

Valley Church Governance Document for
Deacon and Deaconess
Approved by board on July 18, 2017

In Acts 6, the Bible speaks to the establishing the office of Deacons to relieve the elders in the performance of part of their duties, that of serving the individual needs of the members of the church body, so that they can prioritize their time to teach the Word of God and devote themselves to prayer. Deacons meet practical needs and operate under the authority of the elder board in accomplishment of the overall mission and vision of the church.

I. Definition of Deacons

The Greek word for Deacon is *diakonos*. It is used in the New Testament to describe literal servants. (John 2:5,9; Matthew 22:13). However, *diakonos* is most often used in a figurative sense to refer to servants of God. (Romans 15:8; Romans 16:1; 1 Cor. 3:5; 2 Cor. 6:4; Ephesians 6:21; Colossians 1:7). Both the noun *diakonia* and the verb *diakoneo* are used in the New Testament in the narrower, specific sense of practical service rendered to those who are suffering and in need. (Acts 11:29; Acts 12:25; Romans 15:31; 2 Corinthians 8:4; 2 Corinthians 9:1; Acts 6:1; Matt 25:44; Romans 15:25,26. Paul also uses the term as a fixed title, like “overseer” for a distinct body of officials. (Phil 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:8-13.)

In the book of Acts, Luke uses the word *diakonia* to describe the duty or form of service assigned to the “seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom”, called to serve at the tables of daily distribution to the widows. The institution of “The Seven” is the second defined group of disciples, “The Twelve” being the first, to be given a ministry in the Church. The appointment of those within the church who would meet practical needs, thus allowed the apostles to devote themselves to “prayer and the ministry of the Word.” Acts 6:4

“The question of whether Deaconship is an office or work is easily answered: it’s both. It’s obviously a work to perform, yet it’s an office because it requires qualifications and an examination of entry, and it entails appointment to an official, public position for entry with prescribed duties and designated authority.” (*The New Testament Deacon* by Alexander Strauch, p. 71)

Further study of the word *diakonos* indicate this office was held by both men and women.

1. The Greek word for Deacon can be masculine or feminine in the same form.
2. In the middle of the qualifications for Deacons in 1 Timothy 3:8-13 Paul mentions qualifications of women. This could be the wives of the Deacons, but probably refers to women Deacons.
3. The Deacons were distinguished from the elders in that they were not the governing body in the church nor were they charged with the duty of authoritative teaching. So the role of Deacon seems not to involve anything that Paul taught (in 1 Timothy 2:12 or anywhere else) is inappropriate for women to perform in the church.
4. Finally, in Romans 16:1,2 Phoebe is very probably called a Deacon.

It appears then that the role of Deacon is of such a nature that nothing stands in the way of women's full participation in it. (excerpted from "*Rethinking the Governance Structure at Bethlehem Baptist Church*")

From these uses of the word *diakonos* we can conclude that the New Testament Deacons are men and women who are official ministers of a local church. Their duties are to follow and assist the leadership of the church by relieving the elders of distractions and pressures that would divert them from the ministry of the Word and prayer and the general, visionary oversight of the church.

Therefore we define the office of Deacon - "A Deacon is an officer within the church who is set apart to ensure that 1) the elders are freed up to focus on prayer and ministry of the Word and 2) the practical needs within the church are met."

II. Differences Between Elders and Deacons

The Deacons are distinguished from the elders and pastors in that they are not a governing body in the church nor are they charged with the duty of authoritative teaching.

Deacons operate under the authority of the board of elders and under the leadership of the particular area of ministry where they serve. They do not meet as a separate board and do not have authority outside of their ministry area.

III. Qualifications of Deacons (Male or Female)

The qualifications of a Deacon give us the idea that men and women in this position must of high commitment to Christ, integrity and character. These Deacons are entrusted with leading our most valuable resources, the people

God has entrusted to Valley Church. In addition, they may handle sensitive or confidential information, and may often administrate funds.

1. A Deacon must be born again, born of the spirit (John 3:1-5)
2. A Deacon must be full of wisdom and full of faith (Acts 6:3)
3. A Deacon must be sober not be double-tongued, not be given to wine, and not be greedy. (1Tim 3:8)
4. A Deacon must be tested and found to be above reproach. (1 Tim 3:10)
5. A Deacon must be chaste if single and faithful to his or her spouse if married. (1 Tim. 3:12)
6. A Deacon must have a house that is ruled well (1Tim 3:12).
7. A Deacon must be a member of Valley Church.

Deaconesses

8. A Deaconess must also be respectful (1Tim 3:11) and not a slanderer (1 Tim. 3:11)
9. A Deaconess must be sober and faithful in all things. (1 Tim. 3:11)

IV. Responsibilities of Deacons

Deacons are different than a typical ministry servant, i.e. usher, in that they are called by the elders to this position and confirmed by the congregation. At Valley Church Deacons serve by equipping others within the church to meet practical needs. We limit the office to people who deploy others in this way, rather than apply this to all ministry servants. Deacons are “hands on” kinds of people, but ones who lead, recruit, and train as they do the practical work of ministry.

Deacons underlying role is to meet practical and material needs, but they could also care for the building and grounds, supply the communion and baptismal needs, provide for food and fellowship needs, administer a fund for the material needs of the people and be ready to step in during crises of all kinds, handle the greeting and welcoming ministries, and provide practical assistance in job-hunting, housing matters, legal-aid, child-care, etc. In general, they would be ready to assist the elders and pastors of the church in any “service” that would support and promote the ministry of the Word.

V. Organization and term of Deacons

Deacons will be connected organizationally to the ministry they “serve”, i.e. Children, Youth, Worship, Property, Missions, Benevolence, etc. Deacons will be supported by and accountable to the leader of that ministry. Those ministry leaders are supported by and accountable to one of the Knowing, Growing, or Showing Point Pastors, who are supported and accountable to the Lead Pastor. He is supported by and accountable to the Elder Board. Communication and support will follow this flow of ministry.

Deacons will be approved for a three-year term. This would give them the opportunity to step down as the Lord leads after three years and would also allow new people into servant leadership. Deacons may be reapproved for a second three year term, but would need to take one year off after two consecutive terms. Any Deacons renewing their service must go through the process of board and congregation approval. Term duration will be monitored by the Deacon and by their Ministry Leader.

VI. Selection and Approval of Deacons

1. Deacons will be nominated by currently serving elders and pastors. Names can be suggested from the congregation through pastors and elders to the board for the office of Deacon. (Acts 6:3)
2. Deacons will be nominated to support existing ministries or for new or under-represented ministries that are deemed important and yet do not have an existing support structure. Elders will provide guidance on the priorities of ministries needing support and the roles of the Deacons.
3. Ministry Leaders supervising each Deacon will provide a job description to board for the specific Deacon.
4. Elders will evaluate each candidate for Deacon and vote to allow the Candidate to become an Intern Deacon.
5. Intern Deacons must be proven for at least six months of service in the ministry they plan to serve in before being appointed as Deacons. (1Tim 3:10) During this time they will read and discuss “New Testament Deacons” by Strauch with their ministry leader and elders if so desired. Candidates who are have already served for six months in a ministry area will read Strauch prior to confirmation.
6. Intern Deacons will affirm or deny their desire to be Deacon, and the elders will confirm or deny his appointment by a vote.
7. While elders will take the lead in the nomination, additional inputs will also be sought from the congregation with regards to the qualifications of the nominees. Intern Deacons will be presented to congregation three weeks before a congregational vote of affirmation is called and voted on to three-year term. Voting members of the congregation will then confirm the names of the nominees.
8. New Deacons will be announced to the congregation.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Q: What does a Deacon DO?

A: “A Deacon is an administrative officer within the church who is set apart to ensure that 1) the elders are freed up to focus on prayer and ministry of the Word and 2) the practical needs within the church are met.” As part of the leadership in that ministry area, the Deacon will meet regularly with their ministry leader for encouragement, prayer, and ministry refinement. Deacons

will also have the opportunity for more exposure to the pastors and elders of Valley church as they serve side by side in ministry. They will meet at least monthly with their ministry leader to discuss and pray for the ministry they are serving in.

Q: How do Deacons fit into the governance structure of Valley Church? Do they have “authority” over others within the church?

A: Deacons operate under the authority of the board of elders as delegated through leadership of the particular area of ministry where they serve. They do not meet as a separate board and do not have authority outside of their ministry area.

Q: How does the Biblical office of Deacon differ from other ministry leaders?

A: We have many people serving at Valley Church, but Deacons are 1.) called by the elders to this position and 2.) confirmed by the congregation. As such they have a greater ministry opportunity to those who do not know them. They are visible, available, and accountable to the congregation they serve. In addition, Deacons are constantly deploying, equipping, and encouraging others to serve.

Q: What will happen when Deacon finishes their three year term of service?

A: When Deacons finish their term, there are two options; 1) Deacons resign from that ministry and a new Deacon to step into that position or 2) resign from being a Deacon but continues to serve in the ministry in some other ministry capacity.

Q: Do we appoint Deacons to positions (i.e. Global Outreach Chairman), and then REQUIRE those positions to be rotated when the Deacon’s term of service ends?

A: No. Deacons serve for three years at a time. Ministry positions are not tied directly to being a Deacon. In the case of GO team chairman, an individual could serve as chair, even though someone else serves as Deacon.

Q: How many Deacons will we have?

A: While the New Testament only names “the seven”, we see no reason why more could not be appointed. This pattern was repeated in New Testament churches beyond Jerusalem. (Phil. 1:1)

Q: What are the advantages and rewards of being a Deacon?

A: 1 Timothy 3:13 “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.”