers and deacons be the husbands of one wife and manage their households well. If 1 Timothy 3:11 addresses female deacons, then why the lack of a similar calling? Schreiner argues that the character

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<sup>43</sup> Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 204.

<sup>44</sup> Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 494.

<sup>45</sup> Knight, *Pastoral Epistles*, 172; Merkle, *40 Questions*, 236.

<sup>46</sup> Schreiner, “Does the Bible Support Female Deacons?”

requirements for female deacons here are the same as expected of men.<sup>47</sup> Yet, with the emphasis of marital fidelity and a faithful homelife made first to overseers, then to male deacons, one would expect that Paul would continue in that emphasis with female deacons, though it is missing.

Third, if Paul had meant female deacons, then why did he not clarify by using a more specific word for female deacon? In Strauch's book, he asks why Paul did not simply use the word for female deacons if that is what he meant. He writes, "If Paul is singling out women deacons . . . why does he use the ambiguous and general word *gynaikas*, and not *diakonoi* with the feminine article—*tas diakonous* ('women deacons')?"<sup>48</sup> This is a good question and this precise wording would have clarified Paul's position.

Fourth, Paul forbids a woman to teach or have exercise authority over a man. Schreiner argues that female deacons would not violate the command of 1 Timothy 2:12 as the diaconate is a service role, yet Merkle writes that it is a mistake to think deacons do not exercise authority.<sup>49</sup> His argument is that deacons are servants who possess authority. Merkle writes, "The Seven chosen in Acts 6 were given oversight over the daily distribution of food—a responsibility that certainly involved exercising authority over others. Deacons exercise authority in the physical/logistical realm, which would be inappropriate for women."<sup>50</sup> After all, having an office assumes some kind of authority—otherwise there would be no office.

Critics of translating *γυναικας* as wives cite that wives of deacons would also suffer from omitting the character qualities of 3:12. Two responses will be made to this

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<sup>47</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Handbook on Acts and Paul's Letters* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019), 385.

<sup>48</sup> Strauch, *New Testament Deacon*, 116.

<sup>49</sup> Merkle, *40 Questions*, 256; Schreiner, *Handbook on Acts and Paul's Letters*, 385.

<sup>50</sup> Merkle, *40 Questions*, 256.



objection. First, if a deacon is being faithful to his wife and managing his own household and children well, then it is redundant to ask her to do the same. Second, the emphasis of examination is on his character and not hers. He is under greater scrutiny since he will be fulfilling the office. Her qualifications are valuable but not the same as his—hence the blanket statement of “faithful in all things.”

### **Wives of Deacons**

If Paul meant wives, what kind of involvement would they have in their husband’s service? Like her husband, she is to be dignified, not a slanderer, but sober-minded, and faithful in all things. In looking at these characteristics, she may simply have been able to be a faithful wife who aided her husband in service.

Schreiner writes about the importance of women in service, though he uses the framework of female deacons. He suggests that women may be more adept than men to ministering to other women: “Other women needed assistance from those of their own sex in visitation, baptism, and other matters.”<sup>51</sup> If a deacon’s wife could aid her husband to serve the women of the church better, then this would be a tremendous help in circumstances in which he may struggle.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the reader cannot be dogmatic that Paul meant wives over female deacons. The difficulty of translating 1 Timothy 3:11 well is that there is so little to examine. If Paul meant female deacons, then why use such a general word such as *γυναίκας*? If Paul meant wives, why did he not include an examination of overseers’ wives? Perhaps Strauch’s argument is the most helpful: if Paul meant female deacons, then why did he not create a more accurate wording for this office to avoid confusion? If

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<sup>51</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 787.

Paul wanted to establish a new office of female deacons, then it is difficult to promote it with a single vague verse.

### **Romans 16:1 and Phoebe**

This section addresses Phoebe in Romans 16:1, who, in some translations, is called “a servant of the church at Cenchreae.” Other translations, such as the NRSV, translate the same verse as “deacon of the church at Cenchreae.” The differences in translations stem from the Greek word *διακονον*, which means servant or deacon. The same Greek root word of *διάκονος* is used to describe the office of deacon in 1 Timothy 3:8. However, *διάκονος* commonly means servant. Context would typically dictate the meaning of this word, however, either translation could fit in describing Phoebe.

### **Arguments for Phoebe as a Deacon**

Four arguments support Phoebe as a deacon of the church. First, Paul’s uses the Greek word *διακονον* to describe Phoebe and not *διακονέω*—meaning serving. As argued, if Paul meant to say Phoebe served the church, why not use the Greek verb *διακονέω* instead of giving her the title *διακονον*? Kruse states that Paul “uses the same word he employs regularly to describe both himself and others as servants of God (2 Cor. 6:4).”<sup>52</sup> Since Paul uses the same root word of *διάκονος* to describe himself, he must have meant more than a servant.

However, Kruse may be overstating this case. *Διακονον* has both a common use, as translated servant, and a technical use as an ecclesiastical office. Unless there is compelling evidence to translate *διάκονος* in this special case, it should be used in its most common usage of “servant.” Romans 16:1 gives little evidence the technical use of

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<sup>52</sup> Colin G. Kruse, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 553.

διάκονος should be preferred over its common use.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, as Grudem points out, just because Paul uses a form of διάκονος for Phoebe as well as himself, this does not mean he meant more than servant.<sup>54</sup> Grudem shows the error of this logic by stating while some ministers are called διάκονος, this does not mean all διάκονος are ministers.

Regarding Paul's failure to use διακονέω if he only meant Phoebe's service, this is explainable from Romans 16:2. She was a woman who lived in Christian service, stated by Paul as one who "has been a patron of many and myself." Phoebe was more than serving the church on a temporary errand, but she was a woman of continual service: a servant. Therefore, she should be welcomed openly by the Roman church and assisted her to find lodging, food, and any other needs because she has shown herself trustworthy.<sup>55</sup>

Second, some scholars support that Phoebe's connection to the church of Cenchreae does necessitate the ecclesiastical usage of διακονον. As Schreiner notes, Paul does use διακονον in special case as he uses it with Cenchreae. He suggests that Phoebe served in a special capacity since this is the only occurrence of διάκονος linked to a local church.<sup>56</sup> Additionally, Paul calls her "a patron of many and of myself as well" in Romans 16:2, suggesting she was a woman of great social standing or wealth.<sup>57</sup>

While διακονον is used in conjunction with Cenchreae, modern scholars disagree about what this special connection means. Since Phoebe was to deliver Paul's letter to Rome, he may have been informing the Roman church from what church she was

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<sup>53</sup> Merkle, *40 Questions*, 257.

<sup>54</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth: An Analysis of More than 100 Disputed Questions* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 264-65.

<sup>55</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 915.

<sup>56</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 787.

<sup>57</sup> Robert Jewett and Roy D. Kotansky, *Romans*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 947.

sent.<sup>58</sup> Her connection to a church could lend to her trustworthiness, which appears as a concern of Paul's in Romans 16:2, "that you may welcome her." Additionally, while Phoebe may have been a great patron, or helper, of the saints, nowhere in Scripture does having a great social standing or wealth qualify one to be a deacon.

Third, as argued, Paul uses the masculine noun *διάκονος*, instead of the female equivalent, suggesting he was addressing the office. Cranfield states *διάκονος* must be alluding to her office as deacon as opposed to general service since this masculine form is used.<sup>59</sup> However, Merkle, Mounce, and Strauch assert there is no feminine form for the word *διάκονος*. *Διάκονος* can either be used in a masculine or a feminine sense depending on context. Strauch writes, "The Greek noun *diakonos*, although masculine in form is among a select number of second declension nouns that can be either masculine or feminine. Thus, the masculine form can apply to women."<sup>60</sup> Although Paul uses *διάκονος*, this word does not indicate he is alluding to the church office. Conversely, as Merkle suggests, Paul could have created a Greek word for female deacon to clarify that Phoebe held office. Merkle writes, "Paul sometimes created his own words when necessary to convey his intentions."<sup>61</sup>

Fourth, Kruse argues that Phoebe must be a deacon because the early church fathers, such as Origen and Pelagius, affirmed female deacons and deaconesses.<sup>62</sup> While these early church fathers do affirm them, Kruse may be overstressing this point. The early church disagreed within itself about various doctrinal issues as attested by its early

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<sup>58</sup> Merkle, *40 Questions*, 257.

<sup>59</sup> C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans 9-16*, International Critical Commentary (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2004), 781.

<sup>60</sup> Strauch, *New Testament Deacon*, 116. See also Merkle, *40 Questions*, 257; Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 202.

<sup>61</sup> Merkle, *40 Questions*, 257.

<sup>62</sup> Kruse, *Romans*, 553.

work in Christology and the Trinity. The issue concerning female deacons was not a settled matter.

In contrast to Origen and Pelagius, the *Didache*, dated by some scholars as early as the first century, only affirms men as deacons. In Holmes' translation of the *Didache* 15:1-2, he writes, "Therefore appoint for yourselves bishops and deacons worthy of the Lord, men who are humble and not avaricious and true and approved, for they too carry out for you the ministry of the prophets and teachers. You must not, therefore, despise them, for they are your honored men, along with the prophets and teachers."<sup>63</sup> As the *Didache* makes clear, both bishops and deacons are to be men, who are worthy of serving the Lord.

Also, Hippolytus of Rome, an early Church Father and Christian martyr, wrote *The Apostolic Tradition* in the third century. This work was an early Christian treatise on the order of the church, which included the office of the diaconate. In this work, Hippolytus affirms that deacons are to be ordained men:

But the deacon, when he is ordained, is chosen according to those things that were said above, the bishop alone in like manner laying his hands upon him, as we have prescribed. When the deacon is ordained, this is the reason why the bishop alone shall lay his hands upon him: he is not ordained to the priesthood but to serve the bishop and to carry out the bishop's commands. He does not take part in the council of the clergy; he is to attend to his own duties and to make known to the bishop such things as are needful.<sup>64</sup>

Hippolytus makes clear, in repeated fashion, that deacons are to be ordained men, worthy of serving the bishop and to fulfill his command.

### **Support for Phoebe as Servant**

Two arguments support translating Phoebe as a servant. First, as noted, *διάκονος* has a common and non-ecclesiastical usage as servant. Only later would the

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<sup>63</sup> Michael W. Holmes, J. B. Lightfoot, and J. R. Harmer, *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 367.

<sup>64</sup> Burton Scott Easton, *The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), 38.

early church add to this definition with a specialized and ecclesiastical office of the diaconate. Διάκονος, in an everyday sense, simply means servant. Unless there is clear evidence to support translating διάκονος as deacon, like in Philippians 1:1, it should be translated servant. As Merkle writes, “While it is possible that Paul’s use of *diakonos* is used in the more technical sense of a church office, the evidence for that conclusion is weak.”<sup>65</sup> In the limited context of Romans 16:1, there is little reason to translate διάκονος as deacon over translating it as servant.

Second, Phoebe, translated as a servant of Cenchrae, does adequately fit the context of the passage. Many scholars believe Phoebe was the probable bearer of Paul’s letter to Rome, thus proving her willingness to be a servant.<sup>66</sup> Additionally, when Paul refers to her work in the past in Romans 16:2, Phoebe is a patron of many in the ESV, or a succourer in the AV. This word comes from the Greek word προστατις, which may be used, in the general sense of helper.<sup>67</sup> While προστατις has been argued to mean leader or ruler, Grudem argues that no recent Greek lexicon shows this meaning, only patron or helper.<sup>68</sup> With Phoebe’s probable bearing of Paul’s letter and her past work of help, Paul portrays Phoebe as reliable and faithful servant, worthy to be welcomed into the fellowship of the Roman church upon her arrival.

### Conclusion

In conclusion of this section on Romans 16:1-2 and Phoebe, it is difficult to have certainty whether she held the ecclesiastical office of deacon or not.<sup>69</sup> Arguments

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<sup>65</sup> Merkle, *40 Questions*, 257.

<sup>66</sup> Cranfield, *Romans 9-16*, 780; James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 38B (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1988), 886. Schreiner, *Romans*, 786,

<sup>67</sup> Cranfield, *Romans 9-16*, 783.

<sup>68</sup> Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth*, 221-22.

<sup>69</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 787.

for and against Phoebe holding office can be supported from this passage. However, if Acts 6 provides a model of deacon service with seven men, and 1 Timothy 3:11 can be defended to show that Paul is addressing deacons' wives, then male deacons may be the only ones who can serve this office—and this would exclude Phoebe.

In concluding this chapter, the subject of female deacons is a difficult one requiring humility, given that strong arguments can be made to support and oppose female deacons. Biblically grounded and faithful Christians, from pastors to theologians, across theological convictions, have disagreed about what the Bible teaches on this matter. The question about female deacons is not about whether women can serve, as every Christian is expected to serve the Lord, but whether women can biblically fulfill this office.

CHAPTER 3  
THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS  
FOR TRAINING DEACONS

Deacons have historically been men of good repute, known to be full of the Holy Spirit and of wisdom, and who served the local church. Two sections of this chapter defend this position. First, Baptists have historically advocated for faithful men to address the practical needs of the church by serving as deacons. Second, twentieth-century deacon training programs show that deacons are typically expected to handle the practical needs of the church.

**History of Baptist Deacons**

Baptists trace their inception to the Protestant Reformation. From its beginning, which historians almost always date from Martin Luther's (1483–1546) actions in Wittenberg in 1517, the Reformation took divergent paths, with some leaders like John Calvin (1509–1564) and Huldrych Zwingli (1484–1531) favoring close alignment with secular rulers, resulting in state-sponsored churches (thus their designation as “Magisterial” Reformers), while other reformers pursued change independent of national sponsorship. Early on, these second sort of reformers were typically designated “Anabaptists” (re-baptizers), so named for their distinctive practice of baptizing adults based on professions of Christian faith as opposed to baptizing infants as a covenant sign. They were often persecuted by governments as enemies of the state and by other Christians as schematics or heretics.<sup>1</sup> Though Roman Catholic and magisterial-minded Protestants often classified

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<sup>1</sup> Since infant baptism was essentially universal in sixteenth-century Roman Catholic Europe, religious and state authorities accused these reformers of re-baptizing adults who had already been baptized as infants. For their part, these reformers had become convinced that administering baptism to an infant was contrary to the New Testament evidence; hence only baptism administered to confessing adults was valid.



disparate groups together under the name Anabaptist, such groups displayed diversity of theology and practice. During the late 1500s, radical Protestants influenced by the English Puritan vision of a “pure” church, distinct from lingering Catholic rites and trappings, began to disassociate themselves from the Church of England into “Separatist” congregations.<sup>2</sup> One early Separatist congregation in London, led by Francis Johnson (d. 1618), elected deacons as early as 1592.<sup>3</sup> As the Separatist movement grew, John Smyth (d. 1612) led an important independent congregation, first in England and later as expatriates in Amsterdam. Historians mark Smyth’s congregation as the first English-speaking Baptists.<sup>4</sup> Though Smyth’s theology and ecclesiology varied widely over the course of his life, because he stands at the start of the Baptist movement, his teaching is important.

### **Early Baptist Confessions of Faith**

Early Baptists, and their Separatist forebears, wrote confessions of faith to give congregations structure and to avoid apostasy.<sup>5</sup> Though these confessions varied in detail and theology, they provide one important way of understanding early Separatist and Baptist ecclesiology. A review of eight influential early Baptist confessions shows general agreement regarding the office and responsibilities of diaconal ministry.

Though technically a Separatist confession, *A True Confession of the Faith* (1596), written to clarify Francis Johnson’s London/Amsterdam congregations’

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<sup>2</sup> Anthony L. Chute, Nathan A. Finn, and Michael A. G. Haykin, *The Baptist Story: From English Sect to Global Movement* (Nashville: B & H, 2015), 11-12.

<sup>3</sup> William L. Lumpkin, ed., *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, rev. ed. (Valley Forge, PA, Judson Press, 1969), 80. Within a few years, political pressure caused this congregation to split, with some members remaining in London while others fled to Holland.

<sup>4</sup> Chute, Finn, and Haykin, *Baptist Story*, 16.

<sup>5</sup> Tom Nettles, *The Baptists: Beginnings in America* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2010), 2:25.

ecclesiology and doctrine, contained forty-five articles on doctrine and polity and stated that God gave gifts to men so they may fill all things in service to his church. Pastors, teachers, elders, and deacons are called for the helpful instruction, governance, and service of God's church.<sup>6</sup>

Decidedly Baptist, *The London Confession* of 1644 was the first Baptist confession to represent multiple congregations. It was moderately Calvinistic in its theology and included seven churches and the names of fifteen church leaders as signatories—some of whom were connected to the older Separatist movement.<sup>7</sup> It stated that qualified deacons would help the church in the feeding, governing, serving, and building of the church: “Pastors, Teachers, Elders, Deacons, being qualified according to the Word, as those which Christ has appointed in his Testament, for the feeding, governing, serving, and building up of his Church.”<sup>8</sup> This language is nearly identical to *A True Confession of the Faith*, yet added the idea that deacons need to be qualified according to the Bible.

In 1651, multiple congregations adopted a confession called *The Faith and Practice of Thirty Congregations, Gathered according to the Primitive Pattern*. This confession is significant as it is the first General Baptist statement that represented more than one church.<sup>9</sup> Articles 57–66 address care for the physical and spiritual needs within a congregation, interweaving the functions of those set apart for preaching with those set apart to care for the poor. Churches ought to provide “food and rayment” for those enfeebled or those unable to work. The confession does not use the language of “elders”

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<sup>6</sup> Henry Ainsworth, “A True Confession of Faith,” in Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 88. While Johnson was imprisoned, the congregation elected Henry Ainsworth as pastor, and Ainsworth likely wrote the confession.

<sup>7</sup> Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 144-46.

<sup>8</sup> “The London Confession,” in Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 166.

<sup>9</sup> Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 172-73.

and “deacons,” but uses functional categories for these offices. Following God’s direction, congregations ought to “set apart some men that are suitably qualified, to oversee, or order the affairs concerning the poor distressed members of Christ.” When a congregation is unable to meet the physical needs of its godly, poor members, these men that the church has set apart are to seek help from other willing churches. Churches are to evaluate the character of those so set-apart. The particular arrangement of articles in this confession is less precise than other similar documents. However, article 66 cites Titus 1: 7-9 and Acts 6:3 as supporting texts for its call to test the character and aptitude of men whom the church sets apart, conflating responsibilities of those ministering to physical needs with those ministering the Word. Presumably, members of these congregations would know which criteria to apply for each office.

*The Standard Confession* (1660) is a brief confession with insight into the office of deacon. Here, deacons are designated by the unique title “overseers of the poor,” as developed in article 19:

That the poor Saints belonging to the Church of Christ, are to be sufficiently provided for by the Churches, that they neither want food or rayment, and this by a free and voluntary contribution, (and not of necessity, or by the constraint or power of the magistrate) 2 *Cor.* 9.7. 1 *Cor.* 8.11, 12, and this through the free and voluntary help of the Deacons, (called Overseers of the poor) being faithful men, chosen by the Church, and ordained by Prayer and Laying on of Hands, to that Work, *Acts* 6. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6.<sup>10</sup>

The confession’s appeal to Acts 6:1-6 indicates that early Baptists saw this passage as foundational for the office of the deacon. Diaconal service was to be voluntary and formally recognized by congregational selection and ordination. The confession’s preamble makes mention that certain “elders, deacons, and brethren” in London and elsewhere in England subscribed to its teaching, the classification showing the actual practice of setting apart the two ecclesial offices stipulated within the document. The confession’s designation of deacons as “overseers of the poor” is a reference to a parish

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<sup>10</sup> “The Standard Confession,” in Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 230-31.

position established in the late sixteenth century to ensure care for the poor within a community and not a conflation with the biblical office of overseer.

The *Second London Confession* of 1689 clarified and expanded upon the original 1644 *London Confession* concerning deacons. While the 1644 confession addresses pastors, teachers, elders, and deacons in a single statement, the 1689 confession separated the offices and addressed deacons individually. Deacons were to be chosen in a similar manner to elders: set apart by prayer and the laying of hands—reflecting the Acts 6 narrative.<sup>11</sup> The confession states the elders’ calling, by which deacons are also called, is of any person fitted and gifted by the Holy Spirit. Little else is written on deacons in this confession except that the deacons’ work is implied with baptism.<sup>12</sup> However, *Second London Confession* pairs Romans 16:1-2 with 3 John 8-10 to support the view that every Baptist church and all their members are to continually pray for the good of all churches—for their peace, increase of love, and mutual edification.<sup>13</sup> This is important to note as the *London Confession* uses Romans 16:1 to support its view on pastors, teachers, elders, and deacons, although the verse is used in the *Second London Confession* as a general attitude of faithful service.

*The Orthodox Creed* of 1678, a confession of Particular Baptists, addressed three ecclesial offices deacons in article 31: Bishops/messengers, elders/pastors, and deacons/overseers of the poor.<sup>14</sup> The article indicates that the Holy Ghost fits and gifts people for each of these offices and that congregations ought to elect and ordain deacons whom have been prepared by the Spirit of God for the work, then men so set apart should receive the benevolence aid of the church to care for the poor.

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<sup>11</sup> “The Second London Confession,” in Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 287.

<sup>12</sup> “The Second London Confession,” 291.

<sup>13</sup> “The Second London Confession,” 289.

<sup>14</sup> “The Orthodox Creed,” in Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 319.

These six confessions represented early Separatist and Baptist beliefs on deacons. Overall, these confessions show that deacons must be qualified men, set apart by the church, who help in feeding the poor and sick. Each of these six confessions used Acts 6:3 as supporting its view on deacons.

A minority of Baptists held that women or widows could serve as deacons. In 1609, John Smyth wrote *A Short Confession of Faith in Twenty Articles* and he affirmed the purpose of deacons was to attend to the poor and sick within the church and allowed widows to serve this role. He wrote, “That the ministers of the church are, not only bishops (*episcopos*), to whom the power is given of dispensing both the Word and the sacraments, but also deacons, men and widows, who attend to the affairs of the poor and sick brethren.”<sup>15</sup> Smyth’s beliefs were based on 1 Timothy 5:9-10. However, as Deweese notes, Smyth’s theology and writings “showed possible English Separatist and/or Anabaptist influences regarding women deacons.”<sup>16</sup>

The *English Declaration at Amsterdam* (1611) recorded two offices: elders and deacons. Deacons were men and women whose office was to assist the poor and helpless within the church. As this confession stated, “Deacons [are] Men, and Women who by their office releave the necessities off the poore and impotent brethre concerning their bodies.”<sup>17</sup> This confession included women in the work as deacons.

Considering these early Separatist and Baptist confessions, one sees a general consensus among these congregations that deacons were concerned with relief of the physical needs of the poor and that they were to be mature, godly Christians set apart by

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<sup>15</sup> John Smyth, “Short Confession of Faith in Twenty Articles,” in *Baptist Confessions, Covenants, and Catechisms*, ed. John A. Broadus, Timothy George, and Denise George (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 33.

<sup>16</sup> Charles W. Deweese, *Women Deacons and Deaconesses: 400 Years of Baptist Service* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2005), 49-50.

<sup>17</sup> “English Declaration at Amsterdam,” in Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 121-22.

their respective congregations for this specific duty. While some confessions restricted this role to men, two early confessions envisioned widows or other women fulfilling this ministry. Charles Deweese documents the role of women serving as deacons or deaconesses in Separatist and early Baptist congregations. Though Deweese openly advocates for women serving as deacons, his historical research shows diversity of practice among the earliest Baptists and the Separatist congregations.<sup>18</sup>

Subsequent Baptists confessions of faith in North America add little to these early English confessions on deacons. *The Philadelphia Confession of Faith* of 1742, in its article “Of the Church,” uses near-identical language to the *Second London Confession* when it notes that deacons are chosen by “like suffrage, and set apart by prayer, and the imposition of hands.”<sup>19</sup> “The New Hampshire Confession” of 1833 states that elders’ and deacons’ qualification, claims, and duties are defined in both Timothy and Titus—adding nothing more.<sup>20</sup>

The Baptist Faith and Message” of 1925, in article “The Gospel Church,” states the church’s scriptural officers are bishops, or elders, and deacons. This confession uses supporting verses from Acts 6:3, 5-6. The 1963 and 2000 “Baptist Faith and Message,” in article “The Church,” followed in likewise wording except replacing the language of bishops or elders with pastors, and supporting its view on deacons with 1 Timothy 3:1-15 and Acts 6:3-6.<sup>21</sup>

Three observations can be made on observing these Baptist confessions on deacons. First, deacons are stated and supported in many Baptist confessions showing

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<sup>18</sup> Deweese, *Women Deacons and Deaconesses*, xi, 49-55.

<sup>19</sup> “The Philadelphia Confession of Faith,” in Broadus, George, and George, *Baptist Confessions, Covenants, and Catechisms*, 86-87.

<sup>20</sup> “The New Hampshire Confession,” in Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 365-66.

<sup>21</sup> Southern Baptist Convention, “Southern Baptist Convention Comparison of 1925, 1963 and 2000 Baptist Faith and Message,” accessed September 12, 2019, <http://www.sbc.net/bfm2000/bfmcomparison.asp>.

their importance in church life. Second, Baptists generally agree on the qualifications and responsibilities of deacons, except on the issue of whether women can serve. Third, many of the confessions use supporting verses from 1 Timothy 3:8-13 and especially Acts 6:3 when referencing deacons. Romans 16:1 rarely appears as a supporting verse except in the *London Confession* and the *Second London Confession*, where the latter of these confessions uses it for churches to hold communion amongst themselves for peace, increase of love, and mutual edification.<sup>22</sup>

### **Early Baptist Treatises on Deacons**

Baptists have historically held to two offices within the local church: elders and deacons. Deacons have been an essential part of Baptist churches since the 1600s.<sup>23</sup> Greg Wills writes, “Deacons were to oversee the temporal affairs of the congregation. They had the responsibility to care for the needs of the pastor, to sustain the poor and destitute members among them, to make preparation for the observance of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, and to look after the church’s meeting house.”<sup>24</sup> Their role was to help the church wherever it needed.

Nehemiah Coxe was son to early Particular Baptist Benjamin Coxe. He joined the Bedford church in 1669, and was called to serve at pastor to the church’s sub-congregation at Hitchin.<sup>25</sup> In 1688, Coxe published a brief work called *Biblical Elders and Deacons*, where he cites the first appointment of deacons in Acts 6. Coxe concludes

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<sup>22</sup> “The Second London Confession,” 289.

<sup>23</sup> Charles W. Deweese, “Ministries of Baptist Deacons in Early America,” *Baptist History and Heritage* 25, no. 2 (1990): 3.

<sup>24</sup> Gregory A. Wills, “The Church: Baptists and Their Churches in the Eighteen and Nineteenth Centuries,” in *Polity: Biblical Arguments on How to Conduct Church Life*, ed. Mark E. Dever (Grand Rapids: Sheridan, 2001), 35.

<sup>25</sup> Nehemiah Coxe, *Biblical Elders and Deacons* (1688; repr., Pensacola, FL: Chapel Library, 2015), accessed June 27, 2019, <https://chapellibrary.org:8443/pdf/books/bead.pdf>, 1-2.

that deacons were an ordinary officer of the church, their numbers reflected the congregational need, their qualification by examination and trial proceeded their election to the office, and their work was to care of the poor. Deacons were to be faithful, compassionate, prudent, and diligent—and the congregation ought to give respect to deacons who serve them.<sup>26</sup>

Benjamin Keach was an influential Baptist teacher who lived from 1640 to 1704. In 1668, Keach was ordained pastor of Horsleydown, Southwark, London, where he led for most of his life. Keach's work, *The Glory of a True Church, and its Discipline Display'd*, published in 1697, helped churches understand the role of elders and deacons. He wrote that deacons voluntarily serve tables, contribute to the maintenance of the ministry, and visit the poor and widowed. Keach writes,

The Work of Deacon is to serve Tables, to see to provide for the Lord's Table, the Minister's Table, and the Poor's Table. They should provide Bread and Wine for the Lord's Table. See that every Member contributes to the Maintenance of the Ministry, according to their Ability, and their own voluntary Subscription or Obligation. That each Member do give weekly to the Poor, as God as blessed him. Also visit the Poor, and know their Condition as much as in them lies, that none, especially the aged Widows, be neglected.<sup>27</sup>

Here Keach affirms that deacons are to serve tables—the Lord's table, the minister's table, and the poor's table—though he does not elaborate if women can serve.

Benjamin Griffith was born in Wales in 1688 and came to America in 1711. He was baptized in 1711 and was ordained as pastor of Montgomery church in Bucks County, Pennsylvania in 1725. He wrote *A Short Treatise Concerning a True and Orderly Gospel Church* for the Philadelphia Baptist Association, published in 1743. Griffith states that deacons are called to serve tables: "Deacons are men called forth by the church, to serve in the outward concerns thereof whose office is to serve tables, Acts

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<sup>26</sup> Coxe, *Biblical Elders and Deacons*, 6-9.

<sup>27</sup> Benjamin Keach, "The Glory of a True Church, and its Discipline Display'd," in Dever, *Polity*, 66-67.



6:2-7.”<sup>28</sup> Griffith includes as responsibilities for deacons, assisting the poor members of the church, providing for the Lord’s Table and minister’s table, and contribute to the proper uses of the church.

In 1743, the Philadelphia Baptist Association printed a short treatise on church discipline that included a section on deacons. This treatise states that deacons are to be faithful men who serve tables. As stated in the treatise, “Deacons are men called forth by the church, to serve in the outward concerns thereof; whose office is to serve tables, Acts vi 2-7.”<sup>29</sup> While brief, this treatise affirms the service of faithful men as deacons.

In 1774, the Charleston Baptist Association in South Carolina produced “A Summary of Church Discipline Shewing the Qualifications and Duties of the Officers and Members of a Gospel Church,” printed by David Bruce. What is unique to this summary is that it adopts Jonathan Gill’s commentary on Acts 6:2, which affirms deacons’ responsibilities to the Lord’s Table, the minister’s table, and the poor’s table. The treatise cites Gill in writing,

The table of the Lord, by providing the bread and wine for it; receiving both from the minister, when blessed, and distributing them to the members; and collecting from them for the poor, and the defraying the church; and observing what members are missing at the ordinance, whom they are to admonish; and if their admonitions are not regarded, to report it to the church: and they are likewise to serve the minister’s table, by taking care that he has a sufficient competency for his support; and it belongs to them to stir up the members of the church to their duty in communicating to him. . . . They are to serve the poor’s table; to whom they are to distribute of the church’s stock, with all impartiality, simplicity, cheerfulness and sympathy.<sup>30</sup>

Samuel Jones was born in 1735, in Glamorganshire, Wales, and was brought to

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<sup>28</sup> Benjamin Griffith, “A Short Treatise concerning a True and Orderly Gospel Church,” in Dever, *Polity*, 98-99.

<sup>29</sup> “A Short Treatise of Church Discipline,” in *A Confession of Faith Adopted by the Baptist Association, Met at Philadelphia, September 25, 1742* (Philadelphia: Anderson and Meehan, 1818), 83.

<sup>30</sup> The Baptist Association in Charleston, South Carolina, “A Summary of Church Discipline Shewing the Qualifications and Duties of the Officers and Members of a Gospel Church,” adopted by the Baptist Association in Charleston, South Carolina, 1774, Founders Ministries, “A Summary of Church Discipline,” accessed September 12, 2019, <https://founders.org/polity/a-summary-of-church-discipline/>.

America two years later. He received his education from the College at Philadelphia in 1762 and became an ordained minister in 1763. He published a work in 1805 called *Treatise of Church Discipline*, in which chapter 3 discussed deacons—their business, qualifications, and manner of service. Jones calls the business of deacons to be extensive as they originally served thousands in Acts 2:41-44 and the church had all things common. The deacons' work was to address the concerns of the church, particularly in serving tables of the poor and of the minister. Their qualifications are set by Acts 6:3 and 1 Timothy 3:8-13. Deacons are to serve in their office with impartiality or simplicity, cheerfulness, compassion, tenderness, and faithfulness, as exhorted from Romans 12:8. Like the minister, deacons are to be ordained into office and by faithful service they receive good standing and great confidence before Christ.<sup>31</sup>

W. B. Johnson was an active and helpful minister who served in South Carolina during the nineteenth century and later as the first Southern Baptist Convention president from 1845 to 1851. He published *The Gospel Developed through the Government and Order of the Churches of Jesus Christ* in 1846 and has an extensive treatment on deacons. Johnson writes that deacons ought to be capable for business, and excellent and stable in moral character. His supporting verses are 1 Timothy 3:8-13, Philippians 1:1, and Romans 16:1.<sup>32</sup>

Johnson estimates *diakonos* appears twenty-eight times in the NT, five of them translated as deacon, with the remaining translated either as servant or minister, and calls the terms synonymous—and his reason for believing Phoebe is a minister like Paul. Johnson's understanding of *diakonos* as both servant or minister confuses the ordinary and ecclesiastical use of this word as co-equals. Additionally, Johnson never states why

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<sup>31</sup> Samuel Jones, "A Treatise of Church Discipline and a Directory," in Dever, *Polity*, 144-45.

<sup>32</sup> W. B. Johnson, "The Gospel Developed through the Government and Order of the Churches of Jesus Christ," in Dever, *Polity*, 196-98.

the visiting of poor women during his time necessitated female deacons while the Acts 6 narrative did not.

**Baptist disagreement on deaconesses.** While the presented evidence shows that many Baptist churches had qualified male deacons only, some Baptist churches called female deacons. James Renihan writes that at Broadmead Church in 1679, the church chose four widows, above sixty years of age, to be deaconesses of the congregation.<sup>33</sup> These women were asked to serve, pledged not to marry, and were given the following tasks: visiting the sick women of the church, visiting sick brothers, reporting to the elder deacons and congregation their work, speaking words of consolation to those they visited, and attending to the sick. As Renihan notes, these women were not considered equals with the deacons nor given status as a church office.<sup>34</sup>

Notable Baptist leaders supported female deacons or deaconesses, such as B. H. Carroll, Morgan Edwards, R. B. C. Howell, W. B. Johnson, and J. L. Reynolds.<sup>35</sup> Reynolds argues for deaconesses since primitive churches saw the use of them as necessary due to their Eastern manners and customs.<sup>36</sup> However, Reynolds never clarifies why the manners and customs of these churches required deaconesses, nor why these manners and customs were different from the first-century. Howell confirms Phoebe as a deaconess, citing Paul affirming her official character of excellence and because of the strong probability that the church at Cenchreae had deaconesses.<sup>37</sup> However, Reynolds never addresses why the

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<sup>33</sup> James M. Renihan, *Edification and Beauty: The Practical Ecclesiology of the English Particular Baptists, 1675-1705* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2009), 116.

<sup>34</sup> Renihan, *Edification and Beauty*, 116.

<sup>35</sup> Wills, "The Church," 35; W. B. Johnson, *The Gospel Developed through the Government and Order of the Churches of Jesus Christ* (Richmond, VA: H. K. Ellyson, 1846), 97.

<sup>36</sup> J. L. Reynolds, *Church Polity: The Kingdom of Christ in its Internal and External Development* (Richmond, VA: Harrold & Murray, 1849), 137-38.

<sup>37</sup> Robt. Boyte C. Howell, *The Deaconship* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication

translation of *διακονον* as deaconess should be preferred over servant, nor does he substantiate his claim that the church at Cencreae had deaconesses. Nonetheless, early Separatist and Baptist congregations in England had women serving as deacons or deaconesses. Among English Baptists, this practice was sporadic during the seventeenth century and declined by the start of the eighteenth century, only to be revived again during the nineteenth century. In Baptist churches in America, deaconesses find no historical support in seventeenth century and scant attestation in the eighteenth century, apart from Separate Baptists, notably in the Sandy Creek tradition.<sup>38</sup>

**The change of deacon function.** Business functions began in the late 1700s and continued into the twentieth century, which changed Baptist views on deacons. The rise of business led to deacons as church managers, acting as a board of directors.<sup>39</sup> The board of directors would be responsible for the business affairs of the church, including finances, facilities, and other needs. The pastor was responsible to the board of directors, and the board of directors were responsible to the church.

From 1800 to 1950, Baptist churches in America experienced great change, growing from a small group into a large and organized denomination.<sup>40</sup> Baptist churches rose from being individual congregations to being part of a national and regional structure. As Baptist churches changed, their church offices changed as well. Churches in cities and towns began to expect their pastors have at least a college education.<sup>41</sup> Baptist churches

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Society, 1851), 126-27.

<sup>38</sup> Deweese, *Women Deacons and Deaconesses*, 62-64.

<sup>39</sup> Henry Webb, *Deacons: Servant Models in the Church* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2002), 68-69.

<sup>40</sup> John F. Loftis, "The Emerging Identity of Deacons, 1800-1950," *Baptist History and Heritage* 25, no. 2 (1990): 15.

<sup>41</sup> Chute, Finn, and Haykin, *Baptist Story*, 215.

treated deacons as either lay ministers or church business managers. As lay ministers, deacons would care for the poor, help the pastor, prepare ordinances, and be involved with church discipline. As business managers, deacons would oversee the business of the church to relieve the pastor to minister to the church.<sup>42</sup> This tension between these two understandings of the deacon office continued from 1800 to 1950.

The differing views on deacons are displayed with the first two presidents of the SBC. William B. Johnson, the first elected president of the Southern Baptist Convention, wrote in 1846 stating of the importance of deacons' service in *The Gospel Developed through the Government and Order of the Churches of Jesus Christ*. He explains the essential role of deacons as the servants of the church:

The qualifications of *deacons* look not so much to the intellectual capacity of *rulers, spiritual guides, feeders of the flock, teachers*, as to trustworthiness, capacity for business, excellence and stability of moral character. As the term *deacon* means *servant*, as contradistinguished from *ruler or teacher*, whatever temporal service the interest of a church may require, should be committed to the hands of the *deacons*.<sup>43</sup>

Johnson taught that there were two kinds of service in every church: the spiritual and the temporal. Bishops were to be rulers over the church and deacons were to be her servants.<sup>44</sup>

R. B. C. Howell was the second president of the Southern Baptist Convention and served during a time before seminaries. In 1846, Howell wrote *The Deaconship: Its Nature, Qualifications, Relations, and Duties*, which was in part opposition to his predecessor, W. B. Johnson. Howell explains that Paul refers to himself and Apollos as *diakonoi*, which Howell believes is a version of minister, as he references in 1 Corinthians 3:5 and Galatians 6:2-3.<sup>45</sup> Howell does not establish why Paul and Apollos could not simply be servants. He argues that the Roman Catholic church, English church,

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<sup>42</sup> Loftis, "The Emerging Identity of Deacons, 1800-1950," 15.

<sup>43</sup> Johnson, *The Gospel Developed*, 94.

<sup>44</sup> Johnson, *The Gospel Developed*, 98.

<sup>45</sup> Howell, *Deaconship*, 14-15.

Presbyterian church, Methodist church, and Episcopal church made deacons low-grade clergyman.<sup>46</sup> Howell appeals to the influence of denominations rather than what is based in Scripture. While Howell maintains that the pastor has oversight with all the spiritual needs of the church, deacons are to be directors of the church.<sup>47</sup>

The two views were dominant in Baptist churches during the 1800s to the 1950s: deacons as lay ministers and deacons as church business managers.<sup>48</sup> Deacons as lay ministers were to care for the poor, help the pastor, assist in church ordinances, and be involved with church discipline issues. Deacons as church business managers were to oversee the functions of the church to allow the pastor to handle spiritual care.

**Influence of social gospel.** As Baptists began the twentieth century, the office of deacon continued to change. Some Baptists were concerned with the role of deacon as influenced by Frank Wilkins, who desired deacons to be active. Wilkins wrote, “How can we produce an active diaconate in every Baptist church in the land, is one of the living questions confronting us as a denomination as the new century opens.”<sup>49</sup> Baptist theologian Walter Rauschenbusch believed the deacons of his day were wealthy social leaders in business who were responsible for much of the misery and poverty in the world—and by this abandoned their New Testament roots.<sup>50</sup>

Rauschenbusch, one of the prominent leaders in the Social Gospel movement, desired for the movement’s concerns to be applied to Baptist deacons. The gospel, he believed, needed to be accompanied by social reforms and deacons should use their

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<sup>46</sup> Howell, *Deaconship*, 16-17.

<sup>47</sup> Howell, *Deaconship*, 18.

<sup>48</sup> Loftis, “The Emerging Identity of Deacons, 1800-1950,” 15.

<sup>49</sup> Frank L. Wilkins, *The Diaconate: As It Is and as It Ought to Be* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1915), 9.

<sup>50</sup> Loftis, “The Emerging Identity of Deacons, 1800-1950,” 17.

influence to tend to the poor and fight for their causes. Rauschenbusch encouraged deacons to look beyond the walls of the church to address problems of poverty, social inequity, and brokenness in the secular world. Loftis writes that, by Rauschenbusch's influence, the concept of deacons being church managers was transforming in Baptist life as new models for civic and specialized services were developing.<sup>51</sup> Yet tensions between deacons as managers and ministers continued until the 1920s as a new component to evangelize began being expected.

F. A. Agar wrote in his 1923 book, *The Deacon at Work*, that evangelism was one of the primary duties of the deacon. Agar writes, "The local church is one of the prime agencies for the winning of lost souls. Therefore it must have very definite plans and programs concerning evangelism, and deacons and deaconesses must have a very particular interest."<sup>52</sup> This new expectation of deacons was unseen in Baptist life until then. Agar also addressed the tension between pastors and deacons by stating that the pastor is to be assisted by the deacons and should never be a servant of the board of deacons.<sup>53</sup>

**Other Baptist works on deacons.** In 1929, shortly after Agar's book, P. E. Burroughs wrote an influential book for Southern Baptists called *Honoring the Deaconship*. He writes chapter 7 on the deacons' work of evangelism, "Honored in Soul-Winning and Missions," where he says the best service of the deacon is to win souls for Christ.<sup>54</sup> Deacons are to be men full of wisdom and of faith, grave, sound in doctrine, and right in regard to speech, strong drink, concerning money, and family relationships.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Loftis, "The Emerging Identity of Deacons, 1800-1950," 17.

<sup>52</sup> Loftis, "The Emerging Identity of Deacons, 1800-1950," 17.

<sup>53</sup> Frederick A. Agar, *The Deacon at Work* (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1984), 5-6.

<sup>54</sup> P. E. Burroughs, *Honoring the Deaconship*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1936), 82.

<sup>55</sup> Burroughs, *Honoring the Deaconship*, 34-42.

While Burroughs does cite the difficulty in translating 1 Timothy 3:11 concerning women or female deacons, he states that each church must implement what is most faithful to Scripture, though he affirms deaconesses.<sup>56</sup>

Robert Naylor wrote about these ongoing tensions between pastors and deacons in his book *The Baptist Deacon*, published in 1955. Deacons, who are often put into a leadership role, such as executive boards, are in contention with pastors attempting to lead churches. Naylor writes, “Tension between pastor and deacons is no uncommon experience . . . often this has come to open warfare, and the resulting tragedy has crippled the influence and work of such churches.”<sup>57</sup> He writes that deacon boards are *not* a part of the NT model: “There is a ‘board’ complex and a general feeling that deacons are ‘directors’ of the church. Nothing could be farther from the Baptist genius or the New Testament plan.”<sup>58</sup> Naylor supports serving deacons who help with church ordinances, receives the church’s offerings, greets members and visitors, cares for the church property, are responsible for filling the pulpit when empty, are a part of the finance committee, and participates in other practical responsibilities.<sup>59</sup>

Howard Foshee studied the work of deacons extensively, which resulted in his book *The Ministry of the Deacon*, published in 1968. He later wrote *Broadman Church Manual* in 1973. In *The Ministry of the Deacon*, he suggests that the meaning for deacon (*diakonos*) literally means “through the dust,” as one would stir up the dust in hasty service. Foshee disagrees with other biblical scholars who suggest Acts 6 speaks about prototype deacons, as no place in the New Testament affirms this position. Yet he cites that the same spiritual integrity and maturity are needed for any deacon who serves. Regarding a

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<sup>56</sup> Burroughs, *Honoring the Deaconship*, 44.

<sup>57</sup> Robert E. Naylor, *The Baptist Deacon* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1955), 3.

<sup>58</sup> Naylor, *Baptist Deacon*, 3.

<sup>59</sup> Naylor, *Baptist Deacon*, 79-103.



deacon's service, the church should choose biblically qualified servants, who can serve well, can serve well *together*, and have a teachable spirit.<sup>60</sup>

Henry Webb has written one of the most recent works on Baptist deacons, originally published in 1980, titled *Deacons: Servant Models in the Church*. He states that *diakonos* is a title service given to every Christian but also is a special designation for a church office.<sup>61</sup> Webb disagrees that Acts 6 addresses deacons. Yet concerning their qualifications, deacons are to show growth in experiencing God's presence, see from God's perspective, integrate faith into life, and demonstrate maturity.<sup>62</sup> Webb writes that deacons are in the heart, and practical parts, of the church. He maintains an opposition to deacons being a board of directors and deacons sharing the ministry with the pastor.<sup>63</sup>

### **Deacons in Contemporary American Church Practice**

In this final section, contemporary Christian sources are examined to see how deacons function in modern American churches. This section looks at recent published materials and shows that modern church contexts still expect deacons to serve the practical needs of the church.

9Marks is a ministry seeking to equip local church leaders with a biblical vision and practical resources to give glory to God and allow the church to thrive. One of the books in its series of publications is written by Thabiti Anyabwile, noted pastor, speaker, and author of several other books.

Thabiti Anyabwile states in *Finding Faithful Elders and Deacons* that deacons provide a joyful means of service to the church and is perhaps one of the most important

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<sup>60</sup> Howard B. Foshee, *The Ministry of the Deacon*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Convention Press, 1974), 26-28.

<sup>61</sup> Webb, *Deacons*, 2.

<sup>62</sup> Webb, *Deacons*, 18.

<sup>63</sup> Webb, *Deacons*, 53.

ministries of the church: “The joy, peace, unity, and fruitfulness of the local church depends in part on having a cadre of faithful table servants who are present when needed, eager to serve without being intrusive.”<sup>64</sup> He cites Acts 6 as being the prototypical beginning of deacons and shows that deacons were the early church’s “shock-absorbers,” absorbing complaints and keeping the peace with spiritual wisdom. He notes that deacons need to be men of faith and of the Spirit, dedicated to serving the church: “When looking for deacons, churches must look for men full of the Spirit. The office is a spiritual office. . . . Deacons are to be men known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom.”<sup>65</sup> Deacons are dedicated to handling the practical and pressing needs of the church.

However, Anyabwile states elsewhere of his support for women deacons. In an article for the Gospel Coalition entitled “I’m a Complementarian, But . . . Women Can Be Deacons,” he argues that *γυναίκα*s in 1 Timothy 3:11 ought to be translated as “women deacons” because of Paul’s use of the word “likewise” to introduce a shift in audience.<sup>66</sup> Anyabwile’s view on deacons is shared by Capitol Hill Baptist Church (CHBC), whose senior pastor, Mark Dever, is the president of 9Marks. According to CHBC’s constitution, the office of deacon, for deacons and deaconesses, is described in 1 Timothy 3:8-13. Both men and women are called to service to the church with particular gifts of service. Specifically, the diaconate cares for the temporal needs of members, attends to the needs of public worship, helps others, and assists elders in receiving and distributing benevolence funding.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Thabiti M. Anyabwile, *Finding Faithful Elders and Deacons* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 19.

<sup>65</sup> Anyabwile, *Finding Faithful Elders and Deacons*, 23-24.

<sup>66</sup> Thabiti Anyabwile, “I’m a Complementarian, But . . . Women Can Be Deacons,” The Gospel Coalition, February 4, 2011, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/thabiti-anyabwile/im-a-complementarian-but-women-can-be-deacons/>.

<sup>67</sup> Capitol Hill Baptist Church, “Constitution of the Capitol Hill Baptist Church,” September 16, 2018, <https://b1033ecbf0be9f1f78e0-9ff91644b80b1213b3e9d43ad0f0e963.ssl.cf2.rackcdn.com/>

In another recent work, Paul Chappell, senior pastor of the Lancaster Baptist Church in Lancaster, California, wrote *The Ministry of a Baptist Deacon*. Chappell states that deacons are to be faithful followers of the pastors, empowering pastors to do their work: “The pastor is the overseer of the church, the men who serve with him must have faith to follow their pastor.”<sup>68</sup> Chappell states ten different qualifications needed for deacons, following in the language of KJV: grave, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for filthy lucre, holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience, proved, blameless, even so must their wives, husband of one wife, ruling their children and their houses well, and faithful in all things.<sup>69</sup> Like Anyabwile, Chappell refrains from defining the responsibilities of deacons in exact terms yet he shares about Lancaster Baptists’ deacons who are ushers, Sunday school teachers, greeters, and ones who make follow-up visits with guests. At Lancaster Baptist, the church is blessed with deacons who are willing to serve in any way needed.<sup>70</sup>

Benjamin Merkle, a New Testament and Greek scholar at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, and a prominent authority on elders and deacons, authored *40 Questions about Elders and Deacons*. Merkle states that the focus of qualifications for the deacon office lay in the moral character of the person.<sup>71</sup> His analysis of 1 Timothy 3:8-13 reflects five attributes expected of deacons: dignified, not double-tongued, sound in faith and life, tested, and having a godly wife. He claims 1 Timothy 3:11 is unlikely to be listing the qualifications for the office of a female deacon, supporting the claim with

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<sup>68</sup> Paul Chappell, *The Ministry of a Baptist Deacon: A Handbook for Local Church Servant Leaders* (Lancaster, CA: Striving Together Publications, 2010), 15.

<sup>69</sup> Chappell, *Ministry of a Baptist Deacon*, 21-25.

<sup>70</sup> Chappell, *Ministry of a Baptist Deacon*, 27.

<sup>71</sup> Benjamin Merkle, *40 Questions about Elders and Deacons* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 233.

eight arguments.<sup>72</sup> In regard to duties, Merkle writes that deacons are not responsible to teach or lead the congregation, nor are they spiritual leaders, but instead provide leadership to service-orientated parts of church life.<sup>73</sup> When referencing practical implications of being service-orientated, Merkle offers this list of possible duties for deacons: management of facilities, care over benevolence, handling of finances, helping as a church ushers, and helping in a variety of ways to support the elders.<sup>74</sup>

Alexander Strauch wrote *Minister of Mercy: The New Testament Deacon*, and he calls the deacon the minister of mercy because of the benevolence picture found in Acts 6. In many modern church, elders and deacons are in contention with each other. Strauch traces power struggles and misunderstandings of leadership to a misunderstanding of the elder and deacon positions.<sup>75</sup> He opposes deacons as executive board members, advocates deacons who are submissive to church overseers, and support male deacons only.<sup>76</sup> Regarding duties, deacons are men, who do not teach nor govern as they are servant-officers who relieve shepherds in the many practical duties required of the church.<sup>77</sup> Elders and deacons have a complementary work: elders to the spiritual welfare of the church and deacons to its physical welfare.

The final work examined is Henry Webb's *Deacons: Servant Models in the Church*, published in 1980. Webb retired in 2005, after twenty-eight years of service at LifeWay in the areas of Pastoral Ministries, Discipleship, and Deacon Ministry. Webb

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<sup>72</sup> Merkle, *40 Questions*, 253-55.

<sup>73</sup> Merkle, *40 Questions*, 239-40.

<sup>74</sup> Merkle, *40 Questions*, 241-43.

<sup>75</sup> Alexander Strauch, *The New Testament Deacon: The Church's Minister of Mercy* (Littleton, CO: Lewis & Roth, 1992), 77.

<sup>76</sup> Strauch, *New Testament Deacon*, 78, 112-31.

<sup>77</sup> Strauch, *New Testament Deacon*, 156-57.

was also the editor of *The Deacon* magazine. Webb writes that the work of deacons should not be considered a lowly task but one equivalent to serving Jesus. While Webb disagrees that Acts 6 speaks about deacons, he does hold that deacons are servant-leaders of the church.<sup>78</sup> The title *diakonos* means servant, and the qualifications of a deacon are in 1 Timothy 3:8-13. Webb states the role of the deacon is to work alongside the pastor.<sup>79</sup> Webb calls the pastor the “team leader” and the pastor having a responsible for directing the deacons’ work. While Webb avoids calling deacons to specific duties, he does say they should find a variety of practical work in leading, proclaiming, and caring for those in the church.<sup>80</sup> To these acts of practical service, deacons will not find a shortage of work in the local church.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, three observations may be made from this chapter. First, Baptists agree that their central beliefs on deacons are based upon Acts 6:3 and 1 Timothy 3:8-13. Deacons are at least modeled after the seven men of Acts 6, to be of good repute and full of the Spirit and of wisdom, who can serve the practical needs of the church. The deacons’ character is of primary concern in 1 Timothy 3:8-13, much like overseers, to ensure that these men are faithful, dignified, and tested. Second, many modern churches are utilizing deacons in practical service: ushers, help with church facilities, finances, and other service-orientated needs. Where faithful deacons are serving well, church ministries needs are being met and workload is shared. Third, while the debate over women deacons is unsettled in Baptist life, faithful Christians can discuss the issue civilly, and without compromise to the inerrancy of the Scriptures.

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<sup>78</sup> Webb, *Deacons*, 73-75.

<sup>79</sup> Webb, *Deacons*, 64.

<sup>80</sup> Webb, *Deacons*, 66.



## CHAPTER 4

### IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROJECT

This chapter describes the implementation of the ministry project to train deacons at Lebanon Baptist Church (LBC). The project had three goals. First was to assess the current knowledge of LBC members concerning the deacon ministry in a pre-project survey. Second, after assessing the data from the surveys, I created a six-session teaching series on deacons' qualifications and roles. This series addressed concerns from the pre-project survey results. The third goal evaluated any patterns of change in the deacons through a post-project survey. A detailed explanation of each of the three goals is listed in this chapter.

#### **Pre-Project Survey**

The first goal of this project was to assess the current knowledge of church members and deacons concerning the qualifications and responsibilities of deacons. To fulfill this goal, I developed a pre-project survey with 29 statements to assess members' current knowledge. Originally, I chose 30 statements for this evaluation. However, one statement was deemed unusable as it could be misconstrued. The remaining 29 statements were sufficient to assess member understanding without replacing the one removed. Participants were given 29 statements from five broad topics, including biblical qualifications, extra-biblical qualifications, biblical responsibilities, extra-biblical responsibilities, and transparency statements. Transparency statements were used to gain knowledge about the opinions of church members concerning LBC deacons. Seventeen statements sought "strongly agree" as the ideal response while 12 statements had "strongly disagree" as the ideal response. This discrepancy between positive and negative ideal

responses was to prevent participants from identifying a pattern of how they ought to answer and answering according to it.<sup>1</sup>

During Sunday morning announcements on October 20, 2019, I invited eligible church members to participate in the upcoming project survey. By “eligible,” I explained that participants would need to be eighteen years old or older and a member of LBC. The project survey would be completed by eligible candidates on a volunteer basis and the survey was required for my graduation. To ensure clarity on eligibility and purpose of survey to participants, a detailed insert was included in the worship bulletins. I verbally encouraged members to ask any questions they had before the upcoming survey date. The same announcement and bulletin inserts was given on the following Sunday, October 27.

Before November 3, 2019, the LBC office manager helped to print and organize the survey materials that would be later distributed to the Sunday school classrooms. Printed surveys were preferred over a digital method for ease of use, the avoidance of possible technological problems, and the concern of all members to have equal access. After the surveys were compiled into bundles according to Sunday school rooms, they were hand delivered by the LBC office manager to each room on the morning of November 3. Each survey bundle included a letter from me expressing gratitude to all those who helped with my survey and common questions answered since the survey was first announced.

The survey itself was created with twenty-nine statements. All statements required responses reflected in a six-point Likert scale: strongly disagree, disagree, somewhat disagree, somewhat agree, agree, and strongly agree. The purpose of using this six-point scale, as opposed to a five-point scale, is that participants could not answer neutrally or without opinion.<sup>2</sup> To ensure anonymity, all participants were not required to

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<sup>1</sup> See appendix 1 for survey.

<sup>2</sup> Neil J. Salkind, *Exploring Research*, 8th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2012), 133-53.



sign their names, nor to include written statements. Three designations were made by checkmark boxes beginning the survey: if they were eighteen years old or older, if they were an LBC member, and if they were currently, or formerly in this past year, serving as an LBC deacon. These three designations ensured participants were adults, members of LBC, and to separate results between deacons and non-deacons.

The LBC office manager returned to the Sunday school rooms to collect the fulfilled surveys after the teaching hour concluded. She brought the surveys to the church office to compile the results in two Excel spreadsheets, deacons and non-deacons, which I received the following week. These surveys resulted in fifty-two total participants, which total included eight LBC deacons' responses. However, two participants provided unusable answers by responding with "Yes" or "No" instead of using the numeric scale. These binary responses could not be used to reflect church member's beliefs on deacons. In total, fifty qualified participants took the survey.

The church strongly affirmed statements that deacons must have high integrity and be trustworthy to serve, they consider the Bible's teaching on deacons when voting for them, a deacon must have a deep faith in God, and the deacons' role is to help with the everyday needs of the church. The church responded negatively and appropriately to the following statements: a deacon's work ethic is more important than his character, one must be married before being considered as a deacon, and a person must be a successful in business before becoming a deacon. Yet other responses were surprising. Table 1 shows these unexpected results in detail. Notice that in table 1, in statement 24, two participants failed to answer.

There were several unexpected results from four statements. First, I did not expect the non-deacons to affirm deacons needing biblical knowledge equal to that of the pastor as nearly a third of participants, 29 percent, answered strongly agree to statement 4. Second, statement 17 confirmed my suspicions that deacons have a role at LBC beyond service to overseeing and directing the church. This is affirmed by the LBC constitution

and by-laws, which is suggestive that pastor and deacons are coequals. Concerning regular business meetings, as written in LBC constitution and bylaws, “Regular church business meetings shall be held quarterly . . . under the supervision of the Pastor or a deacon.” Likewise stated in section 3, “Notice of all specially-called business meetings of the church shall be given by announcement one week prior to the meeting, unless extreme urgency renders such notice impracticable, at the discretion of the Deacons.” For these statements, the LBC constitution and bylaws allow both pastor or deacons to lead business meetings, and for deacons to call business meetings, with urgency, under their discretion.

Table 1. Pre-project survey results

4. Deacons should know their Bible as well as the pastor.						
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Members (42)		5% (2)	10% (4)	36% (15)	21% (9)	29% (12)
Deacons (8)		25% (2)	75% (6)			
17. Deacons are called to oversee and direct the church, including the pastor.						
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Members (42)	5% (2)	10% (4)	7% (3)	24% (14)	29% (12)	17% (7)
Deacons (8)		25% (2)	13% (1)	25% (2)	25% (2)	13% (1)
19. If a person has ever been divorced, they cannot serve as a deacon.						
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Members (42)	14% (6)	21% (9)	14% (6)	14% (6)	17% (7)	19% (8)
Deacons (8)		25% (2)	25% (2)			50% (4)
24. Deacons ensure that the pastor is under control.						
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Members (41)	5% (2)	20% (8)	10% (4)	22% (9)	22% (9)	22% (9)
Deacons (7)		29% (2)	14% (1)	29% (2)		29% (2)

Third, statement 19, on if divorced persons could serve, was the most surprising, as the responses are divided across responses for non-deacons. Last, the responses to statement 24 were not as unanimous nor as negative as desired. Generally, non-deacons answered positively to deacons keeping control of the pastor.

Two observations were made from this pre-project survey. First, LBC considers the role of deacons to be important. Only 2 non-deacon participants of 42 responded negatively to statement 6: “Deacons are an essential part of Lebanon Baptist Church.” Members affirmed placing great value on the Bible’s teaching on deacons when voting, with only two negative responses to this in statement 16. However, second, LBC does not have a clear understanding of diaconal service. Of non-deacon participants, 33 percent at least somewhat agree, or more strongly, that deacons must be at least forty years old to serve. Likewise, 26 percent of non-deacons agree that the longest standing members should be deacons. While deacons are called to serve, 33 non-deacon participants, or 79 percent, at least somewhat agreed or more strongly that deacons are to oversee and direct the church, including the pastor.

After analysis of the pre-project survey data, the results were kept in Excel and used in conjunction with data later from the post-project survey. Since the pre-project survey of the church was completed and the results were compiled, this first goal was deemed complete.

### **Six-Session Teaching Series**

The second goal of this project was to develop a training curriculum to increase the knowledge of deacons regarding their biblical qualifications and ministries. To accomplish this goal, I created a six-session teaching series to train LBC deacons. Each session aimed to be a half-hour in length for the purpose of keeping the deacons engaged. This series was based upon two parts: my theological and historical research in this project, and any outstanding concerns from the pre-project survey. After I wrote the six lessons and incorporated outstanding concerns, the series was evaluated with a rubric by a ministry expert who holds a Doctor of Educational Ministry degree. The expert’s overall rubric assessment of the teaching series was “sufficient.” Sufficient means that the teaching curriculum was adequate to teach, though it could be improved by minor

adjustments.<sup>3</sup> The expert gave several suggestions on how the teaching series could be improved. I implemented all of these changes except the discussion on female deacons. This second goal was deemed successful when the ministry expert had indicated that each lesson met the “sufficient” level for each rubric criterion.

I chose to forgo teaching on female deacons for several reasons. First, I had already decided to keep the lessons brief and the number of lessons few. Since I have not trained the deacons at length before, I did not know how these training sessions would be received, nor if they would be well attended. A fair discussion on female deacons required addressing 1 Timothy 3:11 and Romans 16:1 at length, which would require at least a seventh training session, if not more. Second, LBC strongly affirms only men are called to serve as deacons. In statement 11, “Only men are called to serve as deacons” was overwhelmingly supported by non-deacons, with only five responding negatively to this statement, or about 10 percent. Third, the focus of the training was on deacons’ qualifications and ministries. Teaching on female deacons seemed to diverge from this focus.

### **Scheduling Teaching Series**

During the monthly deacons’ meeting, I invited the deacons to participate in the six-part training series, which would help complete my doctoral project. I explained that the purpose of the training was to help them increase knowledge in reference to their office: their qualifications and responsibilities. They agreed to participate, and we picked the dates of November 22 and 23, 2019, from 6 to 8 p.m. Unfortunately, I was not able to finish writing the six-session with the implementation of teaching rubric suggestions by this deadline. Instead, these sessions were rescheduled to December 3 and 5, 2019, from 6 to 8 p.m. This delay allowed the implementation of teaching rubric suggestions made by the evaluator and for the deacons to reschedule without immediate conflicts.

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<sup>3</sup> See appendix 3 for rubric and its evaluation.

On December 3, beginning at 6 p.m., I welcomed and thanked the deacons for their participation in the training series. I explained how this series reflected my research on deacons. However, due to the time restraints, and not being the purpose of these sessions, I explained the sessions would not address the issues of women as deacons or divorced men serving as deacons. As a helpful resource, each deacon received a copy of the LBC Deacon Covenant and *40 Questions about Elders and Deacons* by Benjamin Merkle.

### **Lesson 1: A Deacon's Beginning**

The first teaching session was based upon Acts 6:1-7, and titled "A Deacon and His Work." The goal of this lesson was to increase the deacons' knowledge concerning the early deacons' roles within the church. Originally, the seven men appointed in Acts 6:3-6 ensured the care of neglected widows and restored peace and unity to the early church, which resulted in the continued expansion of the gospel.

I highlighted that these seven men were not formerly called deacons but have historically been understood by many Baptists as at least a model for the diaconate. These men were called to "serve tables," yet their role was far greater than being a distributor of food, money, or other necessities. These men would have an ongoing benevolence ministry to the widows, whose livelihood depended on the generosity of the church. Also, these seven brought stability during a tumultuous time, served the leadership who sought to preach the Word and pray, and ultimately served the whole church. As the Acts 6:1-7 pericope concludes, the gospel is furthered when the right servants are appointed.

### **Lesson 2: A Deacon's Character**

The second session focused on Acts 6:3 and was titled "A Deacon and His Character: Part 1." The purpose of this session was to increase the deacons' understanding of their qualifications. This lesson began by briefly examining how other denominations

use deacons. However, as helpful as deacons' work is, their qualifications are as important their work.

While the seven men of Acts 6 were called to the practical task of serving tables, no ordinary men could fulfill this role. As Darrell Bock states in his commentary on Acts, deacons have basically two qualifications: they are spiritual men and their character was well received by others.<sup>4</sup> These seven men were to be of good reputation, which means they were to be well spoken of or be approved. This good reputation is not limited within the bounds of church life and should be considered an overall quality. As representatives of Christ and his church, deacons must be faithful representatives of the faith. Their ministry must not be weakened by their lack of character. As Proverbs 22:1 states, "A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches."

Deacons must also be full of wisdom and of the Holy Spirit. These seven men ought to be of sound judgment and filled with God's presence. Their wisdom ought to be heavenly, or from above (Jas 3:13-18) rather than a wisdom that is earthly. Additionally, these men ought to exercise great faith and dependence upon God. The Spirit of God should be evident in their lives and expressed in actions such as love, peace, patience, kindness, and goodness.

Unfortunately, some may misunderstand that deacons are mere table servers or servants. However, deacons play a vital role in the local church. No ordinary men can serve within this office—only the exceptionally faithful ones. As the Acts 6 narrative shows, deacons brought peace, joy, and stability to a church in the midst of difficulties—an exceptionally important part of a healthy church.

### **Lesson 3: A Deacon's Character**

The third session focused on the deacons' qualifications from 1 Timothy 3:8-13 and was titled "A Deacon and His Character: Part 2." This lesson focused on

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<sup>4</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 260.

increasing the deacons' understanding of their qualifications from 1 Timothy 3. These qualifications of deacons found in 1 Timothy 3 parallel those found in Acts 6.

In 1 Timothy 3, overseers and deacons share many qualities. Both are called to be dignified, not drunkards, not greedy for selfish gain, blameless, “one-woman” men, and good managers of their households. However, there are several notable differences between overseers and deacons. Deacons are not called to teach, nor are they to oversee the affairs of the church. Deacons are to be tested, and part of this examination includes their wife, yet they are not called to be hospitable like overseers.

Within lesson 3 I addressed a common confusion in both the qualifications and responsibilities of deacons. Both Acts 6 and 1 Timothy 3 give a minimum set of qualifications, however not maximums. Deacons are not called to teach yet are not prohibited from teaching either. Deacons may be hospitable to others, but this responsibility is given only to overseers. In a practical sense, deacons may be seminary trained, gifted in preaching, or even have served previously in the pastorate—but they are content in serving in the office of deacon. This understanding of minimums and not maximums for deacons helps to explain the ongoing role and abilities of Stephen and Philip in Acts.

In *40 Questions about Elders and Deacons*, Benjamin Merkle cites five qualifications for deacons in 1 Timothy 3: dignified, not double-tongued, sound in faith and life, tested, and having a godly wife.<sup>5</sup> These qualifications in 1 Timothy 3 are paralleling, not in opposition of, the qualifications of Acts 6.

#### **Lesson 4: Baptist History on Deacons**

The fourth session, beginning on December 5 at 6 p.m., focused on “A Short History on Baptist Deacons.” The goal of this session was to show that Baptists have

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<sup>5</sup> Benjamin Merkle, *40 Questions about Elders and Deacons* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 233-37.

historically called qualified deacons and explained their common work. This session began with a short section on the Baptist heritage and then discussed early Baptist confessionals, which led into the Baptist Faith and Message 2000. This lesson proved difficult as to include good confessions without being overwhelming to the audience.

Three notable Baptist theologians were included in this discussion: Benjamin Keach, Benjamin Griffith, and Samuel Jones. Keach states the importance of deacons to serve tables: “The Work of Deacon is to serve Tables, to see to provide for the Lord’s Table, the Minister’s Table, and the Poor’s Table.”<sup>6</sup> Griffith states that deacons are men called by the church to serve its outward concerns and whose office is to serve tables.<sup>7</sup> Jones calls the business of the deacons’ work to be extensive as they originally served thousands as Acts 2:41-44 indicates.<sup>8</sup>

While brief, this lesson showed that Baptists have historically examined Acts 6 and 1 Timothy 3 as common supporting verses to their understanding of deacons. Deacons were called to oversee the poor of the church, help serve with the Lord’s Table, and help serve the minister’s table.

### **Lesson 5: Modern Uses of Deacons**

In session 5, this lesson discussed “Modern Uses of Deacons in Church Life” and examined several ministries’ published materials for how they used deacons. The purpose of this lesson was to increase the deacons’ understanding as to the possibilities of their work. While the LBC Deacon Covenant is helpful to give a reasonable list of duties, the church needs deacons who are prepared to work in a variety of responsibilities.

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<sup>6</sup> Benjamin Keach, “The Glory of a True Church, and Its Discipline Display’d,” in *Polity: Biblical Arguments on How to Conduct Church Life*, ed. Mark E. Dever (Washington, DC: Center for Church Reform, 2001), 66-67.

<sup>7</sup> Benjamin Griffith, “A Short Treatise concerning a True and Orderly Gospel Church,” in Dever, *Polity*, 98-99.

<sup>8</sup> Samuel Jones, “A Treatise of Church Discipline and a Directory,” in Dever, *Polity*, 144-45.



The first resource discussed was *Finding Faithful Elders and Deacons* by Thabiti Anyabwile. He discusses how deacons provide a joyful means of service and he cites Acts 6 as the prototypical beginnings of deacons, who were the church's "shock-absorbers."<sup>9</sup> Paul Chappell's *The Ministry of a Baptist Deacon* was the second resource considered. Chappell writes about how deacons are to be faithful followers of the pastor and how deacons help empower pastors to do their work. Benjamin L. Merkle's *40 Questions about Elders and Deacons* was the third resource discussed. According to Merkle, deacons are not responsible to teach or lead the congregation nor are they spiritual leaders. However, deacons appear to have responsibility to care for the poor, manage finances of the church, and help the church community.<sup>10</sup> The fourth resource was Alexander Strauch's *The New Testament Deacon: The Church's Minister of Mercy*. His desire is for churches to return to what deacons were originally called to do in Acts 6, and that is people-service. Deacons have one of the most important ministries of the church: service, mercy, and loving the needy.<sup>11</sup> Henry Webb's *Deacons: Servant Models in the Church* was the final resource considered. His work is significant because of his long-term experience with LifeWay and editor of *The Deacon* magazine. Webb suggests the service of deacons to be the equivalent to serving Jesus and therefore not a meaningless task.<sup>12</sup> His assessment of the church offices is that pastors are the team leader and have a responsibility to direct the deacons' work.

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<sup>9</sup> Thabiti M. Anyabwile, *Finding Faithful Elders and Deacons* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 21.

<sup>10</sup> Merkle, *40 Questions*, 239-42.

<sup>11</sup> Alexander Strauch, *The New Testament Deacon: The Church's Minister of Mercy* (Littleton, CO: Lewis & Roth, 1992), 11.

<sup>12</sup> Henry Webb, *Deacons: Servant Models in the Church* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2002), 2.

## **Lesson 6: Implications of Using Deacons Biblically and Extra-Biblically**

This last lesson collected parts of the previous lessons to illustrate the importance of diaconal service. This lesson aimed to help the deacons practically consider what happens when deacons serve biblically and extra-biblically. Two sections are included in this lesson: “Blessing of Using Deacons Biblically” and “When Deacons are Used Poorly.” Each section had four subpoints and these were chosen according to the potential need of LBC deacons.

**Using deacons biblically.** The first section, “Blessing of Using Deacons Biblically,” was primarily based on the events of Acts 6:1-7. In the first subpoint, like the seven men called, deacons bring help to overwhelmed churches and pastors. Churches’ needs often outweigh the help provided. In Acts 6, the early apostles could not give up preaching the Word to serve tables. The apostles could not perform both tasks. Therefore, seven men were appointed to this task to help a church with its many needs.

Second, deacons ensure care for widows, the poor, shut-ins, and other mercy-related ministries. Even with small churches, there are numerous ongoing benevolence ministries needing attention. Deacons ensure no care ministry is lacking.

Third, faithful deacons bring joy and stability to the church. Like Acts 6, deacons bring help to overwhelmed churches. The poor are ministered to, the leadership is aided, and the overall church is helped. Deacons bring relief and adequate care to a variety of ministries. Without deacons, ministries can be accidentally neglected. However, with the right deacons serving, as serving the Lord, the church is blessed.

Fourth, deacons who serve faithfully can help advance the gospel. While Acts 6:7 does not tell *how* the new appointment of deacons helped advance the gospel, their appointment did help further the gospel. One might argue the genuine care of widows, rejoicing of the church in the seven’s appointment, and unity provided in a divisive time, helped to show the authenticity of the gospel. The church needs to be characterized by love, care, and mercy—qualities necessary for the advancement of the gospel.

**Using deacons extra-biblically.** Four areas were addressed to emphasize how using deacons extra-biblically could negatively impact the local church. First, deacons can become a source of contention and division within the church. When deacons misunderstand their role, they can overstep their responsibilities or to fail to meet the responsibilities given to them. Two types of deacons can come from this misunderstanding: deacons who rule or deacons who fail to function as servants. Either of these types of deacons are unhealthy for the local church.

Second, deacons can create power struggles and frustrations for their pastor. This point is like the previous one except the conflict takes place within the leadership. Deacons and pastors may conflict unnecessarily over leadership. Pastors with deacons like this may not be able to lead, and this frustration may cause them to leave to find a church where they can lead.

Third, deacons can serve in other extra-biblical roles for which they are not qualified. Deacons are not prohibited from teaching or preaching; however, these roles are not their primary calling. Deacons are not called to lead either. If deacons assume roles for which they are neither called nor qualified, it could result in hurting the church.

Fourth, deacons who serve in extra-biblical capacities may be unable to sustain their workload. If deacons serve as elder-deacon hybrids, for example, they will become overworked as they are serving two roles. Even the early apostles understood serving tables in addition to the ministry of the Word was too much. Deacons who are overwhelmed with an extra-biblical workload may leave responsibilities unfulfilled. Or they may withdraw from the church, seeking an easier church to serve. Any of these scenarios are harmful to the church.

### **Conclusion of the Teaching Series**

To conclude this teaching series, I contended that one of the great problems facing the twenty-first century church is a misunderstanding about the biblical qualifications and responsibilities of the church offices. Church tradition can often

replace biblical expectations. If churches are guided by the traditional use of deacons without biblical framework, unhealthy cycles can occur. If a pastor is called to lead the church but is unable due to the conflicting nature of deacons, then he may become ineffective or leave the church to find another place where he can lead. Deacons who serve as the church's leadership may be ill-equipped for the task and may contribute to the pastor's problems instead of helping to relieve them.

### **Overall Impressions from Series**

After each of the training sessions, deacons were allowed to ask questions. The discussions were encouraging as they were considering the lessons though somewhat contentious at times. A few deacons verbally disagreed with statements that they were not spiritual leaders or that the pastor would dictate their work. The deacons' disagreements centered on the idea that a pastor would have too much authority over the church and this would lead him to be unanswerable to others. I discussed that as Southern Baptist congregationalists, the authority resides in the local church, so pastors do not have all authority and are answerable to the church.

### **Post-Project Survey**

The third goal of this project was to assess any change in knowledge amongst current deacons concerning the qualifications and responsibilities of deacons. After the final training session, the attending deacons received a post-project survey in print form. This survey was the same as the pre-project survey and was to be fulfilled anonymously. The deadline for surveys to be returned was Sunday, December 8, to allow non-attending deacons to participate in the survey. Deacons unable to attend the December 5 training were emailed with audio of the lessons and a PDF of the survey. To ensure the email was received, deacons were instructed to message back upon receipt of the email.

By December 8, 2019, only 6 of the 8 deacons returned their post-project survey. In a follow-up message, I instructed deacons to return the survey by Monday,

December 9, to help encourage all 8 participating. The remaining 2 surveys were completed and returned to the church office by this date.

Upon review of the both the pre- and post-project surveys for deacons, several observations were made. The most significant changes were on statements 12, 17, and 24—some of the statements seeking the most change. These results were listed in table 2. Deacons answered statement 12 unexpectedly: by affirming more strongly the need for deacons to be married. One possible reason for this subtle shift may be the result of Merkle’s teaching in lesson 3 of the deacons’ training. In 1 Timothy 3:8-13, he argues that one of the qualifications of a deacon is a godly wife.<sup>13</sup> Statement 17 shifted negatively in the post-project survey, which is the ideal direction. Also statement 24 showed some promising indications in changes of thinking in an area previously concerning.

Table 2. Pre- and post- project survey of deacons

12. A person must be married before being considered a deacon.						
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Pre- (8)	25% (2)	25% (2)	25% (2)	13% (1)	13% (1)	
Post- (8)	13% (1)	13% (1)	13% (1)	25% (2)	13% (1)	25% (2)
17. Deacons are called to oversee and direct the church, including the pastor.						
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Pre- (8)		25% (2)	13% (1)	25% (2)	25% (2)	13% (1)
Post- (8)	13% (1)	38% (3)	13% (1)	25% (2)	13% (1)	
24. Deacons ensure that the pastor is under control.						
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Pre- (7)		29% (2)	14% (1)	29% (2)		29% (2)
Post- (8)	25% (2)	25% (2)	13% (1)	13% (1)	13% (1)	13% (1)

<sup>13</sup> Merkle, *40 Questions*, 236-37.

However, the post-project survey did yield some assumed errors. In statements 1 and 3, one deacon answered strongly disagree for both responses. This is surprising as all the deacons answered positively to these statements in pre-project survey, with 1 agree and 7 strongly agree for both statements. It is unlikely that such a dramatic shift from agree or strongly agree in the pre-project to strongly disagree in the post-project survey would take place. It is possible the deacon confused his responses of strongly disagree, or numerically “1,” with the response of strongly agree, or “6.”

Since the surveys stated that participants were anonymous, I could not follow up with this deacon to see if different responses were meant for statements 1 and 3. If I did attempt to follow up, I would have been deceitful from what the survey had clearly stated—that the surveys were fulfilled anonymously. I could accept the deacon’s responses as is or remove all of his responses. I decided to keep the deacon’s responses even with his assumed errors for two reasons. First, statements 1 and 3 were not areas of concern in the post-project analysis though they would affect the overall results. Second, given the sample size of eight deacons, I thought losing one deacon’s responses to be more substantial than keeping two assumed errors on non-essential statements. Third, and more troubling, I *could not* remove the pre- and post- surveys of the same deacon since they did not have designations.

This third goal was deemed completed after receiving all the surveys from the deacons and entering their responses into an Excel spreadsheet. This goal was completed the week after the six-training sessions, the week ending on December 14, 2019.

### **Conclusion**

The three project goals were completed according to what was stipulated in chapter 1. The pre- and post-project surveys were a helpful exercise to see the teachability of the deacons at LBC. The pre- and post-project evaluations were helpful for me to gauge my own teaching. Every pastor wants to know if he is making a helpful impact on the congregation he leads.

This six-session training for LBC deacons will be a continual resource to this church in the future. Deacons as well as the congregation need to be reminded of the great role deacons have within the local church. This project will help develop future training for deacons and future sermon series for LBC.

## CHAPTER 5

### EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

This chapter is my evaluation of the ministry project: its implementation and outcome. I look at the strengths, weakness, and potential improvements that could have been made to the ministry project. After implementing this project, shortcomings and unexpected problems did occur, and part of my evaluation considers how these issues could have been avoided. The conclusion of this chapter returns to the importance of having qualified and serving deacons and how Lebanon Baptist Church (LBC) deacons grew in this understanding.

#### **Evaluation of the Project's Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to teach the biblical qualifications and responsibilities of deacons at LBC. This project employed a six-session teaching series delivered over the course of two days to LBC deacons, which helped them grow in this understanding. In addition to the teaching series, each of the eight deacon participants received a copy of *40 Questions about Elders and Deacons* for further reference.<sup>1</sup> This project purpose was successful in its goal to help deacons expand in their understanding of qualifications and responsibilities.

The LBC has historically used the “Lebanon Baptist Church Deacon Covenant” (LBCDC, established August 28, 2012)<sup>2</sup> as the standard for stating deacons’ qualifications and responsibilities. This covenant was based upon the original founding documents of LBC in 1856, which adopted the New Hampshire Articles of Faith (1833).

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<sup>1</sup> Benjamin Merkle, *40 Questions about Elders and Deacons* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> See appendix 6 for LBC Deacon Covenant.



The LBCDC uses language similar to the New Hampshire confession, which states in article 13, “Of a Gospel Church:” “That a visible Church of Christ is a congregation of baptized believers . . . that its only proper officers are Bishops or Pastors, and Deacons, whose qualifications, claims, and duties are defined in the Epistles to Timothy and Titus.”<sup>3</sup> The LBCDC states likewise, “Seeking to lead a life that honors the Word of God (and especially the Biblical qualifications as outlined in 1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus), the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Baptist Faith and Message, and the Church Covenant of Lebanon Baptist Church.”

The LBCDC’s wording is troubling for several reasons. First, the biblical references appear to be copies of the New Hampshire Confession, which was addressed to both pastors and deacons. However, since the LBCDC only uses a partial reference to the New Hampshire Confession, the wording affirms the deacons’ qualifications, claims, and duties as defined in 1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus. Only 1 Timothy 3 outlines the qualifications of deacons. Second, items such as the Baptist Faith and Message and Church Covenant of Lebanon Baptist Church appear to have equal bearing on the deacon office as Scripture.

Regarding the deacons’ work, the LBCDC includes five duties for deacons: setting a godly example for the congregation, helping the pastor spiritually shepherd the congregation, taking personal responsibility for the spiritual nurture of the families, guarding and keeping confidentiality with important church matters, and keeping duties in according with the “Deacon of the Week” ministry. Under these five duties, deacons are expected to lead a life that honors Christ, tithe 10 percent of gross yearly income to the general fund of LBC, consistently attend all church events, worship, attend deacons meetings, help shepherd widows and homebound members, lock and unlock church facilities, moderate church business meetings, and personally find replacements for

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<sup>3</sup> “The New Hampshire Confession,” in *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, ed. William L. Lumpkin (Valley Forge, PA, Judson Press, 1969), 365-66.

“Deacon of the Week” duty weeks when unable. This list of responsibilities is helpful but may unintentionally place limits on service.

The purpose of this project was to teach the biblical qualifications and responsibilities of deacons at LBC. Deacons serve well at LBC in the work defined for them. However, if activities or services fell outside the defined LBCDC expectations, these responsibilities were prone to be ignored or given to the pastor. The deacons understand they serve the church, but this service excludes the pastor. Eventually, if deacons receive this training well, changes to the LBCDC will be made.

There were several benefits to training the deacons and helping them understand their roles better. First, training LBC deacons helped them understand their role in church service beyond what is defined in the LBCDC. Second, deacons who serve well are a blessing to the churches they aid, including LBC. As the Acts 6 narrative shows in the seven faithful men selected, their appointment brought joy, stability, and an expansion of the gospel. Third, when deacons understand their role, they can take initiative in service, because of a confidence in knowing their work expectations.

### **Evaluation of Project Goals**

The first goal of this project was to assess the current knowledge of church members and deacons concerning the qualifications and responsibilities of deacons. The second goal of this project was to develop a training curriculum to increase the knowledge of deacons regarding their biblical qualifications and ministries. The third goal of this project was to assess any change in knowledge among current deacons concerning the qualifications and responsibilities of deacons.

The last two goals were limited to deacons for two reasons. First, training the church and keeping control over a large group would prove difficult. Overseeing and managing eight deacons would be easier to handle well. Second, by focusing on the deacons, who have a great influence at LBC, I maximized my training. If the deacons received training well, then they would have an impact on other congregants.

## **Goal 1**

The first goal of this project was to assess the current knowledge of church members and deacons concerning the qualifications and responsibilities of deacons. A pre-project survey helped to assess eligible participants' understanding on deacons. Eligible participants affirmed three true or false statements before taking the survey. The first indicating that they are eighteen years old or older, and the second affirming membership of LBC. A third true or false statement was used to indicate whether the participant was currently, or formerly within this past year, a deacon of LBC. The third true or false statement was used in the pre-project analysis to separate between deacon and non-deacon participants. Both deacons and non-deacons were asked to complete the surveys at the same time.

Eligible participants' knowledge concerning deacons were assessed by a 29-statement survey. Originally, 30 statements were used for this assessment until one was deemed unclear and removed. The remaining statements were deemed sufficient to evaluate the participants' knowledge. The 29 statements used a six-point Likert scale of strongly disagree, disagree, somewhat disagree, somewhat agree, agree, and strongly agree—these responses did not allow participants to answer neutrally. Each of the 29 statements were in accordance with the following categories concerning deacons: biblical qualifications, extra-biblical qualifications, biblical responsibilities, extra-biblical responsibilities, and transparency statements. Transparency statements were used to gain members' opinions concerning LBC deacons. Each category contained 6 statements except unbiblical responsibilities which contained 5.<sup>4</sup>

The first goal of this project successfully analyzed the current church members' understanding concerning deacons. The pre-project survey confirmed some misunderstandings of both deacon and non-deacon members concerning diaconal ministry. Answers between deacons and non-deacons were surprisingly consistent.

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<sup>4</sup> See appendix 1 for survey and survey categories.

LBC answered strongly that deacons ought to have high integrity, be trustworthy, and have a deep faith in God to serve. They agreed to statements on considering the Bible’s teaching on deacons when voting for them, knowing many if not all the deacons at LBC, and deacons being an essential part of LBC. Table 3 shows some concerning responses in the pre-project survey. Thirty-three of the 42 non-deacon participants, or nearly 79 percent, at least somewhat agreed that deacons are called to oversee and direct the church in statement 17. In statement 24, 27 of the 42 non-deacon participants, or 64 percent, at least somewhat agree that deacons ensure that the pastor is under control. Twenty-two percent of non-deacon participants answered strongly agree to statement 24. These results confirmed concerns over at least a partial diaconal misunderstanding.

Table 3. Pre-project survey of LBC

17. Deacons are called to oversee and direct the church, including the pastor.						
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Members (42)	5% (2)	10% (4)	7% (3)	24% (14)	29% (12)	17% (7)
Deacons (8)		25% (2)	13% (1)	25% (2)	25% (2)	13% (1)
24. Deacons ensure that the pastor is under control.						
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Members (41)	5% (2)	20% (8)	10% (4)	22% (9)	22% (9)	22% (9)
Deacons (7)		29% (2)	14% (1)	29% (2)		29% (2)

This first goal was successful after the surveys were completed by eligible participants, and data was recorded and examined for any outstanding concerns.

## Goal 2

The second goal of this project was to develop a training curriculum to increase the knowledge of deacons regarding their biblical qualifications and ministries. This goal was achieved by developing a six-session teaching series. Each session aimed to be a half-hour in length, totaling three hours, and the lessons were assessed before training

with a teaching rubric evaluated by a ministry expert who holds a Doctor of Educational Ministry degree. The training did not proceed until all lessons were deemed “sufficient.” After the teaching series was developed and met the sufficient criteria of the teaching rubric, I taught the six-sessions to LBC deacons over the course of two days.

This rubric used six areas for evaluation: biblical grounding, sound hermeneutics, appropriate applications, theological consistency, practical applications, and sound pedagogy. Each area could be evaluated from unacceptable, partially sufficient, sufficient, and excellent. The expert’s score of the six areas in the teaching rubric was “sufficient,” which meant the sessions could be improved but teachable in their current state. After including the expert’s recommendations for improving the teaching sessions, except including a teaching on female deacons, I implemented the six training sessions.<sup>5</sup> This second goal of the project was deemed completed after I developed these six training sessions according to the teaching rubric.

The preparation period for these six-session teaching series took three weeks to construct, in part, to include the recommendations by the evaluator. The sessions were largely reflective of the previous work in chapters 1-3 and the full transcripts can be found in appendix 4. The sessions were originally scheduled for November 22 and 23, 2019, but to implement the expert’s changes, the lessons were rescheduled to December 3 and 5, 2019. Most of the deacons were able to attend both days. However, 3 were absent December 3 and 3 were absent on December 5. Only 1 of the absentees was absent for both training days. To ensure the missing deacons were included in the training, audio recordings were made of all the sessions and emailed to those unable to attend. Confirmations were required of the absentees to ensure they received the audio.

These six teaching sessions were well-attended given some of the deacons’ work schedules. At the end of every thirty-minute session, a question-and-answer time

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<sup>5</sup> See appendix 4 for lesson plans rubric and notes.

allowed the deacons to give feedback or ask questions. The December 3 training day went accordingly, and the deacons seemed receptive. The December 5 training proved more difficult. Session 4 on Baptist history and the historical use of deacons was difficult for some of the deacons, as voiced in their questions afterwards. Some of the deacons appeared disengaged through this lesson. The modern uses of deacons, in session 5, sparked a small controversy amongst the deacons as the practices of other ministries appeared foreign. There was some resistance to the idea of pastors dictating the deacons' work as suggested by Henry Webb.<sup>6</sup>

### **Goal 3**

The third goal of this project was to assess any change in knowledge among current deacons concerning the qualifications and responsibilities of deacons. This evaluation was accomplished by the deacons taking a post-project survey after the six-session training. This survey was the same as the pre-project survey. Retaking the same survey allowed easier assessment of before and after the training, rather than using different surveys. I distributed post-project surveys after the last training session on December 5. Like the pre-project survey, deacons completed the post-project surveys anonymously. However, unlike the pre-project survey, I collected the post-project surveys and compiled the data.

Deacons fulfilled and returned the surveys by Sunday, December 8, 2019, to allow absentees time to listen to audio and fulfill the survey. Two deacons did not return the surveys by December 8, and I extended the deadline until the next day. All 8 deacons fulfilled and returned the surveys by the extended date.

Table 4 shows the results of the pre- and post-project surveys for deacons according to a two-sample t-test: two-sample assuming equal variances. This t-test was used as opposed to a t-test for paired two sample means because deacons were not given

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<sup>6</sup> Henry Webb, *Deacons: Servant Models in the Church* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2002).

any designations such as numbers to compare matching pre- and post-survey results. The t-test for two-sample assuming equal variances allows for unmatched data.

Table 4. T-test: Two-sample assuming equal variances

	<i>pre-training total</i>	<i>post-training total</i>
Mean	143.25	143.75
Variance	65.35714286	147.3571429
Observations	8	8
Pooled Variance	106.3571429	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	14	
t Stat	-0.096965372	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.462064178	
t Critical one-tail	1.761310136	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.924128357	
t Critical two-tail	2.144786688	

As table 4 displays, the post-training mean increased from the pre-training mean, though not significantly. This is a positive result though the deacon training does not appear to have had a measurable impact. However, the pre- and post-variance changed considerably. Also, in the pre-training results, the highest and lowest scores were 156 and 131 respectively, but the post-training results were 168 for highest response and 129 for the lowest. Though a hypothesis, the increase in variance could be the result of the training having some impact on a few and little impact on others. Overall, as the t-test pre- and post-training shows, the deacon training had no measurable impact.

These were unfortunate results from the training, though a few contributing factors may be considered in the post-training results. First, the deacons had a decent biblical understanding of their qualifications and ministries as reflected in the pre-project survey. Table 5 shows a pre-existing competency of LBC deacons on diaconal ministry.

Table 5. Pre- and post-training results

9. I consider a deacon's work ethic more important than their character.						
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Pre-training (8)	50% (4)	38% (3)		13% (1)		
Post-training (8)	38% (3)	38% (3)	25% (2)			
13. Deacons are called to visit the church's sick and shut-ins.						
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Pre-training (8)				13% (1)	25% (2)	63% (5)
Post-training (8)				13% (1)	13% (1)	75% (6)
21. Deacons must be honorable and thought well of by others.						
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Pre-training (8)				13% (1)		88% (7)
Post-training (8)					13% (1)	88% (7)

Overall, LBC deacons understand the importance of character and their calling of service. The only place where there appears to be a deficiency is the deacons' relationship to the pastor. Second, a few responses may have been incorrectly answered and shifted the results minimally. One of the deacons responded to statements 1 and 3 in the post-project survey as strongly disagree. These responses were surprising as all the deacons answered the same questions in the pre-project as either agree or strongly agree with most being strongly agree. It is unlikely that the statement "A deacon must have high integrity and be trustworthy," and another statement concerning the deacons' help in with serving the Lord's Supper, would change so dramatically. This candidate likely misunderstood the numeric scale temporarily for these two questions as the rest of their responses appear correct. However, this poses two other problems: did the same deacon continue the problem throughout though less obviously? Likewise, did other deacons make incorrect responses similarly? Unfortunately, inaccurate responses may have skewed the survey results and a better response system should have been used.

### Strengths of the Project

Several strengths came from implementing this project. Only with these strengths did this project produce results. One of the first strengths was the overall



participation of church members in the pre-project survey. Overall, 52 participants answered the pre-project survey, though 2 could not be used in the initial evaluation because of unusable responses. However, with 50 eligible participants in the church, this was a good representation of members' beliefs.

The second strength of this project was the help of current and previously serving deacons throughout the research process. LBC has 5 deacons serving, as 3 rotated off in September 2019. With 5 deacons, I did not know how strong the research would be, so I asked 3 previously serving deacons to participate. All 8 of these men fulfilled the pre- and post-surveys and attended or listened to the audio of the six-session training. Fulfilling the pre-training surveys did not require a great investment of time, yet I was unsure of the deacons' reception of three hours of training. These 8 deacons agreed to participate in the training sessions and to give the feedback.

The last strength of this project was that the training sessions allowed open conversation between pastor and deacons about expectations for church service. I am still getting acquainted in my pastoral role at LBC, as I began here in October 2018. This training allowed me an opportunity to lead and develop relationships with LBC deacons.

### **Weaknesses of the Project**

Several weaknesses in this project became apparent as its implementation took place. Some of these weaknesses could have been prevented given more forethought to the project process. Other weaknesses were a product of using participants and were partially unavoidable.

First, this project was originally designed for another church context that had a greater need to understand the diaconal ministry. I adapted this project to a new ministry setting, which was unavoidable, but affected the selection of the project topic. Yet diaconal training was still necessary and valuable for LBC deacons.

Second, some of the participants struggled to fulfill the survey correctly. In the pre-project survey, two participants answered true or false instead of using the numeric

scale, making their answers unusable. One deacon might have reversed answers on at least two questions in the post-training survey. The confusion with the numeric scale could have been prevented if the response choices were more obvious.

Third, some of the survey statements were unclear. Statement 23 states, “Deacons should help the pastor in anything he requires.” *Anything* should have been clarified more specifically as ministry related needs. Otherwise, this statement is left to open interpretation and could mean needs outside of ministry.

Fourth, in retrospect of the training sessions, I should have focused more on perceived problems with deacons’ understanding than overall training. I originally sought to have a baseline training to ensure deacons were on equal understanding. However, LBC deacons struggle to understand their role to the pastor, which I addressed in training, but could have used more emphasis during the training.

Lastly, during the six-session training series, I did not require a minimum attendance or confirmation that absentees listened to the audio. One deacon was unable to attend both training days. Though absentees received the audio, I am not confident that they listened to it. Some deacons may have retaken the survey without listening to the audio. In retrospect, I should have required a minimum attendance or confirmation that missed sessions were listened to carefully.

### **What I Would Do Differently**

Several unforeseen problems occurred while implementing this project. In review, many problems could have been avoided. The first avoidable problem was incorrect survey responses. Instead of each participant indicating a numeric response, the range of strongly disagree to strongly agree should have been provided for each statement, allowing participants to circle their responses. With this method, participants could not use true or false, nor reverse numbers, but circle their desired response.

Second, some of the survey statements were unclear. Statements in this survey should have been evaluated by volunteer church members beforehand, or by some other

means, to avoid any uncertainties. This initial evaluation of the survey could have been done a month beforehand to allow for initial feedback and necessary corrections.

Third, I should have used designation numbers for the deacons in the pre- and post-training surveys. One deacon answered, presumably, at least two questions incorrectly. I could not follow-up with them to confirm this. By assigning numbers for deacons to affix to their surveys, I could have followed up with the deacon in question or removed his pre- and post-training data. Furthermore, with designation numbers, I could compare individual pre- and post-training results which would have given greater insight to the reception of training.

Fourth, during the training sessions, I should have addressed the pastor's relationship to deacons more deeply, female deacons, and if divorced men can serve as deacons. While writing the six sessions, I sought to train with a broad overview of the office of deacon. I avoided issues I deemed more controversial than helpful during this general training. However, during my discussion with deacons, they expressed interest in female deacons and if divorced men can serve. This surprised me. I believed the primary purpose of the training was to increase the knowledge of deacons regarding their qualifications and ministries. Yet female deacons and if divorced persons can serve as *are* two considerations for this office. In future training, I will implement these additions.

Fifth, and lastly, I should have required a minimum attendance to the training sessions to participate in the post-training survey. One deacon did not attend any of the training sessions and claimed to have listened to session audio. It could have been a temptation for this deacon simply to fulfill the survey, disregarding the audio, simply to finish the process.

### **Theological Reflections**

This project challenged me to examine the Scriptures to see what was written about deacons. This was not easy as the primary texts for consideration were Acts 6:1-7, 1 Timothy 3:8-13, and Romans 16:1-2, and there are various interpretations of these

passages. Generally, the commentaries and books agreed to the importance of the qualifications and service of deacons, yet disagreed on whether women could serve.

Acts 6 is one of the primary texts studied for this project and proved to be challenging to understand. The great difficulty of the text lies within if these seven men were deacons, or early models of deacons, and the ongoing ministry of Stephen and Philip. At the very least, these seven men give guidance for how the diaconal office should function. With Stephen and Philip, these men do not fit exactly into the office of deacon but better as the office of elder. Strauch's book was helpful for me to understand the expansive role of deacon, and that preaching or evangelism does not prohibit one from being a deacon.<sup>7</sup>

The passage in 1 Timothy 3:8-13 and its accompanying commentaries were the most influential in my understanding of deacons. While this passage on deacons appears straight-forward, many questions arise from the text. Is this an exhaustive list for qualifications of deacons? Can a divorced man serve? Can a woman serve? 1 Timothy 3:11 proves most difficult to translate. I. Howard Marshall's and George Knight's commentaries shaped my understanding the most on this passage. Marshall gave four possible interpretations of 1 Timothy 3:11: women in the church in general, a group of female deaconesses, wives of deacons, and female deacons—though he considers the last two to be the only serious considerations.<sup>8</sup>

Marshall provides one of the major arguments for my understanding that 1 Timothy 3:11 is directed toward deacons' wives, though he believes this passage speaks of female deacons. He writes,

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<sup>7</sup> Alexander Strauch, *The New Testament Deacon: The Church's Minister of Mercy* (Littleton, CO: Lewis & Roth, 1992).

<sup>8</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, International Critical Commentary (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2004), 492-93.

The strongest argument in favour of taking the women as wives is the peculiar position of the discussion of women. However, it is probable that the writer made his main points about male deacons in vv. 8-10, then discussed female deacons, and then returned to a point when had been temporarily forgotten (v. 12) before reaching his general conclusion on the topic (v.13).<sup>9</sup>

This observation is important. If Paul meant female deacons, then why does he write to them in such an unusual place? Why did he not speak to male and female deacons from the onset of the passage? If Paul did write to both men and women deacons from the onset, no scholars have advocated for this position, which is not an argument but an observation. Marshall writes that Paul made his main points about male deacons, then addressed female deacons, and returned to a point for male deacons at 1 Timothy 3:12, then finished with a general conclusion. However, as Knight notes, if wives are in view, then 1 Timothy 3:11 would be another qualification necessary for deacons.<sup>10</sup>

Romans 16:1-2 is a difficult passage of study since *διακονον* is used to describe Phoebe, who is at the very least a servant of the church at Cenchreae or a deacon. Since *διακονον* can mean either servant or an ecclesiastical office, context typically dictates translation. However, in the context of Romans 16:1, Phoebe could be either. Commentaries strongly differ on how *διακονον* should be translated here. Two factors influenced my understanding of this passage. First, *διάκονος* has a common everyday usage as servant and a specialized ecclesiastical usage as deacon. Unless there is a clear and justifiable reason to prefer translating *διάκονος* as deacon, servant should be used. Since there is little basis in Romans 16:1 requiring the translation of *διάκονος* as deacon, it should be translated as servant. Second, Phoebe as a servant fits the context of Romans 16:2 that describes her as a patron of many or assistance to many.<sup>11</sup>

Overall, the theological study on the qualifications of deacons from Acts 6:1-7,

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<sup>9</sup> Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 494.

<sup>10</sup> George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 172.

<sup>11</sup> William Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 718.

1 Timothy 3:8-13, and Romans 16:1-2 was difficult and rewarding. The commentaries and books I used in this study helped me have a greater appreciation for the work of biblical scholars and for me to think critically about their work.

### **Personal Reflections**

This project proved to be rewarding and challenging. One of the great challenges I faced was the competition of time. It has been difficult to balance church, family, personal, and devotional life. The demands of my current preaching and teaching schedule have been high as I preach three times each week that requires a great deal of reading and writing.

The pursuit of my doctorate was not what I expected. I anticipated to understand the office of deacon better and I have. I enjoyed returning to my alma mater, the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and continuing to learn under many professors I have come to respect. I did not foresee the value of reading and writing extensively nor how my in-depth research would try my outlook.

I was challenged during my seminars with numerous books to be read, book reviews to be written, and often a limited amount of time to perform both. Efficiency was a difficult task for me—it still is—as I am a slow reader. My doctoral work stretched my abilities and caused me to hone my skills on research and writing.

For these reasons, I have become a more faithful pastor in my church. The greatest compliment that I receive is that my preaching and teaching is clear; this is my aspiration. Clarity is still a struggle of mine yet has been improved over my doctoral work. My leadership has also changed significantly as I am more confident to understand issues more thoroughly after good research has been done. Additionally, I am more confident in assessing the current knowledge of the church through the use of surveys, how to analysis them, and investigating the results.

Most of all, this project helped me develop a passion for using deacons well in the local church. Deacons utilized well are a blessing to the church they serve. I have

found that deacons are more than servants of the church but coworkers in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Given that ministry can often be lonely and isolating for pastors, having faithful deacons who work alongside me provides great encouragement and joy. Deacons who serve well are one of the greatest blessings to the local church.

### **Conclusion**

This research project helped begin a necessary conversation at LBC: understanding the qualifications and ministries of deacons. My research will help with future sermons on deacons to train LBC, and to enact changes to the LBC Deacon Covenant. My long-term hope is that this project will bless churches beyond LBC who are seeking similar answers for their diaconal ministries.

## APPENDIX 1

### DEACON QUALIFICATIONS AND PRACTICE SURVEY

The following survey assesses the current knowledge of members at LBC of deacon qualifications and responsibilities.



DEACON QUALIFICATIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES SURVEY  
FOR LEBANON BAPTIST CHURCH MEMBERS

**Agreement to Participate**

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to measure your knowledge on the qualifications and responsibilities of deacons. This research is being conducted by Steve Stutzman for purposes of project research required for his doctoral graduation. In this research, you will respond to statements with “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree.” Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses.

*Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

By your completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

**Agreement to be Truthful**

Please be truthful in your responses. Avoid answering in how you think you ought or how others may answer. This research will only be beneficial if it reflects your personal beliefs.

\*\*I have read the above information and agree to fill out this survey:

Yes

No

**Preliminary Questions**

- Are you a member of Lebanon Baptist Church? Y N
- Are you eighteen years old or older? Y N
- Are you *currently* serving as a deacon at Lebanon Baptist Church,  
or served within this last year? Y N

**Statements about Deacon Qualifications and Responsibilities**

Using the following numeric scale from 1-6, please answer the following statements:

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6

1. A deacon must have high integrity and be trustworthy. \_\_\_\_\_
2. Deacons must be at least forty years old to serve. \_\_\_\_\_
3. Deacons should help with serving the Lord's Supper. \_\_\_\_\_
4. Deacons should know their Bible as well as the pastor. \_\_\_\_\_
5. I know many, if not all, the deacons at Lebanon Baptist Church. \_\_\_\_\_
6. Deacons are an essential part of Lebanon Baptist Church. \_\_\_\_\_
7. Deacons are called to be teachers in a Sunday School. \_\_\_\_\_
8. One of the main purposes of deacons is to serve the pastor. \_\_\_\_\_
9. I consider a deacon's work ethic more important than their character. \_\_\_\_\_
10. Before one can serve as a deacon, they must be tested and proven. \_\_\_\_\_
11. Only men are called to serve as deacons. \_\_\_\_\_
12. A person must be married before being considered as a deacon. \_\_\_\_\_
13. Deacons are called to visit the church's sick and shut-ins. \_\_\_\_\_
14. Deacons should be in the pulpit and preach from time to time. \_\_\_\_\_
15. For the most part, I could explain what deacons do. \_\_\_\_\_

16. I consider the Bible's teaching on deacons when voting for deacons. \_\_\_\_\_
17. Deacons are called to oversee and direct the church, including the pastor. \_\_\_\_\_
18. A deacon's role is to help with the everyday needs of the church. \_\_\_\_\_
19. If a person has ever been divorced, they cannot serve as a deacon. \_\_\_\_\_
20. A deacon must have a deep faith in God. \_\_\_\_\_
  
21. Deacons must be honorable and thought well of by others. \_\_\_\_\_
22. A person must be successful in business before becoming a deacon. \_\_\_\_\_
23. Deacons should help the pastor in anything he requires. \_\_\_\_\_
24. Deacons ensure that the pastor is under control. \_\_\_\_\_
25. I think our deacons do a good and faithful job. \_\_\_\_\_
  
26. I do not know the roles of deacons in our church. \_\_\_\_\_
27. One of the main purposes of deacons is to serve the church. \_\_\_\_\_
28. The longest standing members should be deacons. \_\_\_\_\_
29. A person must have a good home life to be a deacon. \_\_\_\_\_

## **Survey Category Key**

### **Biblical Qualifications of Deacons**

1. A deacon must have high integrity and be trustworthy.
10. Before one can serve as a deacon, they must be tested and proven.
11. Only men can serve as deacons.
20. A deacon ought to have a deep faith in God.
21. Deacons must be honorable and thought well of by others.
29. A person must have a good home life to be a deacon.

### **Extra-biblical Qualifications of Deacons**

2. Deacons must be over forty years old to serve.
9. I consider a deacon's work ethic more important than their character.
12. A person must be married before being considered as a deacon.
19. If a person has ever been divorced, they cannot serve as a deacon.
22. A person must be successful in business before becoming a deacon.
28. The longest standing members should be deacons.

### **Biblical Responsibilities of Deacons**

3. Deacons should help with serving the Lord's Supper.
8. One of the main purposes of deacons is to serve the pastor.
13. Deacons are called to visit the church's sick and shut-ins.
18. A deacon's role is to help with the everyday needs of the church.
23. Deacons should help the pastor in anything he requires.
27. One of the main purposes of deacons is to serve the church.

### **Extra-biblical Responsibilities of Deacons**

4. Deacons should know their Bible as well as the pastor.
7. Deacons are required to be teachers in a Sunday School.
14. Deacons should be in the pulpit and preach from time to time.

- 17. Deacons are called to oversee and lead the church, including the pastor.
- 24. Deacons ensure that the pastor is under control.

**Transparency Statements on Deacons**

- 5. I know many, if not all, the deacons at Lebanon Baptist Church.
- 6. Deacons are an essential part of Lebanon Baptist Church.
- 15. For the most part, I could explain what deacons do.
- 16. I consider the Bible's teaching on deacons when voting for deacons.
- 25. I think our deacons do a good and faithful job.
- 26. I do not know the role of deacons in our church.

## APPENDIX 2

### PRE- AND POST-PROJECT SURVEY RESULT AVERAGES

Table A1. Pre-project survey averages for non-deacons

		Pre
1	A deacon must have high integrity and be trustworthy.	5.9
2	Deacons must be at least forty years old to serve.	3.1
3	Deacons should help with serving the Lord's Supper.	5.3
4	Deacons should know their Bible as well as the pastor.	4.6
5	I know man, if not all, the deacons at Lebanon Baptist Church.	5.4
6	Deacons are an essential part of Lebanon Baptist Church	5.4
7	Deacons are called to be teachers in a Sunday School.	3.6
8	One of the main purposes of deacons is to serve the pastor.	4.3
9	I consider a deacon's work ethic more important than their character.	2.4
10	Before one can serve as a deacon, they must be tested and proven.	4.6
11	Only men are called to serve as deacons.	5.1
12	A person must be married before being considered as a deacon.	3.3
13	Deacons are called to visit the church's sick and shut-ins.	5.2
14	Deacons should be in the pulpit and preach from time to time.	2.9
15	For the most part, I could explain what deacons do.	4.5
16	I consider the Bible's teaching on deacons when voting for deacons	5.3
17	Deacons are called to oversee and direct the church, including the pastor.	4.2
18	A deacon's role is to help with the everyday needs of the church.	5.0
19	If a person has ever been divorced, they cannot serve as a deacon.	3.5
20	A deacon must have a deep faith in God.	5.8
21	Deacons must be honorable and thought well of by others.	5.6
22	A person must be successful in business before becoming a deacon.	2.2
23	Deacons should help the pastor in anything he requires.	4.5
24	Deacons ensure that the pastor is under control.	4.0
25	I think our deacons do a good and faithful job.	5.1
26	I do not know the roles of deacons in our church.	2.5
27	One of the main purposes of deacons is to serve the church.	5.4
28	The longest standing members should be deacons.	2.6
29	A person must have a good home life to be a deacon.	4.9

Table A2. Pre- and post-project survey averages for LBC deacons

		Pre	Post
1	A deacon must have high integrity and be trustworthy.	5.9	5.3
2	Deacons must be at least forty years old to serve.	2.6	3.6
3	Deacons should help with serving the Lord's Supper.	5.9	5.4
4	Deacons should know their Bible as well as the pastor.	3.8	3.5
5	I know man, if not all, the deacons at Lebanon Baptist Church.	5.9	6.0
6	Deacons are an essential part of Lebanon Baptist Church	6.0	6.0
7	Deacons are called to be teachers in a Sunday School.	3.1	2.5
8	One of the main purposes of deacons is to serve the pastor.	4.0	3.8
9	I consider a deacon's work ethic more important than their character.	1.8	1.9
10	Before one can serve as a deacon, they must be tested and proven.	5.0	5.6
11	Only men are called to serve as deacons.	5.9	6.0
12	A person must be married before being considered as a deacon.	2.6	3.9
13	Deacons are called to visit the church's sick and shut-ins.	5.5	5.6
14	Deacons should be in the pulpit and preach from time to time.	2.4	2.3
15	For the most part, I could explain what deacons do.	5.4	5.5
16	I consider the Bible's teaching on deacons when voting for deacons	5.1	5.8
17	Deacons are called to oversee and direct the church, including the pastor.	3.9	2.9
18	A deacon's role is to help with the everyday needs of the church.	5.3	5.1
19	If a person has ever been divorced, they cannot serve as a deacon.	4.3	4.4
20	A deacon must have a deep faith in God.	6.0	6.0
21	Deacons must be honorable and thought well of by others.	5.8	5.9
22	A person must be successful in business before becoming a deacon.	1.9	1.6
23	Deacons should help the pastor in anything he requires.	4.9	4.6
24	Deacons ensure that the pastor is under control.	3.9	3.0
25	I think our deacons do a good and faithful job.	5.4	5.3
26	I do not know the roles of deacons in our church.	1.4	2.0
27	One of the main purposes of deacons is to serve the church.	5.9	5.4
28	The longest standing members should be deacons.	2.0	2.0
29	A person must have a good home life to be a deacon.	5.5	5.1

## APPENDIX 3

### DEACONS IN NON-BAPTIST CHURCHES

#### **Deacon Expectations within the Catholic Church and Other Protestant Denominations**

In this section the Catholic Church, Presbyterian Church, and United Methodist Church are examined to show that deacons perform practical ministries in other denominations.

#### **Deacons in the Catholic Church**

According to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, deacons are ordained ministers of the Catholic Church.<sup>1</sup> Within the Catholic Church are three ordained offices: bishops, presbyters, and deacons. The deacons' position is unique in that it serves *in persona Christi Servi*—literally in the Servant: Christ.<sup>2</sup>

Catholic deacons serve in a permanent capacity, since the Second Vatican Council, and are essential for the church to exist. Before the Second Vatican, those seeking the priesthood would join the diaconate and eventually graduate into another office: either the presbyterate or priesthood. Students for the priesthood still enter the diaconate before becoming a priest but now there are permanent deacons. Currently, more than 13,000 Catholic deacons permanently serve in the United States.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Frequently Asked Questions about Deacons," accessed June 18, 2018, <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/vocations/diaconate/faqs.cfm>.

<sup>2</sup> James Keating, *The Heart of the Diaconate: Communion with the Servant Mysteries of Christ* (New York: Paulist Press, 2015), x.

<sup>3</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Frequently Asked Questions about Deacons."



To become a deacon, one must have good people skills and virtues such as communication, prudence, humility, and professional demeanor.<sup>4</sup> Then, one must be sensitive to “hear” God’s voice calling them to this holy task, which is not to be treated lightly. A prospective deacon must be willing to die to self and live for Christ, enduring the same sufferings of his Savior. To become a deacon is to become an ordained minister, and all ordained ministers in the church are called to functions of the Word. A deacon, then, serves in various ministerial capacities. As the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops writes, “As ministers of the Word, deacons proclaim the Gospel, preach, and teach in the name of the Church. As ministers of Sacrament, deacons baptize, lead the faithful in prayer, witness marriages, and conduct wake and funeral services.”<sup>5</sup> Deacons care for the needy, their vocation is supernatural, and are constant recipients of Christ’s mysteries to serve. These mysteries are, as Keating writes, “truly Christ’s own heart.”<sup>6</sup>

To summarize, the emphasis of the Catholic deacon is the supernatural, being the *literal* hands of Christ, and liturgical parts of their vocation rather than simply service. Deacons bring dedicated and constant service to the church. Keating writes, “What the deacon brings to the altar is intimacy with the servant mysteries of Christ. He is a man who is defined by the service of Christ as a result of his ‘knowing’ that Christ’s service has become sacrifice.”<sup>7</sup> Deacons are an essential part of the Catholic church.

### **Deacons in the Presbyterian Church**

James McLeod Willson was a pastor of the Reformed Presbyterian Congregation in Philadelphia and published an extensive book on deacons in 1841. Willson

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<sup>4</sup> Keating, *Heart of the Diaconate*, 6.

<sup>5</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, “Frequently Asked Questions about Deacons.”

<sup>6</sup> Keating, *Heart of the Diaconate*, 61.

<sup>7</sup> Keating, *Heart of the Diaconate*, 66.

addresses deacons as those who serve in giving and by showing mercy to others.<sup>8</sup> Willson cites Acts 6 as a picture of deacons caring for the special needs of the poor. However, he writes that deacons must be more than distributors of wealth and feeders of the poor: “He must give to the necessitous advice, and impart to them comfort . . . as a kind friend . . . sustaining to the desolate and friendless orphan, a relation almost as intimate as the parental.”<sup>9</sup> A deacons’ care must go beyond the poor, to the pastors of the church, who must devote themselves extensively to prayer and preparation of God’s Word. Pastors are often overwhelmed with church administration, visiting the sick, in-home visitations, and other general needs of the church. “To serve tables” for deacons means to handle the common tables and any other necessities of the church.<sup>10</sup>

Willson argues strongly against a board of trustees, calling their use both unscriptural and anti-scriptural.<sup>11</sup> Deacons are not to be independent officers or groups, but their work determined by the church and its pastors. To the spiritual officers of the church, deacons are to be men of good estimation and helps or assistants. In concluding his book, Willson states that deacons should be intelligent, godly, honest, industrious, liberal, zealous, and public-spirited.<sup>12</sup>

### **Deacons within the United Methodist Church**

In the 1996 General Conference, the United Methodist Church (UMC) met and redefined their picture of deacon. Originally, becoming a deacon was the first step toward

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<sup>8</sup> James McLeod Willson, *The Deacon: An Inquiry into the Nature, Duties and Exercise of the Office of the Deacon, of the Christian Church* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2010), 16.

<sup>9</sup> Willson, *The Deacon*, 23.

<sup>10</sup> Willson, *The Deacon*, 26.

<sup>11</sup> Willson, *The Deacon*, 44, 46.

<sup>12</sup> Willson, *The Deacon*, 71.

the pastorate. However, after the 1996 conference, being a deacon was transformed into a calling for the mobilization of the church and for the good of the world. Deacons and deaconesses are understood in the UMC to be called by God, authorized by the church, ordained by a local bishop, to a lifetime ministry. As stated in *Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*, deacons are called to “Word, Service, Compassion, and Justice, to both the community and the congregation in a ministry that connects the two.”<sup>13</sup>

Primarily, UMC deacons serve the church and the needy, the neglected, and the marginalized world. In the UMC, deacons give leadership to teaching, proclaiming the Word, helping in worship, helping elders in administering the sacrament of baptism and Holy Communion, conducting funerals, and burying the dead.<sup>14</sup> Deacons are also called to be on the frontlines of outside the church relief, offering comfort and the love of Jesus to hurting people. Crane and Seymour write, “Deacons are responsible for seeing that the community is faithful in sharing the gifts of love to all.”<sup>15</sup> By the deacons’ compassion and involvement in social work, broken people are introduced to the person of Jesus.

Secondarily, UMC deacons are called to bridge the gap between the church and the hurting world—therefore they must be out in the community. Deacons will be on the forefront helping with soup kitchens, providing disaster relief, donating blood, and serving in other similar mercy-ministries. A UMC deacon is responsible to share the love and justice of Christ in nursing homes, social work, the community, and Christian education to help engage others with the gospel.<sup>16</sup> A deacons’ ministry is to serve extensively

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<sup>13</sup> General Conference of the United Methodist Church, *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), 254.

<sup>14</sup> General Conference, *Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*, 253.

<sup>15</sup> Margaret A. Crane and Jack L. Seymour, *A Deacon’s Heart: The New United Methodist Diaconate* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 10.

<sup>16</sup> Crane and Seymour, *A Deacon’s Heart*, 17.

externally from the church rather than mostly inwardly. The UMC's view on deacons is unique from other denominations because it heavily emphasizes the world outside.

UMC emphasizes the work of mercy as a form of evangelism. Crane and Seymour write about how the gospel changes other people's lives: "Christian faith is really about the transforming grace and love of a God who works to heal the brokenness that threatens creation."<sup>17</sup> This same kind of teaching God's love is reflected in *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*.

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<sup>17</sup> General Conference, *Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*, 20.



## APPENDIX 4

### LESSON PLANS RUBRIC

The following rubric was used to evaluate lessons created by Steven Stutzman for teaching sessions offered as part of his doctor of Ministry project work. The rubric lists criteria to be evaluated (rows) as well as gradations of performance (columns). The evaluator will use one rubric to score the entire curriculum (not multiple rubrics for each individual lesson). Please read each lesson outline with these criteria in mind and place a mark in the column that best describes each criteria for the curriculum as a whole once every session has been reviewed. Use the *notes* section to provide specific feedback on particular lessons.

Scoring guide:

- Unacceptable – The majority of lessons within the curriculum have significant weaknesses for a given criteria and should not be taught in their present form.
- Partially Sufficient – The majority of lessons within the curriculum are sufficient but more than one lesson has deficiencies that should be addressed before teaching commences.
- Sufficient – The majority of lessons within the curriculum are sufficient and might be improved from minor adjustments but could be taught in their present form.
- Excellent – The majority of lessons show uncommon skill and expertise and cannot be improved in any meaningful way.

	<b>Unacceptable (1)</b>	<b>Partially Sufficient (2)</b>	<b>Sufficient (3)</b>	<b>Excellent (4)</b>
<b>Biblical Grounding</b> The curriculum appeals explicitly to Scripture to establish the main points of each lesson.			X	
<b>Sound Hermeneutics</b> All biblical passages utilized are handled using appropriate grammatical/historical/theological exegesis.			X	
<b>Appropriate Applications</b> Applications in the curriculum arise naturally from the biblical texts utilized.			X	

<b>Theological Consistency</b> The curriculum speaks with a consistent theological “voice” across all lessons.			X	
<b>Practical Applications</b> Each lesson contains specific, practical applications that learners could implement.			X	
<b>Sound Pedagogy</b> The curriculum specifics one or more pedagogical approach per lesson. The chosen approach is sound and likely to enhance the learners’ experience.			X	
<b>Overall Score</b>				

**Notes:** Reviewers should use this section to provide specific feedback to curriculum writers regarding any score less than “sufficient.” They may also choose to include feedback on scores of “sufficient” or “excellent” if so desired.

Comments from Ministry Expert:

Lesson 1: Would it be helpful to include a bit of info on the situation of widows in the NT period? That might help frame the need a bit since they were so dependent on others for livelihood.

You write, "Many Baptists, through confessions and other writings, have generally agreed that the Acts 6 narrative to be an early picture of the deacon office." This would be a great opportunity to cite a few sources to confirm the point. Also, read back through that sentence for subject/verb agreement.

Overall, this is a great introduction. In my opinion, it feels short if you're aiming at a half hour.

Lesson 2: Could the introduction be strengthened by citing a couple of denominational materials on deacons? The Baptist Faith & Message 2000, the Westminster Directory of Worship, the United Methodist Church Handbook, or the like?

In your second paragraph and second sentence you might want to clarify that the disciples didn't allow for the servants to be chosen without qualification. It currently reads as a statement that it was not the disciples who chose the servants. I do not think that was the point you were making, but it may have been.

Lesson 3: Your sources cited are very helpful in this lesson. Great job. Would it be beneficial to interact with those who understand 3:11 to speak of "the women" as in women serving in a diaconate role? It may or may not be worth interacting with based on your context. I'm biased in that I affirm Rom 16:1-2 and 1 Tim 3:11 to allow for female deacons who serve in a properly deacon (not quasi-elder) role. ;-)

Lesson 4: Well done.

Lesson 5: Would it be helpful to detail how deacons have served in your church in the past/present/future? Well done.

Lesson 6: There are a few spelling/grammar errors to look for here. This is a helpful and

pastoral summary. Great job.

I would proofread carefully at least twice. A few spelling and grammar issues throughout.



## APPENDIX 5

### DEACON TRAINING SERIES LESSONS

#### Teaching Lesson 1

##### Acts 6:1-6, A Deacon and His Work

Read Acts 6:1-7

Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. (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.” (5) And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. (6) These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them. (7) And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

Introduction:

As we read, Acts 6 begins with a great problem within the early church. Until now, most of the early church’s problems were external but this was the first-time there was internal strife. The problem was this: some widows were receiving much needed benevolence help from the church while others were being neglected. The biblical text does not state *why* one group of widows was being preferred over the other—so we admit some uncertainty. Biblical scholars disagree about what divided these Hebrew and Hellenist widows. One helpful position comes from biblical scholar, Craig Keener, who suggests the Hebrew widows presumably spoke Aramaic and Greek and the Hellenists

spoke mainly Greek. If those who served could not speak Aramaic, this would create a natural language barrier may have hindered some widows from being served.<sup>1</sup>

Regardless of the reason for this neglect, some of these neglected widows complained about the lack of much-needed benevolence help from the church. They depended on the generosity of the church to survive. In the 1<sup>st</sup> century, widows received little support from the Greek society. Widows were typically supported by male relatives or encouraged to remarry to support themselves.<sup>2</sup> Otherwise, widows depended on the generosity of others, especially since widows were prone to abuse. Joseph Fitzmyer wrote in his commentary on Acts concerning widows, “widows were often in particular need and vulnerable to abuse and neglect, because they had lost their main source of companionship and support, their husbands.”<sup>3</sup> Without special care from the church, these widows would suffer needlessly. In light of what Scripture tells us, widows do set their hope on God and his continued supplications (1 Tim 5:5). Christians are to honor and care for those who are truly widowed.

Luke does not explicitly state what this daily distribution entailed in Acts 6. The distribution could have been food, material goods, or a mixture of things.<sup>4</sup> However, whatever this distribution was, these widows depended on the generosity of the church for their livelihood. This distribution was also necessary on a daily level. The distribution problem was further complicated as some widows were receiving it and others were not.

As the neglected widows’ complaints arose, it gained the attention of the whole church and the full number of disciples were called to address this problem. We should

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<sup>1</sup> Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 2:1253.

<sup>2</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 2:1265.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries, vol. 31 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 345.

<sup>4</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 257.

realize the complaints were not about the church community itself, or the leadership, but about the lack of even distribution.<sup>5</sup> As the leadership discussed this great problem, the disciples recognized another problem: more help was needed for these widows but who would care for them? The disciples could not give up preaching the word of God in order to serve tables, as the narrative in Acts 6:2 reflects. Yet these widows could not be ignored either. If the early Christian's religion is to be pure and their devotion to Christ right, then they must heed the words of Scripture to care for orphans and widows in affliction (Jas 1:27).

The disciples' solution was *not* to do more. As suggested by the passage, preaching the word of God was a demanding ministry and adding another burden to the disciples was unthinkable. Instead the disciples choose another answer, one that pleased the whole assembly: assign seven faithful men to serve in this ministry. These men were to be picked out from amongst them, to be of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom (Acts 6:3). These qualified, godly men would handle this benevolence ministry to widows. By this act of service, these seven men would serve: the neglected widows, these disciples who had many other burdens including preaching the Word of God, and ultimately serving the whole church. The disciples chose Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus—with Stephen and Philip both having an ongoing importance in the Acts narrative.

Though Luke does not formerly call these seven men deacons, these men were called to the service of tables. Many Baptists, through confessions and other writings, have used the Acts 6 as supporting their view on the deacon office. The Baptist confessions like *The Orthodox Creed* of 1678, the *Second London Confession* of 1689, and more recently the Baptist Faith and Message of 1925, 1963, and 2000, all these confessions cite Acts 6 as supporting the confessions understanding about deacons.

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<sup>5</sup> Keener, *Acts*, 2:1260.

Notable Baptists in history such as Nehemiah Coxe and Benjamin Keach believed in the importance of faithful men serving as deacons. From this Acts 6 narrative, many Baptists believe that deacons served more than widows but the church leadership as well as the whole church.

Yet deacons were more than servants as well. Though we will address this more fully in the following sessions, these seven men were set before the apostles, prayed over them, and the apostles laid their hands on them—much like a commissioning service we have today. This commissioning shows these seven men were to be far more than simply a distributor of goods. These seven men were to have high qualifications: of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom; these men would also represent the church as faithful men and examples of the faith.

Faithful deacons, who are qualified and serve well, are a blessing to the church and can be means of celebration like Acts 6 shows. The seven men's appointment pleased the whole gathering, was approved by the apostles, provided sustained relief for the widows who would not have to worry about their daily needs being met, and the deacons' faithful service seems to be linked to the church's growth (Acts 6:7). And notice what these deacons initially bring in this difficult time of the church: stability to the church body, a unifying group of men in whom the whole church celebrates in their commissioning, relief to widows, relief to the leaders, and faithful representatives of Christ and his church. *Those who serve as deacons have a noble, godly, great, and continual task of service.* As we see at the end of Acts 6, it appears the commissioning and appointing of these seven men allowed the word of God to continue to increase, for the number of new converts to multiply, and a great many of the priests becoming obedient to the point of faith. It seems the only change from Acts 6:1 with divisions and complaints within the church, to peace and unity in Acts 6:7 was the commissioning of these seven men: deacons.

## Teaching Lesson 2

### Acts 6:1-6, A Deacon and His Character – Part 1

Acts 6:3, “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.”

Today, deacons serve in a variety of roles across denominations. For the Catholic Church, deacons become ordained ministers who oversee the Sacrament, baptize, lead in prayer, witness marriages, and conduct wake and funeral services. In the United Methodist Church, deacons are called to lead the mobilization of the church and for the good of the world. Within reformed Presbyterian churches, deacons care for the special needs of the poor, caring for the pastors of the church, and their work is largely dictated by the church and its pastors.<sup>6</sup> Deacons can be found in Baptist life serving on finance committees, helping with evangelistic outreach, welcoming guests on Sunday morning, visiting shut-ins and helping in other areas of church service. However, the deacons’ character is as valuable as their work.

Consider what Luke wrote in Acts 6. Despite the need for helping the widows in the church, the disciples did not allow these seven men to serve without qualification. The church needed *qualified* men to serve these widows because, in part, these men would represent the church and Christ. These men needed to have Christian maturity as they would undoubtedly minister to the needs of lonely and sad widows.

In Acts 6:3, Luke states that these seven men were to be of good repute (or reputation), full of the Spirit and full of wisdom, whom will be appointed to service. In the KJV, these seven men were to be of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom. The early church expected mature Christians to serve in these roles as deacons.

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<sup>6</sup> Other Christian views on diaconal usage can be found in appendix 3.

In Darrell Bock's commentary on Acts, he states that deacons have basically two qualifications from Acts 6. He states, "That they be spiritual men, and that their character be well accepted by others." First, deacons must be spiritual men meaning that they were men of deep Christian faith. These were men in whom their faith was obvious and there was little wonder to where they were spiritually. Second, the deacons' character must be well-known and well-received by others. This means these men would be known for their integrity and trustworthiness. The possible appointment of a man to become a deacon would, then, be without surprise because of their preexisting outstanding character.

However, Bock does not go far enough in his evaluation. According to Acts, deacons ought to be wise, at the very least, in a spiritual sense if not also in an everyday sense. If these deacons are called to serve in the turmoil of divisions, like with these early widows, they must be wise to use spiritual discernment of love, kindness, and self-control to diffuse these difficult circumstances. But additionally, these seven deacons are to be *men* which Bock does not highlight. All of those elected to serve as deacons were men: Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus. The specific number of deacons, as early Baptist theologian Nehemiah Coxe suggests, reflects the present need of the congregation though their numbers was not intended as a rule—as there could have been more or less deacons depending on the church's needs.<sup>7</sup> Yet the *number* of those selected and that they were *all* men is significant.

Let us look more closely at the three qualifications of deacons we saw from Acts 6:3. First, deacons must have a good reputation. As the modern adage states, "reputation is everything." Or as Proverbs 22:1 states, "A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches." The English translation *repute* comes from the Greek word

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<sup>7</sup> Nehemiah Coxe, *Biblical Elders and Deacons* (1688; repr., Pensacola, FL: Chapel Library, 2015), accessed June 27, 2019, <https://chapellibrary.org:8443/pdf/books/bead.pdf>, 1-2, 7.

μαρτυρέω which means: *to be well spoken of or be approved*.<sup>8</sup> This good reputation of a potential deacon appears to be of general reputation overall rather than reputation limited to within the church. Deacons ought to be well thought of by those inside and outside of the church, therefore, their appointment should not be a surprise to anyone. Being of good reputation is essential for the deacon as they are called to more than service but as a representative of the church and of Christ.

Second, deacons are to be men filled with the Spirit. These men would have a particular manifestation of the Spirit's presence in their lives.<sup>9</sup> Or, in other words, God's presence would have a great influence in that man's life. As we are told in Galatians 5:22-23, the fruit of God's Spirit present in one's life is: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control—which deacons should demonstrate in their own lives. Additionally, being filled with the Spirit may mean these men have good fellowship with God without the hindrance of outstanding sin (Ephesians 5:18, 1 Thess. 5:19). God would be their source of love, compassion, and direction—and they would be filled with Him at all times.

Third, deacons are to be men filled with wisdom. This wisdom should not be limited to wisdom of this world but also a wisdom that comes from God. As Proverbs 3:7 states, “Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and turn away from evil.” Likewise, James states in James 3:17-18 about a wisdom that is from above, a wisdom that is from God. He states, “But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.” James' evaluation of wise men who practice this wisdom from above is this “And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.” Or in other words, as all men

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<sup>8</sup> William Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 493.

<sup>9</sup> David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 233.

and women, including deacons, practice wisdom from above that is pure, peaceable, gentle, and open to reason—living this way will cause a harvest of righteousness.

Deacons must be wise in understanding people and the world around them yet are always evaluating life through a biblical lens. Only with godly patience, understanding, love, and kindness, (or in other words godly wisdom) could these seven men bring stability to the early church.

What Acts 6 shows us is that deacons are called to a high position by serving on behalf of Christ and His church. Though their work is to “serve tables,” their character is filled with integrity, wisdom, and faithfulness to God. No ordinary men can serve this role but only the exceptionally faithful ones—who live by faith and obedience to God.



### Teaching Lesson 3

#### 1 Timothy 3:8-13, A Deacon and His Character – Part 2

##### 1 Timothy 3:8-13

Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. (9) They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. (10) And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. (11) Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. (12) Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. (13) For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

Church offices are an essential part of any healthy church. Without the complementary roles of overseers (otherwise called pastors) and deacons, important ministries may be neglected, while other ministries may be overcompensated. As Paul writes to Timothy concerning the offices of the church, he addresses the qualifications for both overseers and deacons. What is surprising is that overseers, otherwise known as elders or pastors in the New Testament, and deacons share many qualifications with each another. As New Testament scholar, William Mounce notes, there are nine characteristics of a deacon with six being parallel to that of an overseer.<sup>10</sup> Both overseers and deacons are to be dignified, not drunkards, not greedy for gain, blameless, “one-woman” men, and good managers of their households. It is impressive that most of the qualifications for both offices place a high value on personal integrity and character. However, there are several notable differences between overseers and deacons.

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<sup>10</sup> William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 46 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 195.

First, deacons are not required to teach others unlike overseers according to Titus 1:9. This lack of requirement does not forbid deacons from teaching if they are qualified, however deacons are not required to teach either. Second, as overseers, pastors and elders of the church are called to oversee and direct the affairs of the church but this role is not given to deacons. As we are told concerning elders in 1 Peter 5:2, only pastors are called to shepherd the flock of God. This title of overseer and his responsibility to oversee as God's shepherd is not shared with deacons who are called to serve. Third, part of the deacons' qualifications includes an examination of his wife and her faithfulness which is not shared with overseers. Fourth, deacons are not required to be hospitable as overseers are. By hospitable, it is suggested deacons did not serve as housing for guests. Fifth, deacons must be tested first before being allowed to serve.

This is an appropriate time to point out something very important: the qualifications and responsibilities of a deacon listed both in Acts 6 and in 1 Timothy 3 should be considered a list of minimums, but not maximum, requirements. What is meant by this is that a man could be exceptionally gifted, able to preach and to teach, even over-qualified for role of deacon, and yet still serve in that role. While preaching is not required of the deacons' service, a gifted deacon is not prohibited from preaching either. A deacon can teach if he is able but is under no obligation to teach. In a practical sense, deacons can be seminary trained, have previously served as a pastor, be an able speaker, or be gifted in other ways, far above the minimum qualifications of deacons.

Returning to 1 Timothy 3, Benjamin Merkle, in his book *40 Questions about Elders and Deacons*, understands there to be five qualifications of deacons instead of nine listed by Mounce in 1 Timothy 3:8-13. The reason that Bible scholars do not agree on how many qualifications there are is that many of them appear to overlap or give further explanation of others. For example, when Paul states deacons likewise ought to be dignified in 1 Timothy 3:8, he follows up this qualification with they ought not be

double-tongued either. The question is, is being not double-tongued what it means to be dignified or should it be treated as its own qualification? No one is certain.

However, the number of qualifications is not problematic as does not change what Paul expects. For simplicity, Merkle summarizes deacons in 1 Timothy 3 into these five qualifications: dignified, not double-tongued, sound in faith and life, tested, and having a godly wife.

This first requirement of a deacon as dignified is given in 1 Timothy 3:8 with the Greek word σεμνους. This Greek word only appears four times in the New Testament and often means *worthy of respect or honor, noble, dignified, or above reproach*.<sup>11</sup> This dignified qualification is given both to a deacon and his wife, that they be *worthy of respect*. This qualification is essential as the deacons' work take him outside the bounds of the church into the local community and he is a representative of the faith. For he, or his wife, to be untrustworthy or foolish in action, could hurt the work of benevolence, especially if handling money, or to bring disrepute on the gospel.

The second requirement of a deacon is to be not double-tongued. This English translation comes from the word διλογους which only appears in the New Testament in this passage and means to "say something twice."<sup>12</sup> Modern English synonyms of double-tongued are: deceitful, two-faced, dishonest, or dishonorable. As Merkle notes, people who are "double-tongued" may say or act one way with certain people but then say or act differently while with others.<sup>13</sup> Being double-tongued, or speaking out of both sides of their mouth, calls into question the person's integrity and trustworthiness. Deacons must exude trustworthiness and honesty to minister to widows, shut-ins, or others in need.

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<sup>11</sup> Arndt and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 747.

<sup>12</sup> Arndt and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 198.

<sup>13</sup> Benjamin Merkle, *40 Questions about Elders and Deacons* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007), 234.

Third, Paul exhorts that deacons ought to have a sound faith and life. Potential deacons must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. As Merkle helps us to understand, “The reference to ‘the mystery of the faith’ is another way for Paul to speak of the gospel (cf. 1 Tim. 3:16).”<sup>14</sup> Deacons, as well as their wives, must be ones who have a commitment to the faith, to the true gospel, that resonates beyond words of affirmation to affecting their every day lives. This soundness of faith should extend into the deacons’ life: his marriage, how he raises his kids, how he oversees the home, handles his finances, loves his wife, and more.

Fourth, Paul states that potential deacons must be tested first before being allowed to serve (1 Tim. 3:10). Paul uses the word δοκιμαζεσθωσαν which comes from the root word δοκιμαζω which means *put to the test* or *examine*. However, Paul never states *how* a potential deacon is to be tested. It appears from what Paul states in 1 Timothy 3:10, deacons must prove themselves to be blameless. It would be wise that before a deacon is allowed to serve that his reputation, theological understanding, current service, faithfulness, and personal background is checked.<sup>15</sup>

Fifth, and lastly, a deacon’s wife must be examined before he is allowed to serve. Like her husband, she is to be dignified, not slanderer, but sober-minded, and faithful in all things. By slander, she must not be prone to speaking half-truths and gossiping behind others backs—especially since her husband has an insider’s understanding of church life. She should be sober-minded or temperate which can mean one who is retrained, moderate, or self-controlled. Readers of 1 Timothy 3:11 may become concerned as the wives of deacons are not called to be a wife of one husband or managing her children well. However, if the potential deacon is performing his God-given responsibilities in the home, she does not need to be told the same thing.

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<sup>14</sup> Merkle, *40 Questions*, 235.

<sup>15</sup> Merkle, *40 Questions*, 235.

In conclusion, deacons are called in 1 Timothy 3 to be dignified, not double-tongued, sound in faith and life, tested, and having a faithful wife. This may appear different than deacons in Acts 6 called to a good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom. However, Acts 6 and 1 Timothy 3 having paralleling lists of qualifications. For both passages, a man's character and faithfulness to God is of prime examination. Given the emphasis on personal integrity and faith, one might conclude a man's qualifications as deacons are as important as their service given to the church.

## Teaching Lesson 4

### A Short History on Baptist Deacons

#### Baptists Beginnings

Baptists trace their inception to the Protestant Reformation which began with Martin Luther on October 31, 1517. In the book, *The Baptist Story*, we are told that because of the Protestant Reformation: “In the 1580s and 1590s, some of the more radical-minded Puritans, despairing of the reformation within the Church of England, began to separate from the state church and organize what historians call Separatist congregations.”<sup>16</sup> These small numbers of men and women begin to reject the idea of a national church, and its support of infant baptism.<sup>17</sup> “Instead, they advocated churches composed solely of believers who admitted on the basis of a person confession of faith and believer’s baptism.”<sup>18</sup>

One early Separatist congregation in London, led by Francis Johnson (d. 1618), elected deacons as early as 1592.<sup>19</sup> As the Separatist movement grew, John Smyth (d. 1612) led an important independent congregation, first in England and later as expatriates in Amsterdam. Historians mark Smyth’s congregation as the first English-speaking Baptists.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Anthony L. Chute, Nathan A. Finn, and Michael A. G. Haykin, *The Baptist Story: From English Sect to Global Movement* (Nashville: B & H, 2015), 14.

<sup>17</sup> Chute, Finn, and Haykin, *Baptist Story*, 12.

<sup>18</sup> Chute, Finn, and Haykin, *Baptist Story*, 12.

<sup>19</sup> William L. Lumpkin, ed., *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, rev. ed. (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1969), 80. Within a few years, political pressure caused this congregation to split with some members remaining in London while others fled to Holland.

<sup>20</sup> Chute, Finn, and Haykin, *Baptist Story*, 16.

Early Baptists, and their Separatist counterparts, wrote confessions of faith to give congregations structure and avoid apostasy.<sup>21</sup> Though these confessions varied in detail and theology, they provide one important way of understanding early Separatist and Baptist ecclesiology.

### **Early Baptist Confessions of Faith**

*A confession of faith* is a formal statement of doctrinal beliefs. Confessions are similar to creeds although they are typically more extensive.<sup>22</sup> Baptist confessions of faith have historically stated beliefs on: God, the Trinity, the depravity of mankind, the exclusivity of the gospel of Jesus, and much more. Early Baptist confessions also taught on the Church and the Offices of the Church: Elders and Deacons.

Early Baptist confessions show general agreement regarding the office of deacon. *A True Confession of the Faith* (1596), written to clarify Francis Johnson's London/Amsterdam congregations, is one of the earliest confessions addressing deacons. In *A True Confession of the Faith*, pastors, teachers, elders, and deacons are called for the helpful instruction, governance, and service of God's church.<sup>23</sup> Here in this confession, deacons are called to help aid in the service of God's church along with pastors, teachers, and elders.

*The London Confession* of 1644 was the first Baptist confession to represent multiple congregations. It stated that qualified deacons would help the church in the feeding, governing, serving, and building of the church: "Pastors, Teachers, Elders,

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<sup>21</sup> Tom Nettles, *The Baptists: Beginnings in America* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2010), 2:25.

<sup>22</sup> "Confession of Faith," Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed November 12, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/confession-of-faith-theology>.

<sup>23</sup> Henry Ainsworth, "A True Confession of Faith," in Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 88. While Johnson was imprisoned, the congregation elected Henry Ainsworth as pastor and Ainsworth likely wrote the confession.

Deacons, being qualified according to the Word, as those which Christ has appointed in his Testament, for the feeding, governing, serving, and building up of his Church.”<sup>24</sup> This language is nearly identical to the previous confession, *A True Confession of the Faith*, yet added that deacons need to be biblically qualified to serve.

*The Standard Confession* (1660) is a brief confession with insight into the office of deacon. Here, deacons are designated by the unique title “overseers of the poor,” as developed in article 19:

That the poor Saints belonging to the Church of Christ, are to be sufficiently provided for by the Churches, that they neither want food or rayment, and this by a free and voluntary contribution, (and not of necessity, or by the constraint or power of the magistrate) *2 Cor. 9.7. 1 Cor. 8.11, 12*, and this through the free and voluntary help of the Deacons, (called Overseers of the poor) being faithful men, chosen by the Church, and ordained by Prayer and Laying on of Hands, to that Work, *Acts 6. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6.*<sup>25</sup>

*The Orthodox Creed* of 1678 addressed three ecclesial offices in article 31: Bishops/messengers, elders/pastors, and deacons/overseers of the poor.<sup>26</sup> The article indicates that the Holy Ghost fits and gifts people for each of these offices and that congregations ought to elect and ordain deacons whom have been prepared by the Spirit of God for the work, then men so set apart should receive the benevolence aid of the church to care for the poor.

These early confessions represent a handful of early Separatist and Baptist beliefs on deacons. Overall, these confessions show that deacons must be biblically qualified, set apart by the church, who help in feeding the poor and sick. Each of these early 17<sup>th</sup> century confessions used Acts 6:3 as supporting its view on deacons.

Subsequent Baptists confessions of faith in North America added little to these early English confessions on deacons. *The Philadelphia Confession of Faith* of 1742, in

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<sup>24</sup> “The London Confession,” in Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 166.

<sup>25</sup> “The Standard Confession,” in Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 230-31.

<sup>26</sup> “The Orthodox Creed,” in Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 319.



its article “Of the Church,” uses near-identical language to the *Second London Confession* when it notes that deacons are chosen by “like suffrage, and set apart by prayer, and the imposition of hands.”<sup>27</sup> Yet little else is added to either confession on deacons. *The New Hampshire Confession* of 1833, by which the LBC used as an early template for our church’s organization, states that elders’ and deacons’ qualification, claims, and duties are defined in both Timothy and Titus.<sup>28</sup> If you were to look at the sheet of our LBC Deacon Covenant, you will see the exact same language of the *The New Hampshire Confession*.

The *Baptist Faith and Message* of 1925, in article “The Gospel Church,” states the church’s scriptural officers are bishops, or elders, and deacons. This confession uses supporting verses from Acts 6:3, 5-6. The 1963 and 2000 *Baptist Faith and Message*, in article “The Church,” followed in likewise wording as in 1925 confession except replacing the language of bishops or elders with pastors, and supporting its view on deacons with 1 Timothy 3:1-15 and Acts 6:3-6.<sup>29</sup>

Overall, we can see from these confessions that though deacons are not discussed extensively, they were vital to discuss for church life and many confessions included the deacons’ qualification or work. Few confessions state the deacons’ work past being that of service except to add they are to minister to the poor.

Three notable Baptists will be discussed on deacons. First, Benjamin Keach who was an influential Baptist teacher who lived from 1640 to 1704. Keach was a prolific author and theologian who wrote, *The Glory of a True Church, and its Discipline Display’d*, published in 1697. One of his goals was to help churches understand the role

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<sup>27</sup> “The Philadelphia Confession of Faith,” in *Baptist Confessions, Covenants, and Catechisms*, ed. John A. Broadus, Timothy George, and Denise George (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 86-87.

<sup>28</sup> “The New Hampshire Confession,” in Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 365-66.

<sup>29</sup> Southern Baptist Convention, “Southern Baptist Convention Comparison of 1925, 1963 and 2000 Baptist Faith and Message,” accessed September 12, 2019, <http://www.sbc.net/bfm2000/bfmcomparison.asp>.

of elders and deacons. He wrote that deacons voluntarily serve tables, contribute to the maintenance of the ministry, and visit the poor and widowed. Keach writes,

The Work of Deacon is to serve Tables, to see to provide for the Lord's Table, the Minister's Table, and the Poor's Table. They should provide Bread and Wine for the Lord's Table. See that every Member contributes to the Maintenance of the Ministry, according to their Ability, and their own voluntary Subscription or Obligation. That each Member do give weekly to the Poor, as God as blessed him. Also visit the Poor, and know their Condition as much as in them lies, that none, especially the aged Widows, be neglected.<sup>30</sup>

Keach understands that deacons serve tables, yet that table service is to include: the Lord's Table, the Minister's Table, and the Poor's Table. Deacons ought to help with preparing and administering the Lord's Supper. Deacons ought to oversee the ministry to the poor and the maintenance of that ministry. Deacons should visit the poor, especially the older widows, to know their state and to help avoid them being neglected.

Benjamin Griffith, the second author we will consider, was born in Wales in 1688 and came to America in 1711. He was baptized in 1711 and was ordained as pastor of Montgomery church in Bucks County, Pennsylvania in 1725. He wrote *A Short Treatise Concerning a True and Orderly Gospel Church* for the Philadelphia Baptist Association, published in 1743. Unlike Keach, Griffith explicitly states that only men serve as deacons. He wrote, "Deacons are men called forth by the church, to serve in the outward concerns thereof whose office is to serve tables, Acts 6:2-7."<sup>31</sup> In his work, Griffith includes as responsibilities for deacons: assisting the poor members of the church, providing for the Lord's Table and minister's table, and contribute to the proper uses of the church.

Samuel Jones was born in 1735, in Glamorganshire, Wales, and was brought to America two years later. He received his education from the College at Philadelphia in

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<sup>30</sup> Benjamin Keach, "The Glory of a True Church, and Its Discipline Display'd," in *Polity: Biblical Arguments on How to Conduct Church Life*, ed. Mark E. Dever (Washington, DC: Center for Church Reform, 2001), 66-67.

<sup>31</sup> Benjamin Griffith, "A Short Treatise concerning a True and Orderly Gospel Church," in Dever, *Polity*, 98-99.

1762 and became an ordained minister in 1763. He published a work in 1805 called *Treatise of Church Discipline*, in which chapter 3 discussed deacons—their business, qualifications, and manner of service. Jones calls the business of deacons to be extensive as they originally served thousands in Acts 2:41-44 and the church had all things common. The deacons' work was to address the concerns of the church, particularly in serving tables of the poor and of the minister. Their qualifications are set by Acts 6:3 and 1 Timothy 3:8-13. Deacons are to serve in their office with impartiality or simplicity, cheerfulness, compassion, tenderness, and faithfulness, as exhorted from Romans 12:8. Like the minister, deacons are to be ordained into office and by faithful service they receive good standing and great confidence before Christ.<sup>32</sup>

Though this is a brief examination of deacons in Baptist life, there is a general agreement to the service nature of this office. Deacons are chosen in a biblical manner according to Acts 6 and 1 Timothy 3, with their purpose of serving the church. Deacons are to oversee the poor and help serve the church wherever needed. Given the lack of treatment on deacons from the 1800s until today, it seems fair to suggest these expectations are largely unchanged and uncontroversial.

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<sup>32</sup> Samuel Jones, "A Treatise of Church Discipline and a Directory," in Dever, *Polity*, 144-45.

## Teaching Lesson 5

### Modern Uses of Deacons in Church Life

For this teaching session, we will be discussing some of the modern uses of deacons in American churches today. As Nehemiah Coxe asserted, deacons have been called to serve the poor's table, the minister's table, and the Lord's table. However, the Bible never specifies exactly what serving these tables looks like. While this openness of roles may seem concerning, it is actually helpful. Deacons may serve in a wide variety of roles as long as they are serving the current needs of the church.

Here at LBC, deacons serve in various roles according to what is stipulated in our deacon covenant. In our LBC Deacon Covenant, deacons are to set a godly example for the congregation, help to spiritually shepherd the congregation, take personal responsibility for the spiritual nurture of our families, and to be a part of LBC life. Deacons' duties designated at LBC are to lock and unlock church facilities, finding our own substitute when we are unable to do this task, to moderate business meetings, participate in regular deacons' meetings, shepherd the widows and homebound members and take care of them, to be a pursuer of peace and purity in the church, and to lead a life that honors Christ and His church. These roles are designated by LBC Deacon Covenant however deacons could serve in other ways too and be faithful to their calling of service.

The first example of modern uses of deacons comes from 9Marks ministry. 9Marks is a ministry with its mission to equip local church leaders with a biblical vision and practical resources to give glory to God and allow the church to thrive. It is a relatively new Baptist ministry, with its aim to return modern churches to a biblical model. Mark Dever is the president of 9Marks and published *What Is a Healthy Church?* in 1997 and later *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* in 2001. Dever is the senior pastor of Capitol Hill Baptist Church since 1994 and the president of 9Marks since 1998.

9Marks published *Finding Faithful Elders and Deacons* in 2012 to give churches a biblical understanding of these two offices. The author Thabiti Anyabwile

states that deacons provide a joyful means of service to the church and is perhaps *one of the most important ministries of the church*. Anyabwile states, “The joy, peace, unity, and fruitfulness of the local church depends in part on having a cadre of faithful table servants who are present when needed, eager to serve without being intrusive.”<sup>33</sup> He cites Acts 6 as being the prototypical beginning of deacons and asserts that deacons were the early church’s “shock-absorbers,” absorbing complaints and keeping the peace with spiritual wisdom. Deacons need to be men of faith and of the Spirit, dedicated to serving the church: “When looking for deacons, churches must look for men full of the Spirit. The office is a spiritual office. . . . Deacons are to be men known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom.”<sup>34</sup> This 9Marks book calls deacons to “serving tables,” which is not a low-level or demeaning work since it was a necessary work for the church to get work done. Anyabwile never states what these services of deacons are except that they be dedicated to handling the practical and pressing needs of the church.

In another recent work, Paul Chappell, senior pastor of the Lancaster Baptist Church in Lancaster, California, wrote *The Ministry of a Baptist Deacon*, published in 2010. Chappell states that deacons are to be faithful followers of the pastors, empowering pastors to do their work: “The pastor is the overseer of the church, the men who serve with him must have faith to follow their pastor.”<sup>35</sup> Because of different ministries and needs of churches and pastors, Chappell refrains from defining the exact responsibilities of deacons. Yet he shares that at Lancaster Baptist Church, deacons serve as: ministering to widows and the needy, ushers, Sunday school teachers, greeters, at funerals, counting the offering, and ones who make follow-up visits with guests.

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<sup>33</sup> Thabiti M. Anyabwile. *Finding Faithful Elders and Deacons* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 19.

<sup>34</sup> Anyabwile, *Finding Faithful Elders and Deacons*, 23-24.

<sup>35</sup> Paul Chappell, *The Ministry of a Baptist Deacon: A Handbook for Local Church Servant Leaders* (Lancaster, CA: Striving Together Publications, 2010), 15.

Benjamin Merkle, a New Testament and Greek scholar at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, and a prominent authority on elders and deacons, authored *40 Questions about Elders and Deacons*. Merkle writes that deacons are not responsible to teach or lead the congregation, nor are they spiritual leaders, but instead provide leadership to service-orientated parts of church life.<sup>36</sup> When referencing practical implications of being a deacon, Merkle offers this list of possible duties, including management of facilities, care over benevolence, handling of finances, helping as a church ushers, and helping in a variety of ways to help elders focus on shepherding the church.<sup>37</sup>

Alexander Strauch wrote *Minister of Mercy: The New Testament Deacon*. Strauch calls the deacon the minister of mercy because of the benevolence picture found in Acts 6. He explains that in many modern churches, elders and deacons exist in opposition to and overlap one another. He traces power struggles and misunderstandings over leadership to a misunderstanding of the elder and deacon positions.<sup>38</sup> Strauch opposes deacons as executive board members and advocates deacons who are submissive to church overseers.<sup>39</sup> Regarding duties, deacons do not teach nor govern as they are servant-officers who relieve shepherds in the many practical duties required of the church.<sup>40</sup> Elders and deacons have a complementary work: elders to the spiritual welfare of the church and deacons to its physical welfare. In regard to their duties, deacons are called to care for the welfare of people.

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<sup>36</sup> Merkle, *40 Questions*, 239-40.

<sup>37</sup> Merkle *40 Questions*, 241-43.

<sup>38</sup> Alexander Strauch, *The New Testament Deacon: The Church's Minister of Mercy* (Littleton, CO: Lewis & Roth, 1992), 77.

<sup>39</sup> Strauch, *New Testament Deacon*, 78.

<sup>40</sup> Strauch, *New Testament Deacon*, 156-57.

The fifth and final work examined is Henry Webb's *Deacons: Servant Models in the Church*, published in 1980. Webb retired in 2005, after twenty-eight years of service at LifeWay in the areas of Pastoral Ministries, Discipleship, and Deacon Ministry. Webb was also the editor of *The Deacon* magazine. Webb writes that the work of deacons should not be considered a lowly task but one equivalent to serving Jesus. The title δούκονος, which is translated deacons, means servant. Webb states the role of the deacon is to work alongside the pastor.<sup>41</sup> Webb calls the pastor the "team leader" and the pastor having a responsible for directing the deacons' work. While Webb avoids calling deacons to specific duties, he does say they should find a variety of practical work in leading, proclaiming, and caring for those in the church.<sup>42</sup> To these acts of practical service, deacons will not find a shortage of work in the local church.

### **Overview of Modern Uses of Deacons in Church Life**

Overall, you will notice there is not a complete consensus on the specific tasks of what deacons ought to do. Many modern churches and resources avoid giving a list of responsibilities probably because the New Testament does not give a list either.

However, what all of these voices seem to agree upon is that deacons are to help the pastor, help with caring for benevolence ministries, or any other areas of practical service within the church. Therefore, the deacons' work will often look different from church to church. A deacon may serve as a greeter of new guests during the morning worship service yet may not be needed in another church where new members are encouraged to fulfill that role. Or the financial expertise of a deacon may be desperately needed in one church while he is unneeded in this role at another. It seems that where deacons need to be serving is where the church needs the most practical help.

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<sup>41</sup> Henry Webb, *Deacons: Servant Models in the Church* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2002), 64.

<sup>42</sup> Webb, *Deacons*, 66.

Perhaps the most helpful way to think of the deacons' work is not a rigid list of things to-do or not-do, but rather asking the question "where does the church need my help right now?"



## Teaching Lesson 6

### Implications of Using Deacons Biblically and Extra-biblically

In this last teaching session, we will be talking about how the using of deacons well blesses the church. And conversely, how using deacons poorly can be harmful.

#### **Blessing of Using Deacons Biblically**

- 1) *Deacons Bring Much Needed Help to Overwhelmed Churches and Pastors.* The needs of churches often outweigh the help that can be provided. First-time guests need to be followed-up with. The Lord's Supper often needs several helping hand to prepare and administer. Pastors can be overwhelmed with tasks that could easily be given to someone else. When deacons serve well, they bring hands of mercy to needy churches.
  
- 2) *Deacon Ensure Care for Widows, Poor, Shut-Ins, and Other Benevolence Ministries (and that they are not neglected).* Even with a small sized church of 100 members or less, there are numerous benevolence ministry opportunities every week. Widows need to be encouraged, poor will oft rely on the generosity of churches, shut-ins need ministering that comes to them and much more. When there are willing and dedicated deacons to serve "the least of these," the overall church is blessed (Acts 6:5, 7).
  
- 3) *Faithful Deacons Bring Joy and Stability to the Church.* Deacons, as the Acts 6 narrative shows us, brought joy to the whole church. The widows would be cared for, the disciples were relied, the church had more hands to help, overall there was relief. And not only relief, these seven men brought stability during a tumultuous time in the church. As Thabiti Anyabwile remarked in his book *Finding Faithful Elders and Deacons*, deacons are spiritual "shock-absorbers," bringing unity to the church that might otherwise be divided. Good deacons unite churches.

- 4) *Deacons Can Help to Advance the Gospel.* As Acts 6 about the seven men appointed concludes, “And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:7). This multiplication of the gospel comes *after* the stabilizing help of deacons! The Bible shows that when overseers, deacons, and the church functions well with love and unity—the gospel is advanced.

### **When Deacons are Used Poorly**

- 1) *Deacons can become a source of contention and division.* When deacons misunderstand their role, they may become rulers rather than servants. Rather than serving, these kinds of deacons desire to be served and stand in a place where they are not meant to, nor are they equipped to. Deacons who rule, or even deacons who simply desire the title alone, are hurtful to churches and do not allow overseers to lead in their biblical role.
  
- 2) *Deacons can create power struggles and frustrations for their pastor(s).* Where deacons do not serve, often they become a burden to pastors. Rather than working together with the pastor and under the pastor, they will think their role is to dictate him and oversee the church. A deacon can run off pastors, seek his own vision for the church, undercut the pastor’s authority when he does not agree, dictate the budget, and make threats when their ideas are not embraced. Creating problems for the pastor and the church is not what deacons are called to do.
  
- 3) *Deacons can serve in roles in which they are not qualified.* When deacons serve in roles in which they are not qualified, this hurts the church overall.

Deacons who oversee, lead, or even dictate, do not bring stability to churches. Many churches are hurting and will remain in a state of hurt as long as deacons serve in the wrong way. If this pattern is continued, deacons serving wrongly can kill churches.

- 4) *Deacons can burn out.* In the case of deacons unknowingly serving as overseers, or an overseer-deacon hybrid, they are in an unnatural position. In the case for overseer-deacon hybrids, they have expectations of a deacon coupled with the roles of an overseer. Their qualifications from 1 Timothy 3:8-13 can appear to betray them into a work they cannot seem to do. If the early disciples could not handle the workload of ministering of God's word and serving tables, then deacons who serve in both capacities will find it nearly impossible too. Often men will attempt to serve in both capacities either to get burned out, even to the point of leaving the church, or rust out in the sense they cease to do anything at all. Both of these scenarios is harmful and hurtful to the church especially to the needy that need ministering.

I would contend that one of the great problems facing the 21<sup>st</sup> century church is a misunderstanding of the biblical qualifications and responsibilities of both pastors and deacons. *Many church members do not understand either roles.* Churches can fall into a routine of pastors and deacons serving in what has traditionally been done with little regard to the Bible. Surprisingly, many pastors and deacons do not understand their roles—and this can create unhealthy tensions and conflict. As John R. Bisagno wrote concerning deacons, “Deacons who protect the fellowship, honor the pastor, have an humble servant's heart, and love to work are deacons who are happy and whose churches

are alive and growing.”<sup>43</sup> Without deacons to protect the fellowship, respect the leadership, have a humble heart towards the needy, deacons will be unhappy and churches can be stunted and even die.

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<sup>43</sup> John A. Bisagno, *Letters to Timothy: A Handbook for Pastors* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 25.

## APPENDIX 6

### LEBANON BAPTIST CHURCH DEACON COVENANT

#### **ELECTION OF DEACONS**

“Whenever there is a vacancy on the Deacon Body, whether due to the yearly rotation or otherwise, the active Deacon Body shall examine potential candidates and present the recommendations of the active Deacon Body to the Nominating Committee for presentation and recommendation by the Nominating Committee to the church, for the congregation’s approval, in accordance with the Constitution and Bylaws of Lebanon Baptist Church.”

#### **EXPECTATIONS OF DEACONS OF LEBANON BAPTIST CHURCH**

**1. Each Deacon setting a godly example for the congregation of Lebanon Baptist Church in belief and action.**

This involves:

- Seeking to lead a life that honors the Word of God (and especially the Biblical qualifications as outlined in I and II Timothy, and Titus), the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Baptist Faith and Message, and the Church Covenant of Lebanon Baptist Church.
- Tithing 10% of gross yearly family income to the General Fund of Lebanon Baptist Church.
- Always pursuing the peace and purity of the church.
- Faithful and consistent attendance and participation in the life and worship of the church.
- Faithful and consistent attendance at monthly and called Deacons Meetings.

**2. Each Deacon, alongside the pastor, spiritually shepherding the congregation of Lebanon Baptist Church.**

**3. Each Deacon taking personal responsibility for the spiritual nurture of the families assigned to their care.**

This involves:

- Regularly shepherding widows and homebound members assigned to their care by talking with them and visiting them.
- Regularly maintaining contact with the families under their care.

- Contacting and reaching out to the families under their care in the event that those families become absent from participation in the worship of the congregation.
  - Going to the assistance of the families under their care in the event of crisis or need.
- 4. Each Deacon guarding and keeping confidentiality.**
- a. This involves:
- Keeping absolute confidentiality regarding proceedings and votes in Deacons' Meetings.
  - Keeping absolute confidentiality regarding things shared with the Deacon by those they shepherd.
- 5. Each Deacon fulfilling the duties designated to the Deacon of the Week ministry.**
- This involves:
- Locking and unlocking the church facility on their week of duty.
  - Taking responsibility for finding a substitute in the event they are absent during their duty week.
  - Moderation of the church business meeting when it occurs during their week of duty.

### **LEBANON BAPTIST CHURCH DEACON COVENANT**

**If elected to serve as a Deacon of Lebanon Baptist Church, I understand and embrace my duties as follows:**

- 1. To set a godly example for the congregation of Lebanon Baptist Church in belief and action.**
- This involves:
- My seeking to lead a life that honors the Word of God (and especially the Biblical qualifications as outlined in I and II Timothy, and Titus), the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Baptist Faith and Message, and the Church Covenant of Lebanon Baptist Church.
  - My tithing 10% of my gross yearly family income to the General Fund of Lebanon Baptist Church.
  - My always pursuing the peace and purity of the church.
  - My faithful and consistent attendance and participation in the life and worship of the church.
  - My faithful and consistent attendance and participation in the monthly Deacon Meetings.
- 2. Alongside the pastor, to spiritually shepherd the congregation of Lebanon Baptist Church.**

**3. To take personal responsibility for the spiritual nurture of the families assigned to my care.**

This involves:

- My regularly shepherding the widows and homebound members assigned to my care by talking with them and visiting them.
- My regularly maintaining contact with the families under my care.
- My contacting and reaching out to the families under my care in the event that they become absent from participation in the worship of the congregation.
- My going to the assistance of the families under my care in the event of crisis or need.

**4. To guard and keep confidentiality.**

This involves:

- My keeping absolute confidentiality regarding proceedings and votes in Deacons' Meetings.
- My keeping absolute confidentiality regarding things shared with me by those I shepherd.

**5. To fulfill the duties designated to the Deacon of the Week ministry.**

This involves:

- My locking and unlocking the church facility on my week of duty.
- My taking personal responsibility to find a substitute in the event I am absent during my week of duty.
- My moderation of the church business meeting when it occurs during my week of duty.

*By my signature below, I pledge my sacred word of honor that if elected that I will discharge the above duties, for the full duration of the term I am elected for. I further pledge my sacred word of honor that if I become unwilling or unable to discharge these duties, out of love for Christ and His Church, I will step aside from my role as a Deacon of Lebanon Baptist Church.*

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

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## ABSTRACT

### TEACHING THE BIBLICAL QUALIFICATIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF DEACONS AT LEBANON BAPTIST CHURCH IN LEBANON, VIRGINIA

Steven Daniel Stutzman, DMin  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2020  
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Joseph C. Harrod

This project focuses on the qualifications and responsibilities of deacons at Lebanon Baptist Church (LBC). Chapter 1 discusses the current use of deacons at LBC and includes rationale of why changes need to be adopted at this church. Chapter 2 examines the biblical and theological qualifications of deacons, focusing on Acts 6:1-6, 1 Timothy 3:8-12, and Romans 16:1. Chapter 3 focuses on Baptist history concerning historical qualifications and uses of deacons through confessions of faith and prominent Baptist writers. The chapter includes an examination of modern uses of deacons in some prominent churches. Chapter 4 seeks to determine the current understanding of deacons in LBC, teach a series on deacons to the current and previous deacon board, and assess any changes in patterns of thinking in LBC deacons. Chapter 5 reflects on the research for the project and what may be improved.

VITA

Steven Daniel Stutzman

EDUCATION

BS, Purdue University, 2002

MDiv, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011

MINISTERIAL

Pastor, North Benson Baptist Church, Frankfort, Kentucky, 2011-2018

Pastor, Lebanon Baptist Church, Lebanon, Virginia, 2018-