



Statement on Deacon Ministry

Purpose

TCBC deacons exist to serve the household of God by identifying and meeting tangible needs, protecting the church's mission, and promoting unity within the body, in accordance with Scripture.

Background and Vision

We believe that the NT clearly establishes the designation of specific individuals in the church who are to serve in the office of deacon and deaconess. While Acts 6:1-6 does not use the term *deacon* to describe Stephen, Phillip and the other men chosen to assist the apostles, the passage in many ways does describe the prototypical characteristics and focus of those who were soon to be called *deacons*. By the time the church was established at Philippi, and the writing of Paul's first letter to Timothy, the designation of *deacon* appears to have had a commonly accepted understanding (Philippians 1:1; 1 Tim 3:8-13).

That not all people in a church who are serving are to be designated as *deacon* seems clear from the fact that there is a distinction between deacons and elders (who both serve) and also that there are distinct qualifications that are necessary above and beyond the act of serving others and assisting the elders. The qualifications for deacons are established in 1 Tim 3:8-13 and, similar to the criteria for the prototype deacon in Acts 6, there are no particular skill-related (aptitude) criteria given. This is in contrast to elders who must demonstrate aptitude in teaching. For example, in Acts 6, there clearly needed to be organizational skills necessary to assess and meet the needs of the Hellenistic widows. However, the criteria to select these men were integrity and faithfulness, criteria essential to restoring unity to the body so that the Apostles (prototypes for elders) could return to prayerful study of the Word and preparation for teaching the people while having the joy of knowing that the body was unified in their fellowship. (Hebrews 13:17)

Thus, the primary task of the deacons has been described by some as *peace keepers* and *shock absorbers*,¹ attributes that require the 1 Timothy qualifications of integrity and guarded speech, as well as evidence of leadership and

management in their homes, just as with elders. The elders are clearly designated in Scripture as *overseers* and thus lead the church body as a whole, including those members who serve as deacons. Under the leadership of the elders, deacons then serve the practical needs of the church corporately and individually, allowing the elders to be devoted to prayer, the ministry of the Word, and to the provision of spiritual oversight. Elders and deacons will function together in unity, desiring to fulfill their respective roles in service to the local church and its head, Christ Jesus.

Selection

Unlike the selection of overseers, selection of deacons is not mandated by Scripture. If needed, however, selection of deacons will be based first and foremost on the qualifications outlined in 1 Timothy. We believe Scripture allows for the selection of female deacons (deaconesses) at the discretion of the elders. In choosing from among qualified members, elders may take into consideration particular needs of the church, but aptitude for doing a specific practical need of the church is never to be a stand-alone qualification for serving as a deacon. For this reason, deacons may be tasked with particular areas of responsibility for which they have no specific skill set, depending upon the church's needs. In these cases, the deacon is responsible for identifying and leading members who have the practical skills to meet a church need (in such categories as the physical building and grounds, Information Technology, bookkeeping, etc.). However, those considered for the deacon position should be readily identified by the congregation and the elders as members who have demonstrated a strong desire for service and who are already serving in a practical way.

The number of deacons selected at a particular time is dependent upon the needs of the church as identified by the elders. This will result in the possibility that many qualified individuals may not be asked to serve in this capacity at a given time. Deacons will be encouraged and expected to utilize such members in service, thus training and giving experience to those who may serve in the future. This process of preparing others to serve will ensure that the needs of the church are met in the future and protects against a particular area of service becoming dependent upon a single individual. While there are no predetermined term limits, we believe that a process of preparing new deacons and ultimately transitioning responsibilities to other qualified members is healthy for the church and should be pursued intentionally.

Structure/Role

Small Group Ministry

1. Elders will be responsible for the spiritual oversight of at least one deacon and member Care Group.
2. Each Care Group will have at least one deacon assigned to it. Deacons will be responsible for regularly attending the Care Group. The deacon may or may not lead said Care Group, but will identify and assist with the practical needs of members of their group.
3. Along with the Care Group leader, deacons will alert the elders of any spiritual/shepherding needs within their group and will also report any issues requiring additional assistance.

Other Areas of Deacon Responsibility

Deacons with particular responsibilities related to church function or ministries will meet regularly with the elders for oversight. The frequency of these meetings will be dependent upon the nature of the service/ministry. Areas of deacon responsibility may include:

1. Buildings and Grounds
2. Finances
3. Security
4. Benevolence/Mercy-ministry/Helps (including widow care)
5. Missions
6. Assimilation
7. Ushering/Communion
8. Special Events
9. Technology

References:

1. Dunlop, Mark <http://9marks.org/article/deacons-shock-absorbers-and-servants/>

Recommended Reading List:

Ministry of Mercy: The New Testament Deacon- Alexander Strauch

Conviction to Lead- Albert Mohler

The Book on Leadership- John Mac/