

A Study in the Biblical Role of Deacons
In Light of Scripture and Church History
and in Examination of Current Practice

by

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The Biblical Role of Deacons in the Church

New Testament Deacons serve the Lord by conducting the caring ministry of the church — doing the benevolence work, visiting the sick, being alert to the spiritual needs of the congregation — for the purposes of freeing the pastoral staff to focus on prayer and the ministry of the Word, promoting unity within the church, and facilitating the spread of the gospel.

1. Deacons and Elders Are the Two Distinct Offices in a New Testament Church

“Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons” Philippians 1:1

There are two offices of the New Testament Church mentioned together in Philippians 1:1 and in 1st Timothy 3 — bishops and deacons. In 1st Timothy 3 the qualifications are spelled out for the two offices, bishops in verses 1-7, and deacons in verse 8-13. The qualifications are similar, but not identical. For example, the bishop is required to be “able to teach” whereas the deacon does not have that expectation. The differences in title and qualifications mean that the offices are distinct.

The term “bishop” is translated *overseer* in some translations. It is the word from which we get our word “episcopal.” Translated from the original language, it means, “to look upon, inspect, oversee, look after, care for” and refers to “the care of the church which rested upon the elders.” The term “bishop” is used interchangeably with “elder” and “shepherd” (i.e. *pastor*) in Acts 20 and 1st Peter 5.

One can see how the words in these passages (in bold for your reference) are used in an interchangeable manner:

“From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the **elders** of the church.... And when they had come to him, he said to them: ...take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you **overseers**, to **shepherd** the church of God which He purchased with His own blood”

Acts 20:17, 18, 28 NKJV

“The **elders** who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: **Shepherd** the flock of God which is among you, serving as **overseers**, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away”

1st Peter 5:1-4 NKJV

It was the elders who were charged with the general oversight of the church with the emphasis being on the spiritual building up of the body of Christ:

“Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine” 1st Timothy 5:17 NKJV

One gets the impression from this passage that there were those elders whose duties were more administrative in nature and those who had more of a teaching role, the latter being the most emphasized.

The churches were commanded to be supportive of the elder's ministry and to accept leadership:
"Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls [a shepherding function], as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you" Hebrews 13:17
NKJV

Therefore:

1. *Deacons and Elders are the offices in the church. The offices are distinct. Elders are not deacons. Deacons are not elders.*
2. *The terms, Elder, Pastor (shepherd), and Overseer (bishop) are used synonymously in the New Testament.*
3. *In the New Testament, elders had the role of the general oversight of the church.*

2. The Office of Deacon Was Created for the Purpose of Handling the Benevolence Ministry

The Biblical account is quite clear on the founding of the deaconship and nowhere repeats the original purpose.

"NOW ABOUT this time, when the number of the disciples was greatly increasing, complaint was made by the Hellenists (the Greek-speaking Jews) against the [native] Hebrews because their widows were being overlooked and neglected in the daily ministrations (distribution of relief). So the Twelve [apostles] convened the multitude of the disciples and said, 'It is not seemly or desirable or right that we should have to give up or neglect [preaching] the Word of God in order to attend to serving at tables and superintending the distribution of food. Therefore select out from among yourselves, brethren, seven men of good and attested character and repute, full of the [Holy] Spirit and wisdom, whom we may assign to look after this business and duty.'" Acts 6:1-3¹

3. The Office of Deacon Was Established to Free the Apostles (who functioned as the first pastors) to Pray and to Prepare to Minister the Word

The Apostles, in dealing with the benevolence ministry problem at the Jerusalem church, told the congregations that, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word." Acts 6:2-4 (NKJV)

¹ The Amplified New Testament, (La Habra CA: The Lockman Foundation) 1999

Some have understood this passage to mean that it is the role of deacons to oversee the business of the church. First, the text says, “this business,” not “the business” — and the business being referred to is the business of benevolence. Second, as Dr. Robert Naylor points out, that would be a misrepresentation of the meaning of the word:

“The word ‘business’ should be discussed a little to prevent any misunderstanding. The Greek word is *chreia* and basically means ‘need.’ It is so translated twenty-five times. This is the only place it is translated ‘business.’ Hence there is no Scriptural authority for the deacons to make financial decisions of the church. Church decisions must remain church decisions.”²

P. E. Burroguhs wrote, “The deacons are to share with the pastor the burdens of church ministry; they are to shield the pastor and relieve him of burdens so that he may devote himself to a spiritual ministry.”³

4. The Early Deacons Were Selected for Their Spiritual Qualifications

Not just 1st Timothy 3, but also Acts 6 expounds qualifications for the office of deacons; the later could fairly be called the “core qualifications.” Often, when someone is discussed as a possible deacon one hears a remark such as, “He attends regularly and is a good giver.” Perhaps the fact that he is not divorced will be mentioned. But God is looking at more than mere external characteristics which can be determined by a checking their stewardship voucher or a look at the court house records. Deacons are to be men with an internal dynamic, which cannot be determined in a superficial way. They are to be:

“Men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom” Acts 6:3

“And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit” Acts 6:5

5. Deacons Are to Be Capable of Serving the Lord in Spiritual Ways

The original seven deacons were people who were able to serve the Lord in ways which were more spiritual in nature than merely delivering food. Stephen was a man of spiritual power – “And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people” (Acts 6:8 NJKV).

Philip was not only a deacon, but also was gifted in evangelism:

“Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them. And the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many who were possessed; and many who were paralyzed and lame were healed.”

Acts 8:5-7

² Robert E. Naylor, The Baptist Deacon, Broadman Press, 1955, pages 20-21

³ P. E. Burroughs, Honoring the Deaconship, Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1929, Revised 1936. Page 56.

6. The Word, Deacon, Means *Servant*

While there is not a detailed job description for deacons in the New Testament, the occasion for the creation of the office is enlightening, along with the descriptions of the original deacons. The qualifications for the office in Acts 6 and 1st Timothy 3 shed a good deal of light. The title itself, however, is as descriptive as any job description could be. In the Bible, words have meanings— and the word “deacon” means servant. Here is how the word has been defined:

“The word deacon comes from the Greek word diakonos which can be translated deacon or minister. (The pastor is the ministering leader in a New Testament Church, the deacons the ministering servants.) The etymology or root meaning (dia, konis) of the word is ‘To raise dust in a hurry or by hastening.’ This does not mean to stir up confusion, but on the other hand, means to “Be busy, to serve or do service”—for God and the church. Thus, to be the pastor’s assistants in ministry.”⁴

“diakonos dee-ak'-on-os probably from an obsolete diako (to run on errands)
AV-minister 20, servant 8, deacon 3; 31

1) one who executes the commands of another, esp. of a master, a servant, attendant, minister

1a) the servant of a king

1b) a deacon, one who, by virtue of the office assigned to him by the church, cares for the poor and has charge of and distributes the money collected for their use

1c) a waiter, one who serves food and drink”⁵

“Diakoneo and its derivatives, as their etymology suggests, are used mainly for personal help to others.”

“Diakonia is found 34 times in the NT. It means service at the table in Lk. 10:40; Acts 6:1, etc.”

“Diakonos is found 29 times in the NT. Its primary meaning is one who serves at tables.”⁶

⁴ Paul A. Meigs, “The Office of Deacon as Given in the New Testament,” Published by the Florida Baptist Convention, not dated. Full document appears in the appendix.

⁵ Online Bible: Strong’s Concordance Lexicon

⁶ “Serve, Deacon, Worship” in The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, Colin Brown, ed., volume 3, pages 544, 546

7. The Office of Deacon Requires a Godly Life

While Acts 6 spells out the “core qualifications” for the office, 1st Timothy 3 expounds on them. Much of it has to do with one’s reputation in the community.

“Likewise deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless. Likewise their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things. Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.” 1st Timothy 3:8-13

8. The Office of Deacon Requires a Firm Grasp of Sound Doctrine

“They must possess the mystic secret of the faith [Christian truth as hidden from ungodly men] with a clear conscience” Acts 6:9 (Amplified New Testament)

A church is content oriented. It is a doctrinally driven community, built upon truth. Every member should have this approach in this fellowship; leaders such as deacons, not less but, more so.

9. The Presence of Deacons Should Advance the Unity of a Church

When the Apostles laid out the plan for the creation of this office, “the saying pleased the whole multitude”(Acts 6:5 NKJV). The complaints about the benevolence ministry stopped. And the complaints were by the Greek speaking Jews, the Hebrew speaking Jews obviously bent over backwards to preserve the church’s unity, for they “Chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch”—all men with Greek names. It is still true today: Any time a church has deacons who are properly doing their jobs, the church is more likely to be at unity.

10. The Presence of Deacons Should Advance the Cause of Evangelism

The immediate impact of the creation of the office of deacon was to eliminate the controversy in the church and to get the church back on course in fulfilling its mission. The Bible says that, “Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:8 NKJV). Again, it is still true. When a church has deacons who are in God’s will, the cause of world evangelization will be aided.

THE ROLE OF DEACONS THROUGHOUT CHURCH HISTORY

In the Early Church

“In Philippians 1:1 and in numerous references in early Christian literature outside the New Testament, bishops and/or elders and deacons are mentioned together, with deacons mentioned last. Because of this order, and because of the natural connotations of the word *diakonos*, most interpreters believe that deacons, from the beginning, served as assistants of church leaders. Certainly, that was clearly the role of deacons by the second century. Deacons continued to fill an important role in the ministry of the early church, serving the needs of the poor, assisting in baptism and the Lord’s supper, and performing other practical ministerial tasks.”⁷

In the second through fifth centuries, deacons were the real agents of the charity provided through the church, providing for widows and orphans. They visited the sick and, as early as the third century had, what would several centuries later, be called deacon family ministry plans. They visited the martyrs in prison. Deacons helped to train new converts. They kept watch over the church members, reporting to the bishop any who seemed about to fall away. They attempted to restore the excommunicated. Deacons carried out administrative assignments given them by their bishops and met daily to receive instructions from him. Failure to carry out their assignments was cause for removal. If they had the authority from a bishop and a presbyter or bishop were present, they could baptize. They also assisted with the Lord’s Supper.⁸

During the Middle Ages the Office of Deacon Came to Less Resemble the New Testament Model

“Later, medieval deacons assumed an increasingly ecclesiastical role, and their tendency to become candidates for the priesthood became more pronounced than ever. Almost no one was ordained to the diaconate unless he intended to advance to the priesthood.”⁹

One Catholic writer describes the role of the diaconate in the history of the Roman church:

In the course of time the bishop's principal assistant, the <diaconus episcopi>, came to be called the archdeacon and by the fifth century his role had developed into a powerful ecclesiastical office. He had charge of church administration and of the care of the poor and thus held the purse.

When archdeacons became too dominant sometimes their bishops were minded to "kick

⁷ *Deacon, Deaconess*, Fred A. Grissom, Holman Bible Dictionary, Holman, 1991

⁸ Compiled from Charles W. Deweese, The Emerging Role of Deacons, Broadman Press, 1979, pages 12-15

⁹ Charles W. Deweese, The Emerging Role of Deacons, Broadman Press, 1979, Page 18

them upstairs" by ordaining them priest whereupon they would lose the office of archdeacon. Saint Jerome said, "<archidiaconus injuriam putat si presbyter ordinetur,>" ("the archdeacon thinks himself injured if ordained priest"), for then he would lose his powerful archdiaconal office. Pope Gregory the Great, in fact, once upbraided a bishop for ordaining his archdeacon priest with a view "craftily to degrade the aforesaid archdeacon."

. . . From the eighth to the thirteenth century the power of the archdeacon waxed greatly and archdeacons began to exercise quasi-episcopal powers. . . So powerful had the archdeacons become that a reform movement was spawned and bishops began to counter the power of the archdeacons by appointing priests as their vicars general and officials (or judicial vicars). These priests enjoyed powers similar to those of archdeacons but, importantly, their office was not a benefice and they served at the pleasure of the bishop and were directly subject to his control. Once established, these alternatives set the scene for a frontal assault on the power of the archdeacons.¹⁰

During the Reformation, the Return to Scripture Resulted in a Return to the Biblical Role of Deacons

Martin Luther:

“The diaconate is the ministry, not of reading the Gospel or the Epistle, as is the present practice, but of distributing the church’s aid to the poor”

John Calvin:

“Scripture specifically designates as deacons those whom the church has appointed to distribute alms and take care of the poor, and serve as stewards of the common chest for the poor.”

“Here, then, is the kind of deacons the apostolic church had, and which we, after their example should have.”¹¹

“Calvin did in fact hold the office of deacon in high esteem. Deacons were public officers in the church entrusted with the care of the poor. He urged that they be skilled in the Christian faith since, in the course of their ministry, ‘they will often have to give advice and comfort.’ Indeed, the deacons in Calvin’s Geneva should have experts in what we call today social work as well as pastoral care.”¹²

The Early Baptists

¹⁰ “Deacons Yesterday and Today,” Duane L.C.M. Galles, Trinity Communications 1996.
http://www.deacon.xt.asn.au/Articles/Deacons_Yesterday_and_today.htm

¹¹ Deweese, page 19

¹² Timothy George, Theology of the Reformers, Broadman Press, 1988, page 241

In the early 1600's early Baptists such as John Smyth and Thomas Helwys, saw the primary role of deacons as that of carrying out the benevolence ministry of the church. In 1654, in what would become an often repeated description, Thomas Collier pictured the work of deacons as that of serving tables: the table of the Lord, the table of the minister, and the table of the poor.¹³ Southwestern Seminary founding president B. H. Carroll recalled hearing a sermon delivered by S. S. Lattimore with this very outline and stated that he “thought it a very ingenious division of the table question”.¹⁴

The Drift Among Baptists From the Biblical Model

“In the later half of the eighteenth century, a new concept of Baptist deacons emerged and continues to exist in many churches today. This was the view of deacons as church business managers. This view stressed to a seemingly excessive degree the administrative function of deacons and tended to distract from other areas of service previously given equally strong attention.”¹⁵

The drift started as an effort to “Relieve the minister from the secular concerns of the church”¹⁶ But by 1846, R. B. C. Howell was using new terminology, saying deacons are, “A board of directors, and have charge of the all the secular affairs in the kingdom of Christ.”¹⁷ “...The deacons in their own peculiar department are, as we have said, a BOARD OF OFFICERS, or the *executive board* of the church, for her temporal department...”¹⁸ This book was influential and saw eleven printings through 1977.

Howell regarded the spiritual ministry of the pastor and the temporal ministry of the deacon as separate areas, or “departments” — “...the pastor has supervision of all the *spiritualities* of the church, and is therefore bishop or overseer in that department; so the deacons are overseers of all her *temporalities*, of which they have full control.”¹⁹ He stated, however, that, “It is not, lastly, the duty of deacons to rule in the church,”²⁰ explaining that, “Deacons are not ruling elders.”²¹

¹³ Deweese, page 20

¹⁴ B. H. Carroll, Commentary on the English Bible, Volume IV, page 135

¹⁵ Charles W. Deweese, The Emerging Role of Deacons, Broadman Press, 1979, page 34

¹⁶ A treatise on church discipline, Charleston Association, S.C., 1774, cited by Deweese

¹⁷ The Deaconship, Judson Press, page 11

¹⁸ Howell, Pages 112-113

¹⁹ Howell, page 12

²⁰ Howell, page 66

²¹ Howell, page 69

P. E. Burroughs, who believed that the deacons are the executive board of the church, reflected this same concept when he wrote under the heading “Church Leadership” that, “The progress of churches must largely wait upon the deacons.”²²

There were those who saw the trend to understand the office of deacon in this way as a cause of concern. In 1852, New York pastor/historian, Thomas Armitage, warned against the concept of the deacon as being a person, “Of so much importance and ecclesiastical consequence in the Church, that all the membership, and all the affairs in the Church, and the Pastor, must be dictated, and ruled and governed by him.” In 1897, Edwin C. Dargan, professor of homiletics and ecclesiology at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, warned of the tendency of deacons to act as “a sort of ruling presbytery.”²³

Over the years this concept evolved yet further. No longer was it a matter of the deacons “serving with the pastor” with an aim to “serve the church especially in the material phases of its life.”²⁴ The deaconship had become something which worked like the board of trustees of a college: doing little of the actual work, but setting policy, hearing reports from the staff, and giving assignments. The deacons were, as even Howell warned against, functioning as ruling elders. The relationship between elders and deacons had now been turned on its head the pattern of Scripture and the early church.

Howard Foshee listed three characteristics of churches where the deacons operate as a board:

- (1) When all major recommendations from church operations and church committees are screened by the deacons whether they should go to the congregation.
- (2) When the pastor and staff members are directly responsible to the deacons rather than to the church.
- (3) When the use or expenditure of major church resources, such as facilities and finances, must first be approved by the deacons.²⁵

One Southern Baptist pastor summarized his experience as follows:

“I have found the selection and practices of deacons in the SBC churches I have served, to conform to so-called ‘Southern Baptist polity’ rather, than the Scriptures. Most of these deacons were elected to the office as a confirmation of honor, bestowed upon them in recognition of their tithing and attendance, with little or no attention to their Scriptural qualifications. The predicable result is deacons who do not function as servants but as masters, each ruling his own little kingdom within the church.

²² Honoring the Deaconship, The Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1929, revised 1936, page 65

²³ Both quotes cited by Deweese, pages 47-48

²⁴ P.E. Burroughs, Honoring the Deaconship, The Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1929, revised 1936, page 56

²⁵ The Ministry of the Deacon, Howard B. Foshee, Convention Press, 1968, page 33

Churches that follow this pattern usually demand their pastors serve as ‘deacons’ by expecting them to do the visiting and ministering. Consequently, the pastor has little time for prayer and deep Bible study. Those churches that do not make this "demand" are often tolerant of a pastor who chooses to function as a deacon because it provides a compromise, suitable to everyone involved: The deacons can rule the church with little or no interference from the pastor. The pastor is able to spend his time visiting and promoting relationships rather, than the difficult task of leading the church in sound doctrine. The members are flattered by the personal attention they receive from their pastor but are weak, stunted, anemic Christians because he does not ‘feed’ them from the pulpit.

Perhaps, we Southern Baptists have too many pastors who wish to be deacons, too many deacons who wish to be elders and too many members who have no understanding of God’s requirements for deacons and pastors.”²⁶

The Return to the Biblical Model for Deacons

Beginning subtly in the 1950's and intensifying in the 1970's there were repeated rejections of the approach generated in the 1800's. Robert E. Naylor, president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, warned in 1955, “There are churches where deacons have appropriated to themselves authority which is contrary to New Testament teaching. It may have gone so far that bossism has developed. 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. Anywhere this condition exists, there inevitably are those who say that deacons are not needed. The truth is that such deacons as this... are not needed in churches.”²⁷ In the 1970's, Howard Foshee was firmly rejecting the terminology of the period; he recounted, “The unfortunate term, ‘board of deacons’ arose. The phrase is foreign to the way Baptists should work together under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. A Baptist congregation makes corporate decisions as each member seeks to vote his conviction under the leadership of the Lord.”²⁸

Paul Meigs summarized that deacons are, “**NOT**

1. A church director—nor a Board of Directors.
2. Not a figurehead—but to be elected for service.
3. Not an honorary office.
4. Not a "church boss" or a "pastor's boss."
5. Not to be chosen because of social or financial position, nor chosen in order to get him to attend services. Let him first be proven. I Tim. 3:10.”²⁹

Describing the role of the original seven deacons, “The first responsibility of these men was to assist the pastors in the spiritual ministry of shepherding and caring for the flock and to free the pastors for the ministry of prayer,

²⁶ James F. (Jim) McColloch, Discussion area, Southern Baptist Section, Suite101.com, Subject: Deacons in your church experience, October 22, 1999: http://www.suite101.com/welcome.cfm/southern_baptists

²⁷ Robert E. Naylor, The Baptist Deacon, Broadman Press, 1955, pages 3-4

²⁸ Howard B. Foshee, Now That You're a Deacon, Broadman Press, 1975, Page 13

²⁹ “The Office of Deacon as Given in the New Testament,” by Paul A. Meigs, Florida Baptist Convention

preaching, and training. Actually, these seven were selected to be ‘under-shepherds’ of the flock”³⁰ In Foshee’s chapter, *Understand Your Work as Deacon*, his subtitles include, *Deacon Work Originated to Meet Spiritual Needs* and *Deacons Should Organize for Ministry*.³¹ It was during this period that various “Deacon Family Ministry” materials were made available by the Sunday School Board and became popular.

By the 1990’s, it was a decided issue in denominational publications and among Baptist leaders. In 1991 Jerry Songer wrote that, “The board of deacons and business manager concept is no longer a viable model.”³² In 1997, Jim Henry was back to Thomas Collier’s portrait of the work of deacons as that of serving three tables (the table of the Lord, the table of the minister, and the table of the poor) as part of his video training materials.³³

Why the 1800’s Concept of Deaconship Persists in Some Churches

There are several reasons why the “Howell” model persists:

- 1) As a carry-over from rural churches and the days when they had bi-vocational, perhaps half or quarter time “preachers,” who were not on the field to tend to day to day ministry and administration.
- 2) Because of the conclusion that it is common sense to hash things out behind closed doors before bringing them out to the floor for a church vote; and that deacons are the only body in the given church in place to do so.
- 3) Because some Christians have the gift of administration (or skills in that area) and the deacon body is the only place in their church’s organizational structure where there is opportunity to serve the Lord in that way.
- 4) Because, in many churches, the deacons are the only body in a position to provide a reasonable measure of accountability and to guard against the danger of any one person becoming so powerful that they are tempted to abuse their trust.
- 5) The experience of many deacons with a background in the business world (which would include R.B.C. Howell) and some secular charitable institutions provides their model of organization. Sometimes, it was the only model with which they had any real familiarity.
- 6) Because some have come from churches where the Bible’s teaching on deaconship has not been adequately presented and taught. Because these people have not been properly disciplined in regard to Christian service, they would feel uncomfortable in doing deacon ministry.

³⁰ Wayne Dehoney, Church Administration Magazine, November, 1959, cited in The Ministry of the Deacon, Howard B. Foshee, Convention Press, 1968

³¹ Foshee, pages 11, 16

³² *Deacons Leading with Pastor and Staff*, Jerry Songer, Deacons as Leaders, compiled by Robert Sheffield, Convention Press, 1991, page 87

³³ Deacons: Partners in Ministry and Growth (Sampson Ministries, 1997, distributed by the Sunday School Board of the SBC

Approaches Being Taken by Churches Attempting to Return to the Biblical Model

- 1) **Changing the Terminology**
Some churches have attempted to return to Biblical terminology and drop the language of the business world (no longer referring to the deacons as a “board,” but as a “body,” perhaps removing the term “chairman of the board,” referring to the pastor more in terms of his teaching ministry instead of referring to him as the “CEO”).
- 2) **Changing the Attitude**
These churches simply decide that a change of by-laws would be unwise or unpassable, but that for them a move toward a more servant-ministry approach and mentality would be in order.
- 3) **Moving to a Form of Church Government with Elders and Deacons**
The Capitol Hill Baptist Church has this form of organization. Says their pastor, Mike Dever, “All churches have had individuals who have performed the functions of elders even if they were called by another name. In the NT, they were called elders or overseers, and there was always more than one (a plurality) being talked about. They were needed in the NT and they are needed now”³⁴

These churches select elders to oversee the administration of the church and return the office of deacon to the benevolence/assisting role of the New Testament. The eldership in these churches usually includes the pastor, perhaps other paid ministerial staff members, and lay members of the church. It would be noted that this approach should require that members of the eldership meet the qualifications in 1st Timothy 3:1-7, including being apt to teach the Word of God. The elders would fulfill the Biblical assignment for elders; not simply being church business leaders, but spiritual leaders in the truest sense. Of course, being a Baptist church, the congregation would remain the final place of appeal and decision. It should be cautioned that deacons acting as elders, only under the name deacon, is unbiblical because it prevents deacons from fulfilling their God-assigned role.
- 4) **Changing the Organization of the Deacons**
Some churches organize their deacons to take care of administration and ministry with different deacon teams. One church went to having administrative and ministry deacons. One should note that this is really a variation of having elders and deacons, just not changing the name from deacons or requiring one to meet the qualifications for elders.
- 5) **Dropping the Administration Function of Deacons and Relying on Committees**
These churches go all out for deacon ministry and leave all administrative functions to the committees of the church.
- 6) **Adding Ministry to the Responsibilities of Deacons**
Some churches try to get their deacons moving in a more biblical direction by adding ministry to their concept of deaconship. They do not delete the old approach to leadership which, in their fellowship,

³⁴ “Nine Marks of a Healthy Church: Biblical Church Leadership,” sermon summary, 4/11/99,
<http://www.capitolhillbaptist.org/SermonSummary0425.htm>

might arouse hostility from more traditional members. Their deacons continue to operate like a board of elders, but add ministry to their expectations.

Some observations:

- 1. No church should attempt any changes in its by-laws without a prior change of heart and of mind; or serious division may result in the church.*
- 2. No changes made should create a vacuum. Even churches structured in an unbiblical manner have found ways to get things done. Changes should not have the result of leaving important things left undone.*
- 3. Accountability provides protection for everyone; there must be a way to leave it in place, in a structure which is Biblical and which fosters respect for the office of pastor and other ministerial positions.*
- 4. Merely changing the terminology or giving lip-service to biblical roles is insufficient. The Lord's work must actually be done in the Lord's way.*
- 5. If a church wants to choose to use its deacons as a board of ruling elders, then those deacons (now ruling elders mislabeled) must do the work of elders and meet the qualifications for elders as expounded in the Bible.*
- 6. Ultimately, a congregation has to decide if they are a church under the authority of God's Word – in practice – or not. If so, they will have to structure their church polity in a biblical way using biblical terminology.*
- 7. The purpose of deacons is to serve the Lord by conducting the caring ministry of the church — doing the work of the benevolence ministry, visiting the sick, being alert to the spiritual needs of those falling into sin — and by promoting unity within the church, thus freeing the pastor(s) to focus on prayer and the ministry of the Word, and consequently, facilitating the spread of the gospel. The role of the deacon may be more than this, but it cannot be less and remain Biblical.*

APPENDIX

- Item 1: “The Office of Deacon as Given in the New Testament,” by Paul A. Meigs, Florida Baptist Convention. Pages 15-18
- Item 2: “Church's Deacons Transition From 'Overseers' to Ministers,” Baptist Press, February 8, 1999. Pages 19-20
- Item 3: Suite101.com internet poll on the role of deacons in Southern Baptist Churches. Page 21
- Item 4: Relevant portions of the Constitution of the Capitol Hill Baptist Church, Washington, D.C. which has a system of elders and deacons. Pages 22-23
- Item 5: Portions of the Constitution of Park Avenue Baptist Church which defines their polity involving Elders and Deacons. Pages 24-29
- Item 6: The Role of a Deacon, From Briarwood Presbyterian Church, affiliated with the Presbyterian Church in America. Pages 30-31
- Item 7: Elders and Deacons in the United Methodist Church, 1996 Book of Discipline, United Methodist Church. Page 32

THE OFFICE OF DEACON

as given in the
New Testament

Florida Baptist Convention

by

PAUL A. MEIGS,
Director of Evangelism
and Mission Education

ORIGIN OF DEACON

ACTS 6 1-8

1. The office of Deacon was brought into being to meet definite needs which arose in the first Church at Jerusalem. The Apostles were being swamped with details in the work and were being kept from their main calling which was the ministry of the Word and prayer (public declaration of the Word and private devotion).

The immediate situation was the jealousy among certain of the membership, the Greeks were complaining that their widows were not getting as much help as the Hebrew widows were getting. Thus, a need for deacons, not to aggravate grumbling, but to help keep it down in churches (to aid in keeping down dissension and murmuring).

2. The word deacon comes from the Greek word diakonos which can be translated deacon or minister. (The pastor is the ministering leader in a New Testament Church, the deacons the ministering servants.) The etymology or root meaning (dia, konis) of the word is "To raise dust in a hurry or by hastening." This does not mean to stir up confusion but on the other hand means to "Be busy, to serve or do service"—for God and the church. Thus, to be the pastor's assistants in ministry.

THE PROCEDURE

1. Elected by the Church—Acts 6. 5-6. This election took place after a season of prayer and was under the direction of the Holy Spirit.
2. Originally seven men because that was the number needed. Some churches need more than others.
3. The seven men were ordained or set apart for their work in ministry. Acts 6.6.
This should be a great service in meaning for the New Testament church.

THE OFFICE OF DEACON NOT

1. A church director—nor a Board of Directors.
2. Not a figurehead—but to be elected for service.
3. Not an honorary office.
4. Not a "church boss" or a "pastor's boss."
5. Not to be chosen because of social or financial position, nor chosen in order to get him to attend services. Let him first be proven. I Tim. 3:10.

CHARACTER AND QUALIFICATIONS

The first requirements are spiritual

1— IN ACTS 6:3-8

- (1) **Of Good Reputation**— of good report or repute. Meaning men of integrity, who are upright and straightforward. Not only should a deacon's deportment be right in church and in church affairs but his activities, his character and conduct in daily life be such as to inspire respect and confidence. His witness must be good in business and social dealings, his personal behavior and habits be Christian
- (2) **Full of the Holy Spirit.**
Certainly a deacon should be a spiritual man. He should be spiritually minded. A spiritual man is a prayerful man and one who has a real concern for lost souls. As men are filled with the Holy Spirit they can know the eternal plan and purpose of God. They can then understand the Great Commission. They can give spiritual emphasis in the ministry of their church. Deacons should be men of consecration.
- (3) **Men of Wisdom.**
Here is meant wisdom of a spiritual order. As the Bishop, so the deacon should know the scriptures—"Apt to teach." How can he know the plan of salvation, the meaning of Christian growth, or how to minister the commands and commissions of God or "hold the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience" unless he knows the word?
Then, a deacon needs to be tactful or wise in Christian grace and courtesy that he may help in the solution of church problems. He should be wise enough to control his own temper and disposition.
- (4) **A Man of Faith.**
Stephen was a man of faith. Acts 6:5. A deacon should be a man of energy and courage for faith will dare to lead on. Deacons need to be men of faith in God and His cause and who will be willing to move forward in the Kingdom work.
The office of deacon is an office of service.

2 — IN 1ST TIMOTHY 3: 8-13

Paul states other qualifications:

- (1) **Grave**
Meaning honorable, men who are respected. The word signifies weight—one who carries weight, or one who counts, his support counts for the church and for right influences. (This is not against cheerfulness.)
The deacon should be firm in his faith, stable in his convictions, sound in his beliefs and correct in his church loyalty. He should add weight to the entire church program by taking his place and filling it.
- (2) **Not double tongued, not two tongued, or tale bearers. Not speaking one way with one group and the opposite way with another group, or one thing to a man's face and another to his back. Straight speakers. His word should be truthful and sincere, not a gossip.**
- (3) **The deacon must not be addicted to drink. He must be right on the liquor question. There should be no question on where the churches stand here. They cannot hesitate or take middle ground. The deacons should ring true on this both as to sale and use of strong drink.**
- (4) **Not greedy of filthy lucre.**
The deacon should be right on the matter of stewardship. The passage means "making small gains in mean ways." Deacons are no more to be excused for being covetous than the preachers are to be excused. They need to be right when and where money is involved in the management of church funds and in personal stewardship and in the manner of making money not "by mean practices." The deacon should set an example before his church in bringing his tithes and offerings into the Lord's storehouse on the Lord's day.
- (5) **"Holding the mystery of the Word in a pure conscience."**
He should be stable and sound in the teachings of Christ and the Word. He should be grounded in the scriptures and also understand the teachings of his denomination. He ought to be a Missionary Baptist.
- (6) **His family relations should be right.**
In the present day of divorce evil there should be no question about the deacon on this question. "The husband of one wife," This does not mean that a man has to be married in order to be a deacon. The deacon should manage well his own house and exercise proper control over his children. He should claim the respect of his home.
- (7) **Let him be tested first.**
Proven blameless, deacons should not be new converts but tested or proven men. He should not be a brawler nor a contentious man, nor one puffed up with pride. He should be a growing Christian, an informed church man and a missionary practicing Christian.

THE DUTIES OF THE DEACON

1. The first seven men were elected to serve. Serve the tables; the Lord's table and look after the poor. (Look after widows and orphans.)
2. Serve with the pastor.
Help carry out the program that the Holy Spirit would lead through him. Not only assist him in carrying forward this program but uphold him in prayer and word.
3. The deacon should see after the temporal or material interest of the pastor in order that he may not be worried but be free in the ministry of the Word and in prayer.
4. Serve by looking after the meeting house and church property. See that this is in fit and comfortable condition. No deacon should expect the pastor to act as janitor of the church. The deacons should feel personal responsibility in helping guard utility bills and looking after the temporal details of the church.
5. The deacon is to serve or minister by visiting the sick, by visiting the negligent members and by enlisting the unenlisted.
6. The deacons should lead out in preserving unity and harmony in the church body or family fellowship.
7. They should set the right example in Christian living, church loyalty and New Testament stewardship.
 - (1) No person in the church should be a more loyal attendant at the services of the church than the deacon,—for how can he set the right example otherwise?
 - (2) No person in the church should be a better leader in church loyalty in all her program than the deacon.
 - (3) No person should be better acquainted with the New Testament doctrines and the distinctive teachings of his own church than the deacon.
 - (4) No person ought to be a better missionary minded member and soul winning Christian than the deacon.
 - (5) No member in the church should be more willing to practice scriptural giving than the deacon.
 - (6) No member should be a better backer of the pastor and in prayer for him than the deacon.
8. The deacon should, by all means, be a soul winner. In Acts 8, Philip is a good example of a deacon being engaged in the work that is the high privilege of every deacon.

Church's Deacons Transition From 'Overseers' to Ministers

By Lonnie Wilkey

GLADEVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--When Bruce Grubbs became the bivocational pastor of Gladeville (Tenn.) Baptist Church, the church's deacons were basically "overseers."

"They held meetings to decide the 'big' things," said Grubbs, who served as interim pastor for four years before becoming pastor.

Grubbs, associate to the executive director in the office of corporate affairs at LifeWay Christian Resources in Nashville, however, had another view of what deacons should do.

Grubbs began to preach on expectations of both pastors and deacons. As a result, the church went from six deacons focused on managing the institution and personnel to 24 deacon "ministers" with assignments for "x" number of families, with Grubbs noting Scripture says deacons are to serve the needs of the people.

The role of pastor also changed at Gladeville from a "chaplain" who visited the sick and elderly to one who preaches and proclaims the Word of God, a person who keeps the church's vision alive and one who guides the general life of the church in regard to staff and administration.

About three years ago the church, which has more than doubled in size and attendance over the past 10 years, made another transition in deacon ministry: from the family ministry plan to ministry teams.

Gladeville currently has deacon teams in six ministry areas: hospital visitation, grief ministry, homebound, help ministry, new members and communications. Some of the teams are further divided into sub-teams, Grubbs said. "The deacons are doing ministry that revolves around meeting the needs of the congregation. My role is to be an encourager and to help as needed," he said.

The stated objective of Gladeville's "Servant Team Ministry" is "to provide a ministry of care-giving to the people of our church and community through a servant team ministry led by the deacon fellowship involving as many of our members as possible."

Grubbs noted the deacons are the sponsoring group as well as leaders and participants in the ministry teams. They do not "control" the teams, Grubbs said. "You don't have to be a deacon to be on the team, or even to serve as chairman," he said.

The important thing is, Grubbs continued, "Who has the gifts? Who has the interest?"

"People like to work together and out of their gifts," Grubbs observed. "That is scriptural."

Butch O'Neal, chairman of the deacons when the transition was made, said the deacons had not been able to provide for their families as they wanted to. In looking at the transition, he said they found a "variety of gifts" within the deacon body.

After learning of the deacon ministry concept, they decided it would work for their congregation, he said.

Grubbs noted the concept is "a body producing fruit where the pastor is not the star. ... When you see the

congregation become producers of fruit, you understand how the kingdom of God is built."

Bill Davison, current chairman of deacons at Gladeville, said the ministry teams do not pose a territorial question. The ministries do not take anything away from the pastor. In fact, they have freed him up to do more for the church, he said.

O'Neal observed the teams provide "a real opportunity to be involved on the front line for God's work."

The three men acknowledged coordination is the key and keeping communications open. "The teams work well but it requires communication. You cannot do it by yourself," O'Neal said.

Grubbs acknowledged many churches across the Southern Baptist Convention still have deacon bodies that see themselves as "overseers" and that making the transition does not come overnight.

Grubbs said the question that must be asked is: Do the needy care who helps them?

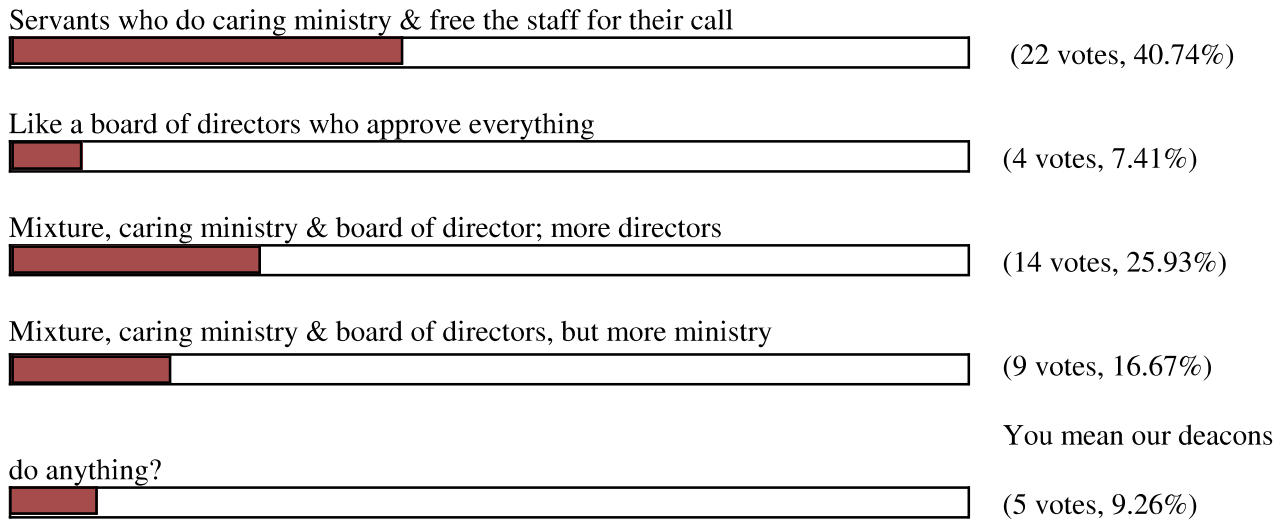
"It is not a matter of who does what, but that the work is done," he said.

Source: "Church's Deacons Transition From 'Overseers' to Ministers," Baptist Press, February 8, 1999
<http://www.baptistpress.org/Archive/BaptistPress/view.cgi?file=19990208.html>
and <http://www.ncbaptist.com/Feb99/Deacon.htm>

Suite101 Poll

An informal, non-scientific, poll of visitors to the web site

For Southern Baptists: What is the role of deacons at your church?



Source: Southern Baptist Section, Suite101.com

http://www.suite101.com/welcome.cfm/southern_baptists

Poll: http://www.i5ive.com/poll/results.cfm/southern_baptists/951

**CONSTITUTION
of the
Capitol Hill Baptist Church
Washington, D.C.**

Adopted by the membership on May 17, 1998

Article 5 - Officers

Section 1 - Summary

The Biblical offices in the church are elders and deacons. In addition, our church recognizes the administrative positions under this constitution of clerk and treasurer. All officers must be members of this church prior to assuming their responsibilities.

Section 2 - Elders

The elders shall be comprised of not less than three men who satisfy the qualifications for the office of elder set forth in I Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9. A majority of the active eldership shall be composed of church members not in the regular pay of the church, and no elder shall hold the office of deacon during his tenure.

Subject to the will of the congregation, the elders shall oversee the ministry and resources of the church. In keeping with the principles set forth in Acts 6:1-6 and I Peter 5:1-4, the elders shall devote their time to prayer, the ministry of the Word (by teaching and encouraging sound doctrine), and shepherding God's flock.

The church shall recognize men gifted and willing to serve in this calling, in accordance with the constitutional provisions on elections. These men shall be received as gifts of Christ to His church and set apart as elders. This recognition shall be reaffirmed by the church triennially. After an elder, other than the pastor, has served two consecutive three-year terms, he may only be elected to the office of elder after at least one year.

An elder's term of office may be terminated by resignation or by dismissal. Any two members with reason to believe that an elder should be dismissed should express such concern to the elders and, if need be, to the congregation. Any such action shall be done in accordance with the instructions of our Lord in Matthew 18:15-17 and I Timothy 5:17-21. Any of the elders may be dismissed by a two-thirds vote of the members at any members' meeting of the church.

The elders shall take particular responsibility to examine and instruct prospective members, examine and recommend all prospective candidates for offices and positions, oversee the work of the deacons and appointed church agents and committees, conduct worship services, administer the ordinances of baptism and communion, equip the membership for the work of the ministry, encourage sound doctrine and practice, admonish and correct error, oversee the process of church discipline, coordinate and promote the ministries of the church, and mobilize the church for world missions. The elders are further to ensure that all who minister the Word to the congregation, including outside speakers, share our fundamental convictions.

The elders may establish ministry positions or committees to assist them in fulfilling their responsibilities.

The elders may also propose paid staff positions, and elders shall present a job description for each position to the membership for approval. The membership may approve all candidates to fill such positions or may delegate this responsibility, on a position-by-position basis, to the elders, deacons, or other staff member.

The elders shall have primary responsibility for the employment, supervision, and evaluation of staff members. This responsibility may, on a case-by-case basis, be delegated to the deacons or other staff member.

The elders shall elect a chairman who shall serve as chairman of elders' meetings and as moderator of members' meetings. In his absence, the elders shall appoint another elder to fulfill these duties.

For purposes of compliance with the nonprofit corporation laws of the District of Columbia, the chairman of the elders shall serve as the president of the corporation.

Resolutions adopted by the elders shall be reported to the church at members' meetings and may be reversed by the church.

Section 3 - The Senior Pastor

The senior pastor shall be an elder. He shall perform the duties of an elder described in Section 2, above, but shall be recognized by the church as particularly gifted and called to the full-time ministry of preaching and teaching.

He shall preach on the Lord's Day, administer the ordinances of baptism and communion, and perform such other duties as usually pertain to that office, or as set forth in the constitution.

In the absence or incapacity of the senior pastor the elders shall assume responsibility for his duties, any of which can be delegated.

Section 4 - Deacons

The office of deacon is described in I Timothy 3:8-13 and Acts 6:1-7. The church shall recognize, in accordance with the constitutional provisions on elections, men and women who are giving of themselves in service to the church, who possess gifts of leadership, and who are called to further service. These members shall be received as gifts of Christ to His church and set apart as deacons. They shall be elected to one term lasting for a maximum of three years and may only be elected to another term after one year.

This section of this church's constitution may be found at:

<http://www.capitolhillbaptist.org/Constitution4.htm>

The index to this church's full constitution is located at:

<http://www.capitolhillbaptist.org/constitutionmain.htm>

**PARK AVENUE BAPTIST CHURCH
CONSTITUTION**

As Revised, May 3, 1992 and February 2, 1994
Pages 12-19, 25

Article VI. Principal Leaders and Officers of the Church

The principal leaders and officers of the church shall be the senior pastor, elders, deacons, trustees/directors, clerk, and treasurer. Other positions of leadership and service shall be established by the bylaws.

A. Senior Pastor

1. Qualifications

The pastor shall be a man who professes Jesus Christ as Savior, Lord, and Master, having been called by God unto the ministry of the gospel. He shall be an ordained minister whose Christian character and qualifications are consistent with the principles of faith and doctrine of this church. (1 Timothy 3:1-7)

2. Election

The pastor shall be called by the church and shall be elected for an indefinite period by its membership. His election shall take place at a meeting properly called and announced for that specific purpose. The membership shall have at least one week's notice of this meeting. The election shall be upon nomination of the pulpit committee and confirmation by the elders of a minister who fits the qualification of the office of senior pastor of this church according to the Scriptures. The committee shall present only one name at a time for consideration and no nomination shall be made except by the pulpit committee with confirmation by the elders. Election shall be by ballot with an affirmative vote of three-fourths vote of those qualified members present and voting. Church membership and confirmation as an elder of Park Avenue Baptist Church is included in the election as senior pastor. If the nominee fails to receive the required affirmative vote, the committee shall be instructed to seek out another candidate and the meeting shall be adjourned without debate.

3. Termination

The term of office of the senior pastor may be terminated voluntarily or involuntarily by written notice.

a. Voluntary termination

The senior pastor may terminate his term of service as senior pastor by submitting a written notice to the elders. The elders shall prayerfully consider the request and upon agreement shall announce to the church the voluntary termination of the senior pastor's term of office. Termination as senior pastor does not automatically mean termination as an elder. The elders shall announce termination as an elder also if it is included. Duties as senior pastor may terminate immediately or by terms announced by the elders.

b. Involuntary termination

The elders shall be charged with the involuntary termination of the term of office of the senior pastor should termination be required. Three-fourths of the elders must agree that termination is recommended. The recommendation would then be presented to the church at a business meeting called for that purpose. The membership shall have a minimum of one week notice, prior to the meeting. Termination shall be official by the majority vote of qualified members present and voting. A thirty day termination notice shall be given in writing by the church clerk. The duties and official actions of the senior pastor may be suspended by the elders upon their agreement to recommend termination by written notice from the elders.

4. Duties

The senior pastor shall submit to the elders for spiritual watchcare and guidance. The senior pastor shall be responsible for directing the staff and other leadership of the church in providing a structure and organization which facilitates spiritual growth and development of individuals and this part of the body of Christ. In conjunction with the elders, the pastor shall be responsible to arrange for the equipping of the saints in this part of the body by apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. As administrative head of the church, the pastor shall be responsible for developing organizations and policies necessary to carry out the ministry functions of the church and its people.

B. Elders

1. Qualifications

An elder shall be a man who professes Jesus Christ as Lord, Savior, and Master. He shall meet the requirements of 1 Timothy 3:1-7. He shall be a man of spiritual maturity as recognized by other leaders in the church. His Christian character and qualifications shall be consistent with the Affirmation of Faith and doctrine of this church. A proposed elder shall be a minimum of thirty-five years of age. He shall have been a member of this part of the body for at least two years and willingly submit himself to the other elders. References: 1 Timothy 3, Titus 1

Exception: The senior pastor may be excluded from the requirements to be a minimum of thirty-five years of age and to be a member of this part of the body for at least two years prior to being an elder. Each individual will be considered for the role as an elder according to their qualifications. A senior pastor who is called by this church will be considered to function as an elder upon his acceptance of a call by the church. The present elder body will consider the senior pastor for the position of chief elder as soon as practical.

Waiver of the 35 year old age limit may be accomplished by unanimous consent of the Elders.

2. Appointment, Confirmation and/or Reconfirmation

a. Appointment/Confirmation

There shall be a minimum of one elder for every 300 active church members. The maximum number of elders shall be established by the incumbent elders according to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Every effort shall be made to maintain an equal balance between lay members and staff members of the elder body in order that a broad base or representation of the membership and to the membership can be attained. However, the need for balance will not override the calling and qualification of the potential candidate.

The incumbent elders shall seek names of potential candidates from the church membership when a need arises to add elders to the body. After prayer they shall recommend those that they believe the Lord directs and present them to the church membership for confirmation. If the candidate for elder has not been ordained previously, an Ordination Council shall be appointed by the Chief Elder in accordance with the bylaws to examine the candidate and recommend his ordination by the church. The names of the elder candidates shall be published in the church bulletin for a period of three weeks. Any member believing he/she has a reason why a person should not be considered for the office of elder shall contact one of the elders stating the reason. If this reason is valid and can be confirmed according to scriptural principles, the name shall be withdrawn. If no charges are presented or confirmed, the name shall be presented for confirmation at a church business meeting. Election shall be by 2/3 vote of those members present and voting at the business meeting.

b. Reconfirmation

Incumbent elders shall be individually presented to the church body for reconfirmation to the office of elder at Park Avenue Baptist Church once every five years. The same method as original confirmation shall be used. The Senior Pastor shall be excluded from the reconfirmation process.

3. Duties

The elders are responsible for providing the vision and direction to the church. They are responsible for the government of the church as representatives of the people and God. They shall pastor the people by providing spiritual guidance, teaching, and by equipping the people for the work of the ministry. The elders, with assistance of the deacons, shall make provisions for each member to receive watchcare. The main function of the elders and deacons is to provide the atmosphere and structure to enable individuals to develop their relationship with God and each other by appropriating the character of Jesus Christ and functioning daily in the obedience to our Father God by the power of Holy Spirit. The elders shall be responsible for providing scripture interpretations to assist our people in knowledge of the Holy Scripture. They shall provide and approve direction, through the senior pastor, of the church staff. They shall provide the senior pastor with guidance and support. The elders shall give approval and authority for all ministry done in the name of Park Avenue Baptist Church. This is not to discourage or prevent the ministry of an individual church member as they are called and directed by the Lord.

The senior pastor shall be designated chief elder. If there is no senior pastor the elders shall elect by ballot one of the elders to serve as chief elder until a senior pastor is called and is qualified to serve as chief elder. The elders shall decide when a new senior pastor is qualified.

The elders shall make, approve, and recommend to the church bylaws which define the operations of the church and the organizations necessary to function properly. These bylaws shall be written.

4. Termination

A person may be terminated from the office of elder as follows:

- a. He may resign.
- b. He shall be terminated if he fails to fulfill the requirements for continuing membership at Park Avenue Baptist Church.
- c. If he does not perform the duties of an elder.
- d. If he becomes an offense to the Name and cause of Jesus Christ by his conduct.

The group of elders shall be responsible for disciplining and/or removing from office any individual elder, according to established bylaws. Announcement of removal of an elder shall be made to the church membership within 30 days of removal.

C. Deacons

1. Qualifications

A candidate for deacon shall be examined in accordance with the scriptures. Acts 6:3 and 1 Timothy 3:8-13. He must have been a member of Park Avenue Baptist Church for at least one year. If a candidate has moved his membership from this church after having met the above requirements and then returned, he shall have been a member at least one year since his return to be eligible to serve as deacon.

A deacon shall be a minimum of 25 years of age.

A deacon must be a person who has been active in service at Park Avenue Baptist Church. He shall be able and willing to give the time that the responsibilities as a deacon will entail.

2. Election

- a. A candidate must have proven himself in service to be considered.
- b. A candidate should be recommended to the deacon selection committee by members of the church because of their recognized service which fits the function of

a deacon.

c. The deacon selection committee shall seek candidates when necessary for presentation to the elders. If the candidate for deacon has not been ordained previously, an Ordination Council shall be appointed by the Chief Elder in accordance with the bylaws to examine the candidate and recommend his ordination by the church. Upon approval by the elders the candidates shall be presented to the church by publishing their names in the church bulletin for three (3) consecutive weeks. Any church member knowing a reason that a candidate should not serve should make it known to the committee or one of the elders. If the reason is valid and can be confirmed according to scriptural principles the candidate's name shall be withdrawn. If no charges are confirmed the candidate shall be presented to the church at a business meeting for confirming election. Election shall be by 2/3 vote of those members present and voting at a business meeting.

3. Term of office

There shall be no prescribed term of office but a deacon shall cease to be a deacon at PABC when he ceases to function as a deacon as described in the section of the constitution describing the duties of a deacon. The names of functioning deacons shall be published annually. The elders shall review annually the need for additional deacons to function and shall appoint a deacon selection committee to seek qualified candidates.

4. Duties

Deacons shall assist the elders in pastoring and serving the people of this local church body. The deacons shall serve as extensions of the elders in imparting vision, providing watchcare and protection, establishing supportive structures and enabling individual and collective growth of our people to the honor and glory of Jesus Christ. As servants of the people they are to seek to know the concerns, cares, and needs of the people individually and collectively and make them known to the elders so that prayer, provision, guidance, and teaching might be focused according to God's guidance and direction to the benefit of the Kingdom of God in our present generation.

Deacons, as a part of their duty, may be assigned by the elders and confirmed by the congregation as specified in the bylaws to areas which support the ministry of the church. Bylaws shall specify details of each area including organization and authority necessary to accomplish the task. Deacons have a special responsibility to lead the church in provision for widows and orphans according to the Scripture.

5. Termination

A person shall cease to function as a deacon of Park Avenue Baptist Church

- a. When there is no longer a need for the service he is performing.
- b. If he fails to perform the function that he is assigned.
- c. Should he fail to live up to the requirements by which he was selected. If a

deacon becomes an offense to the Name and cause of Jesus Christ by his conduct he shall be removed from the office of deacon by the elders in accordance with scripture requirements.

c. For failure to perform his/her duties satisfactorily and/or engages in activities which are an offense to the Name of Jesus according to church beliefs and practices. Terminations shall be according to established personnel policy.

Article VII. Special Committees

B. Deacon Selection Committee

The deacon selection committee shall function to receive, review, and recommend candidates for the office of deacon. The chief elder, with confirmation from the elders, shall appoint three to five deacons to act as a deacon selection committee. This committee shall cease to function upon confirmation of the recommended candidates as deacons of Park Avenue Baptist Church.

**From Briarwood Presbyterian Church
Presbyterian Church in America**

The Role of a Deacon

Biblical Basis for Deacons

The New Testament sets forth two classes of officers designated to serve the Church: elders and deacons. See Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:1, 8. The institution of the Diaconate is recorded in Acts 6:1-6 when the twelve apostles summoned the congregation of disciples and selected from this larger group seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and wisdom, whom the apostles could put in charge of the task of carrying for the needs of widows. (Acts 6:3). The apostles set aside a group of men to minister to the physical needs of the congregation so that the apostles and teaching elders might be able to devote [themselves] to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. (Acts 6:4). Following this division of labor in the local church, the word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith. (Acts 6:7).

In 1 Tim. 3:8-10, the Apostle Paul set forth the qualifications of a deacon, as follows:

Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain, but holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach. 1 Tim. 3:8- 10 (NASB).

The Deacon in the Presbyterian Church in America

The Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) recognizes two ordinary and perpetual classes of officers: elders and deacons. Under the Reformed or Presbyterian system of church government, elders are divided into teaching elders and ruling elders. As a body, the elders have responsibility for the government and spiritual oversight of the church as well as for teaching, except that only certain elders called by God may serve as teaching elders. In contrast, the PCA Book of Church Order (BCO) provides that the office of deacon is not one of rule, but rather of service both to the physical and spiritual needs of the congregation. (BCO at Page 7-2).

The office of deacon is one of sympathy and service, after the example of the Lord Jesus; it expresses also the communion of the saints, especially in their helping one another in time of need. (BCO at Page 9-1). The Book of Church Order specifies the tasks to be carried out by the Diaconate, as follows:

It is the duty of the deacons to minister to those who are in need, to the sick, the friendless, and to any who may be in distress. It is their duty also to develop the grace of liberality in the members of the church, to devise effective methods of collecting the gifts of the people, and to distribute the gifts among the objects to which they are contributed. They shall have the care of the property of the congregation, both real and personal, and shall keep in proper repair the church edifice and other buildings belonging to the congregation. In matters of special importance affecting the property of the church, they cannot take final action without the approval of the Session and the consent of the congregation. (BCO at Page 9-2 (emphasis added)).

The Role of a Deacon at Briarwood

The role of the Diaconate at Briarwood varies slightly from the function of the Diaconate as described in the PCA Book of Church Order. In our church, the Session (the body of elders) has entrusted to certain full-time staff members the day-to-day management of the Church's financial affairs (Church Administrator and Director of Accounting and Information Systems) and the Church's grounds and facilities (Director of Facilities and Security). Diaconate committees provide support and guidance to these staff members through Diaconate committees such as the Property & Equipment Committee and through service on Sessional committees such as the Stewardship & Budget Committee and the Long Range Planning Committee. The Diaconate, however, has no direct oversight responsibility for these areas in our church.

Property transactions are handled by the Corporate Trustees of the church under the direction of the Session and subject to congregational approval as provided in the Book of Church Order and in the church's corporate documents.

The Briarwood Diaconate shoulders specific responsibility for certain functions outlined in the Book of Church Order. For example, the Diaconate carries out its responsibility to develop the grace of liberality and to devise effective methods of collecting the gifts of the people by coordinating the Every Member Canvas stewardship campaign and receiving the weekly offerings in the Worship Services and depositing the funds received through the offerings. The Diaconate also has primary responsibility for the Church's Ministry of Mercy through the Mercy Committee. By performing these functions, we enable the church to operate in an efficient manner, thus freeing the ministerial staff and elders to more effectively devote themselves to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. (Acts 6:4).

The members of the Diaconate also play an important role in facilitating an environment that allows men, women, and children to come to Briarwood to worship God free from distractions and interruptions. From the parking lots to the pews, deacons serve members and visitors from behind the scenes by carrying out a variety of small, but important, tasks. Deacons in the parking lot areas monitor the flow of traffic and parking conditions and assist families in crossing the busy intersections surrounding the church buildings. These men often offer the first words of greeting that visitors and members hear as they arrive for worship. Duty deacons greet worshipers a second time as they enter the buildings and provide directions and assistance to visitors and members alike. Duty deacons also free ministerial staff members to focus on teaching and ministering to visitors and to members without worrying over the myriad of tasks that must be completed each time the doors of the church are open. Ushers greet worshipers as they enter the worship service and coordinate receipt of the tithes and offerings. Counters insure that the Lord's funds are properly accounted for. The primary mission of the Diaconate, however, as instituted in Acts 6:1-6 and further emphasized in Chapters 7 and 9 of the PCA Book of Church Order is service both to the physical and spiritual needs of the people. (BCO at Page 7-2). Our task is to determine how to best accomplish this mission in meeting the needs of our congregation as we take part in the process of worshiping God and equipping Christians to reach Birmingham to reach the world for Christ.

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ORGANIZATION AND ADMINISTRATION

Section V. The Ordained Deacon in Full Connection (Pages 186-188)

¶ 319. The Ministry of a Deacon—From among the baptized, deacons are called by God to a lifetime of servant leadership, authorized by the Church, and ordained by a bishop. Deacons fulfill servant ministry in the world and lead the Church in relating the gathered life of Christians to their ministries in the world, interrelating worship in the gathered community with service to God in the world. Deacons give leadership in the Church's life: in the teaching and proclamation of the Word; in worship, and in assisting the elders in the administration of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper; in forming and nurturing disciples, in conducting marriages and burying the dead; in the congregation's mission to the world; and in leading the congregation in interpreting the needs, concerns, and hopes of the world. It is the deacons, in both person and function, whose distinctive ministry is to embody, articulate, and lead the whole people of God in its servant ministry. From the earliest days of the church, deacons were called and set apart for the ministry of love, justice, and service; of connecting the church with the most needy, neglected, and marginalized among the children of God. This ministry grows out of the Wesleyan passion for social holiness and ministry among the poor.

Deacons lead the congregation in its servant ministry and equip and support all baptized Christians in their ministry. The distinct ministry of the deacon has evolved in United Methodism over many years—the continuing work of the deaconess, the home missionary, and the diaconal minister. The Church, recognizing the gifts and impact of all predecessor embodiments of the diaconate and providing for the continuation of the office of deaconess, affirms that this distinctiveness is made visible and central to the Church's life and ministry through ordination and that the ministry of the deacon is a faithful response of the mission of the Church meeting the emerging needs of the future. Deacons are accountable to the annual conference and the bishop for the fulfillment of their call to servant leadership.

¶ 320. *Ministry, Authority, and Responsibilities of Deacons in Full Connection*— I. Deacons are persons called by God, authorized by the Church, and ordained by a bishop to a lifetime ministry of Word and Service to both the community and the congregation in a ministry that connects the two. Deacons exemplify Christian discipleship and create opportunities for others to enter into discipleship. In the world, the deacon seeks to express a ministry of compassion and justice, assisting laypersons as they claim their own ministry. In the congregation, the ministry of the deacon is to teach and to form disciples, and to lead worship together with other ordained and laypersons.

Section VI. The Ordained Elder in Full Connection (Page 194)

¶ 323. Ministry of an Elder—Elders are ordained ministers who, by God's grace, have completed their formal preparation and have been commissioned and served as a probationary member, have been found by the Church to be of sound learning, of Christian character, possessing the necessary gifts and evidence of God's grace, and whose call by God to ordination has been confirmed by the Church. Elders are ordained to a lifetime ministry of Service, Word, Sacrament and Order. They are authorized to preach and teach the Word of God, to administer the sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion, and to order the life of the Church for mission and ministry. The servant leadership of the elder is expressed by leading the people of God in worship and prayer, by leading persons to faith in Jesus Christ, by exercising pastoral supervision in the congregation, and by leading the Church in obedience to mission in the world.

As members of the Order of Elder, all elders are in covenant with all other elders in the annual conference and shall participate in the life of their Order.