

Operations of the Deacon Team

by David A. Huston and Jim McKinley

This paper is presented to describe how deacons are selected and appointed and to provide practical guidelines for the operation of a biblical deacon team.

‘For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve [diakoneo], and to give His life a ransom for many.’

Mark 10:45

JESUS CHRIST IS THE MODEL OF THE NEW TESTAMENT DEACON. His mission in life was not to take from others but to give. It was not to be served but to serve. No one forced Him to take on the role of a servant; He did it because of His love for man. And in John 13:15, after having washed the feet of His disciples, He said, “For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Every born again believer is called to be a servant of the Lord, but those who are appointed to provide on-going service within an organized framework are called *deacons*.”

The Origin and Purpose of Deacons

The origin of deacons as a distinct function in a local assembly is found in Acts 6:1-6. In this passage, seven men from the church at Jerusalem were appointed by the apostles to ensure the equitable treatment of the widows in the church. The work of these men is referred to twice as “serving” (*diakonia*).

Acts 6:1-6

Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution (*diakonia*).² Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, “It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve (*diakoneo*)

tables. 3 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; 4 but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry (*diakonia*) of the word. 5 And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, 6 whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them.

Rather than being distracted from their primary responsibilities of teaching the Word and prayer, the apostles appointed seven men to take care of the needy widows. Their service was different in character from that of the apostles, but was nevertheless an important spiritual work.

Though never specifically called deacons in this passage, the emphasis on their service can be viewed as a prototype of the role the deacons would fulfill as the young church became established throughout the world.

Several observations can be made from this passage:

1. The apostles (serving as the initial elders of the church at Jerusalem) recognized the need and went to the people for help.
2. The prospective deacons were nominated for appointment by the people using qualifications supplied by the apostles. After prayerful consideration, the apostles made the appointments.
3. Specific qualities were required in those being considered for appointment as deacons. They had to be men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. In other words, they had to be well thought of among the people, they had to be spiritual or Spirit-led men, and they had to be men of good sense and sound judgment.
4. Throughout the Bible, the number seven symbolically means fulness or completion. We can therefore interpret the reference to seven men as indicating that the number of deacons needed in any local assembly should be whatever number is necessary to complete the work.
5. The deacons were appointed publically by the overseers of the assembly through the laying on of hands.

By examining this passage carefully, we can uncover the underlying purpose of the service these men provided to the local assembly:

1. **They worked to eliminate whatever might be hindering the elders from doing their primary work.** They did this by taking over the daily distribution of food from the apostles. This freed them to devote more time to prayer and teaching the Word of God.
2. **They worked to eliminate the underlying causes of disunity in the assembly.** The inadequate job the apostles were doing in distributing food had resulted in discord and division within the local body, the Hellenists feeling neglected. The neglect was certainly not intentional, but was rather the result of the apostles having too much to do. By appointing deacons to take over this task, the quality of the work improved, no one felt neglected, and unity was restored.

The happy result of appointing these men was: 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 6:7). When an assembly is unified and its leaders are praying and proclaiming the Word of the Lord, the assembly will grow as God gives the increase.

Ready and Willing Service

In God's plan, the elders reflect the oversight aspects of Jesus Christ's Headship and the deacons reflect the service aspects.

Since the word *deacon* means ***one who attends to the needs of others***, providing high quality service and care to the people of the local assembly should be the foremost concern of every deacon. Even though Paul's admonition of Romans 12:11 applies to every believer, it has special application to anyone who would serve as a deacon: **Not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord....** ”

Jesus is the model of servanthood. When His disciples argued about which would be the greatest, Jesus said, **Yet I am among you as the One who serves** (Luke 22:27). Based on this reality, Paul exhorted, **Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who...made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant** (Philippians 2:7).

The Bible tells us to **serve the LORD with all your heart** (1 Samuel 12:20); **serve the LORD with gladness** (Psalms 100:2); **serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear** (Hebrews 12:28). Deacons must not pursue their work

with a frivolous or lackadaisical attitude but rather with vigor, diligence, enthusiasm, gladness, and reverence for the seriousness and importance of the work. It is the work of God!

Serving as a deacon must not be looked upon as a less important function than other gifts and service within the body. Look, for example, at the first men chosen to serve the assembly in this way at Jerusalem: Stephen was said to be a man full of faith and power, who did great wonders and signs among the people (Acts 6:8). He was also the first recorded Christian martyr. Philip was the evangelist who went down to Samaria where the multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did (Acts 8:6).

These men demonstrate that there is no incongruity between serving as a deacon and being a competent preacher of the Word. Stephen and Philip were appointed by the apostles as part of a seven-man team to serve in a specific way. By virtue of their God-given gifts, these two men also operated in a powerful ministry of the Word. Of Stephen the Bible says, "They were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke" (Acts 6:10).

As Paul told Timothy, "Those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 3:13). Providing faithful service to a local assembly as a deacon brings many spiritual blessings to a man's life and ministry.

Qualities of Deacons

Acts 6:3

Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom.... "

It would be a mistake to assume that because a man is a gifted server, he is automatically qualified to become a member of the deacon team. Acts 6 demonstrates that certain service tasks require men who are not only capable, but also spiritual and of high moral character. Both gifts *and* godly character are required. The personal qualities of men being considered as deacons are detailed in 1 Timothy 3 where Paul listed the qualities of those who should be appointed as deacons. This list appears immediately following the list of qualities Timothy was to look for in those desiring to serve as overseers (elders).

Paul's underlying purpose for providing these lists was to protect God's people from unqualified and unscrupulous men, of which there has never been a shortage. As he warned the elders of Ephesus, "After my departure savage wolves will come

in among you, not sparing the flock (Acts 20:29). Some men hunger for positions of leadership simply to satisfy their own desire for power or prestige. Others are deceived about their character or abilities. In His wisdom and love, God has provided an objective list of qualities by which the subjective desires of men can be measured and evaluated.

1 Timothy 3:8-12

Likewise deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, 9 holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. 10 But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless. 11 Likewise their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things. 12 Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well.

For Paul's list of qualities to have significance, each assembly must understand what he meant by the words he used. As is often the case in the Bible, the definitions can be found within the context of their use. For example, the word *reverent* could be defined as dignified, respectable, honorable, devout, or of godly character. But even these terms can mean different things to different people. Therefore, Paul helped us understand what he meant by the word *reverent* when he explained what being reverent is not: it is not being double-tongued, not given to much wine, and not greedy for money.

Honesty: To be *double-tongued* means to be deceitful and dishonest. It means that your word cannot be trusted. You say you will do something and then never follow through. You say one thing to one person and something else to another. It means that no one really knows what you stand for. Such a man is too untrustworthy and unreliable to take on the serious responsibilities of a deacon. A man who is not double-tongued is said to be honest.

Temperance: To be *given to much wine* should not be limited to alcoholism, but must be expanded to include the abuse or misuse of any intoxicating substance such as drugs, including many legal drugs. A man who would do the work of a deacon must be unwilling to place himself under the influence of any mind-altering substance or become dependent on any destructive substance such as tobacco. His responsibilities require him to be clear-headed at all times. This quality could even be expanded to include overindulgence in food and entertainment, since over the course of time these can negatively effect a man's thinking. A man who is not given to intoxication is said to be sober and temperate.

Contentment: To be *greedy for money* means to be excessively focused on the material things of life. It can include the lust for accumulating money, the lust for acquiring possessions, or the fear of not having enough money. The fear of

becoming poor is just as destructive as the desire to be rich. Since deacons are frequently involved with the money and possessions of the assembly, they must be above reproach in financial matters. They must be good managers of their household finances, demonstrating care, good judgment, and generosity. According to 1 Timothy 6, a man who is not greedy for money is content.

Faith and Conscience: A *reverent man* is therefore one who speaks directly and honestly, who is sober-minded and temperate in all things, showing sound judgment and good sense in all matters of life, and who is neither lustful nor miserly concerning money, but is both prudent and generous —a man who is content.

Paul helped us to further understand what he meant by *reverent* when he concluded that such a man holds the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. ” In other words, he sincerely and consistently puts into practice what he believes —a man whose doctrine and life are in harmony. He is not a hypocrite —a person who professes to know God but in works denies him. But neither is he so perfect that he never errs or falls short. What makes him a reverent man is that when he does fail, he honestly admits it, repents, and keeps on going.

Domestic Life: We can also see from Paul’s list that being reverent has a lot to do with a man’s domestic life. How he relates to his wife and children tells a lot about how he will relate to the people of the assembly. To be the husband of one wife ” means literally a one-woman man. In other words, if he is married, a man must be a loyal and faithful husband: a strong, caring, supportive head of his wife. If he has children, he must be a strong, caring, involved father. He must not dump the entire parenting task on his wife, but must be actively involved in raising up his children in the training and admonition of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4).

The idea here is that a man who leads well and cares for his wife and children will have a home that exemplifies God’s design for love, order, and purpose in the church. It can then be presumed that such a man will understand the need for kind, conscientious, and purposeful service in the local assembly.

Since a deacon’s wife will work closely with her husband and may be involved in many of the deacon team’s service projects, Paul also provided a brief criteria for wives. Like their husbands, they must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things (1 Timothy 3:11). Can a wife’s poor character disqualify her husband from serving on the deacon team? Absolutely.

Paul’s list of personal qualities should not be considered exhaustive, but rather descriptive of the general qualities necessary for a man to serve effectively as a deacon. For instance, stealing is not specifically forbidden; yet such behavior is

obviously inconsistent with the character qualities of a deacon. Similarly, if a man is not married or has no children, he must nevertheless demonstrate the character traits consistent with being a one-woman man and a strong, caring father. If he is single, he must be a good manager of his home —his life and conduct demonstrating a clear commitment to God's will for the home and family.

In the end, Paul's list of qualities are designed to reveal who in the assembly is of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom (Acts 6:3). These are the men who should be doing the work of deacons.

It should be noted that conspicuously absent from Paul's list of qualities is any requirement that a deacon have any kind of speaking ability. Though some members of a deacon team may be capable speakers, the ability to preach or teach is not a requirement, only the willingness and ability to give high quality service.

Let Them First be Tested

1 Timothy 3:10

But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless.

Before a man is appointed to the deacon team, he must first be tested or evaluated. The specifics of the evaluation process are not spelled out in the Bible, so each assembly must determine how it will handle this matter. It is reasonable to believe, however, that even though the elders make the appointments (*whom we may appoint over this business*), the entire assembly is involved in the evaluation. The steps of selecting and appointing deacons should follow this general pattern.

- 1. Identify the Needs or Problems:** The first thing that happened in Acts 6 was that the apostles (elders) realized there was a problem. Actually there were several problems. First, one segment of the assembly felt neglected. Second, division had entered the assembly. And third, they were feeling pressed to neglect their own responsibilities as the overseers. Had the apostles not acted expeditiously, it would have been easy for the whole situation to have spiraled downhill very quickly.
- 2. Determine the Number of Deacons Needed:** We are not told how they arrived at the number seven, but somehow the apostles determined that by appointing seven men they could resolve the problem. Through thoughtful and prayerful evaluation, the elders of the assembly must determine how many deacons need to be added to the deacon team before taking the situation to the assembly.

- 3. Issue the Call for Nominees:** In Acts 6:3 the apostles instructed the people, Seek out from among you seven men. The word translated seek out means to inspect and make a selection. For a selection to be meaningful, however, the members of the assembly must first have a good understanding of the selection criteria. This will require the elders reviewing in detail the qualities described in Acts 6:3.

The list given to Timothy for evaluating deacons is for use by those making the final appointments. The list in Acts 6 is for the people making the nominations. In Acts 6, the assembly was instructed to nominate a specific number of men who were of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. The assembly may use a check list along the lines of the following:

G A Serving Spirit: A service gift initially reveals itself in a willingness to serve. So the first question to ask is, Who among the people has demonstrated a serving spirit –a willingness and an eagerness to serve the assembly?

G A Good Reputation: The next question to ask is, Who is respected by the people for the quality of their walk with God, their integrity, and their faithful service?

G Full of the Holy Spirit: The third question would be, Who has shown the evidences of genuine spirituality, such as devotion to prayer, love for the Word of God, and the personal qualities we call the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23)?

G Full of Wisdom: Finally, Who has shown the ability to handle difficult or complex situations with grace, insight, and skill?

Exactly how an assembly fulfills this charge is not specified in the Scriptures. One way might be that each member of the assembly is permitted to submit as many names as he wishes up to the total number of nominees requested. These names would then be compiled onto a master list by the existing deacon team (or the elder team, or a specially appointed team), eliminating duplications. The deacon team would then evaluate each nominee according to the Acts 6 criteria. They would then submit a list of either all eligible nominees to the elders or they would narrow the list to the number of men asked for by the elders. This is only one way the process might be handled. Each assembly must adopt a procedure that harmonizes with all applicable principles of the Scriptures.

- 4. Evaluate the Nominees:** The elders must evaluate the nominees according to the criteria of 1 Timothy 3:8-12. This process may include interviews with nominees, interviews with family members or other members of the assembly, requesting additional input from the assembly, and observation over time. Nominees may be asked to read certain material, to participate in specific ways with the deacon team, or to take on certain temporary responsibilities. This process must not be rushed, although if a nominee is well known by the elders, they may act expeditiously.

In addition to evaluating nominees by the biblical criteria, the elders must also commit the matter to prayer (and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them Acts 6:6). There may be candidates who seem to meet the criteria perfectly yet for some reason, which may not be obvious, should not be appointed as a deacon, at least not at the present time. All nominees must be agreed to by the unanimous consent of the elders.

Nominees should be informed privately of their status before any appointments are made. Some may decline to accept the appointment. Those not approved for appointment should receive a full explanation and offered assistance in helping to strengthen areas of deficiency. The nature of any deficiencies should be discussed candidly, confidentially, and lovingly with the nominees. In many cases, they should be looked upon as likely candidates for future appointment.

In some cases, the elders may not have enough qualified nominees to appoint as many deacons as they feel are needed. It is important, however, not to lower the standards, since the Lord has provided them for the protection of His people. Other options might include making temporary appointments for meeting a specific need or simply allowing some men to assist the deacon team without actually being appointed to it.

- 5. Allow a Period for Reflection:** Although there is no Scripture mandating this part of the process, it may be wise to allow a period of time for reflection before making an appointment. The length of time would be determined by the elders. During this interval, the assembly would be charged by the elders to prayerfully consider the nominee and bring to them any report which may disqualify the man from serving on the deacon team.

No nominee should be rejected on the basis of personal bias. People must give scriptural reasons for their objections. The evaluation process is not a popularity contest. It is an evaluation of a man s'character and abilities in the light of Scripture. If even one person offers a verifiable scriptural objection, the nomination must be called into question.

Any and every objection must be evaluated by the elders using scriptural criteria and discussed in a constructive way with the nominee. Any discrepancies or misunderstandings must be resolved to the satisfaction of the entire elder team.

The Bible allows only one conclusion after a full and careful evaluation has been conducted: that the nominee be found blameless. This does not mean he has no flaws or human imperfections. It simply means that no legitimate objections have been found concerning his fitness to serve on the deacon team. In other words, he had been found to be a respected member of the assembly who is honest, temperate, and content, living a consistent Christian life as a faithful husband and father (if married).

Once all issues have been resolved and a nominee has been found blameless, the elders may by unanimous agreement schedule a time for making the public appointment.

- 6. Appoint the Deacons:** In the Bible, the laying on of hands is used for making public appointments and imparting spiritual power. Since both are needed for a man to serve effectively as a deacon, the laying on of hands should always be part of the appointing process. The people of the assembly need to know that a man has been evaluated and approved for service by the elders, and the man needs empowerment from God to accomplish his work of ministry. Appointment services should be sober, yet joyful and inspirational events in the life of an assembly.

The elders may put together a written commitment for all deacons to publicly agree to at the time of their appointment. This commitment should express the purpose, the general responsibilities, and the accountability of the deacon team.

Concerning the process of evaluating men for appointment as deacons (or any other work of ministry), it should be noted that proven character is not simply a matter of a clean past. Certainly a man's past must be taken into consideration, but what is really important is determining if he has consistent and proven character in the present. While a man may not have always been respectable, honest in his speech, or a faithful husband, it is required that such character be both currently evident and sufficiently demonstrated over time.

The time necessary to become proven in godly character is largely dependent on the circumstances and nature of a man's previous shortcomings. Caution is clearly warranted; yet the assembly must not be legalistic or judgmental in evaluating a man's past sins and potential usefulness to the Lord.

Structure and Operation

Plurality, Collegiality, and Diversity of the Deacon Team: In the New Testament, local assemblies are described as having a plurality of deacons; that is, a deacon *team* (Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:8). There is no indication that any single deacon was ever elevated above or exercised authority over the others. Following the pattern of the apostles and elders, the deacon team operates in collegial plurality. This means that each deacon is an equal part of the team with an equal voice.

This does not mean that every deacon has the same gifting and has been equipped to the same degree. Some will be accomplished in areas in which others have no ability. This diversity is what gives the deacon team strength. It is vitally important that all members of the team recognize and esteem the strengths of the other members. It is also important that they recognize their own weaknesses and limitations. Each member should accept general responsibility for the operation and effectiveness of the team as a whole.

Meetings of the Deacon Team: Whenever the deacon team meets for purposes of assessment, planning, evaluation, or accountability, the meeting should not be looked upon as a mere business meeting, but rather as a Spirit-led gathering of an important sub-group within the assembly. If two or three are gathered together, they should expect Jesus to be in their midst.

The deacons may designate any member of the team to a leadership role for purposes of effective and orderly function in a meeting or in a particular area of service. Such a designation will always be considered temporary and a matter of function. It must never be looked upon as a separated position of authority.

Sub-groups within the deacon team may be designated to handle specific areas of service. Such groups may be ongoing or temporary and may include men or women who are not deacons. All such groups function at all times under the direction of the full deacon team. They are accountable to both the deacon team and the elders.

Agreement of the Deacon Team: In matters of discussion and general operation, the deacon team must strive diligently to function as a unified group. All actions must be undertaken as the result of a unanimous decision. In instances of disagreement, action must be postponed while the deacons remain engaged in discussion, study, and prayer. Waiting for unanimity allows the Lord to confirm decisions in every deacon's conscience and helps protect the assembly from impulsive actions and domineering spirits. Such functioning requires a commitment to prayer, mutual submission, accountability, and sensitivity to one another. Once

every man comes into agreement, all team members will be able to go forth with confidence that the mind of the Lord has been recognized and the correct decision made.

In situations where agreement cannot be reached in an important, time-sensitive matter, the deacons may bring in any or all elders for consultation or may refer the matter to the full elder team for consideration and resolution.

Oversight and Accountability of the Deacon Team: The deacon team functions under the direct oversight of the elders of the assembly. Although the team is expected to take the initiative, it is not to act in an independent spirit. At all times the deacons, both individually and as a group, are accountable to the elders for their actions.

All elders and deacons must recognize and be sensitive to the differences in purpose of these two groups. The elders should want the deacon team to function effectively without having to be micro-managed; yet, they also have a responsibility to oversee their work. The deacons should want to take the initiative, acting expeditiously with boldness and resolve; yet, they have a responsibility to operate under submission and provide regular accounts of their activities to their overseers. Finding the balance between freedom of operation and submission to oversight may be difficult at times, and may produce tension. But this tension will not be harmful if it is met with open communication, love, and a willingness among both groups to give the other the benefit of the doubt.

Since neither the elder team nor the deacon team are intended to be static groups, there will always be a learning curve as new members are added. Every new elder and every new deacon will need time to learn the ropes. Mistakes, erroneous assumptions, and impulsive statements *will* be made. Rather than allowing these things to disrupt the flow of ministry from either group, both groups are admonished to be longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:2-3).

Organization of the Deacon Team: Since every assembly has different needs and the needs within each assembly vary over time, it is impossible to make definitive statements as to how a deacon team should be organized and how often it needs to meet. The following questions will assist any deacon team in understanding how it may organize itself.

1. What are the current needs that the team is responsible for meeting? After listing the needs, divide them between those that are unique or short-term verses those that are ongoing. Prioritize both lists.

2. What resources will the team need to meet these needs? Consider finances, personnel, time, etc.
3. Does the deacon team have the necessary personnel within itself or will it need to look for others to work on specific tasks?
4. Does the deacon team have the expertise within itself to provide quality service in meeting these needs or do any needs require other assistance, perhaps professional? Examples of this might be building projects or equipment repairs.
5. How often does the team need to meet to effectively serve the assembly in meeting these needs?
6. Do all deacons need to be at every meeting or can some meetings be sub-groups?
7. When is a good time for the team to meet? The probability that there will be one time slot that is good for every member is slight. Therefore, members will need to cooperate with one another on this issue for the sake of the team and its purpose.
8. How will the team determine who will lead meetings and who will head up and participate in particular service projects?
9. How will the team relate to the elders? How will communication be accomplished? What needs to be put in writing and what can be communicated orally? How will the team make requests for resources and provide reports on activities? These questions will need to be worked out with the participation of the elders.
10. Would it be helpful to select one member to act as a general administrator of the team? If so, should this function stay indefinitely with one person or should it be passed around? If passed around, how often? What would be the duties of the person in this role? Suggested duties might include preparing an agenda and circulating it prior to meetings; organizing meetings and keeping them focused; keeping minutes of meetings noting important discussions and decisions; handling written communications between the deacon team and the elders, members of the assembly, and those outside the assembly; keeping records of the team's activities for purposes of accountability; and other matters that are administrative in nature.

We should note that anyone handling the administrative matters of a group such as a deacon team could potentially gain significant power and begin to dominate the group by controlling meetings and agendas. If the team determines that appointing one member to this task would be helpful, the other members must be careful not to abdicate their own responsibilities to the team. In most cases, the role of team administrator should be of limited duration (perhaps one year) and then passed along to another team member.

The Work of the Deacon Team

The work of deacons is primarily based on serving gifts, as opposed to speaking gifts. It involves *doing* rather than *telling*. This means that to serve effectively as a deacon a man does not have to be a gifted speaker. He simply has to be an industrious and enthusiastic worker.

Each deacon is gifted by the Lord to benefit the local body in particular ways. Each should assume specific responsibilities that are in accord with his gifts, level of development, and availability. In other words, Jesus does not expect anyone to do what he cannot do, only what he can. The assembly depends on the Lord to provide a balance of gifts, abilities, and availability within the plurality of the deacon team.

All decisions concerning a man's role and work as a deacon are made by the unanimous agreement of the entire deacon team, including the one under consideration. No deacon should ever be required to do something he is not willing to do.

The deacon team should keep in mind the two underlying reasons for its existence:

- 1. To eliminate whatever might be hindering the elders from doing their primary work.**
- 2. To eliminate the underlying causes of disunity in the assembly.**

These two purposes can serve as an ongoing criteria for determining whether or not the team needs to get involved with a particular need or problem. A simple test is to ask these questions:

- 1. Is this problem hindering the elders from being able to focus on their primary responsibilities?**
- 2. Is this problem causing any degree of disunity in the assembly?**

Not all activities of the deacon team need to happen as a response to a specific problem. An effective team will often foresee potential problems and take deliberate steps to head them off. For example, many of the responsibilities of a deacon team may be designed to prevent problems from arising rather than dealing with problems that have arisen.

The deacon team must be open to input from voices outside itself. For example, it would be expected that the elders, as the overseers of the assembly, would often anticipate needs before the deacons do. When they bring these needs to the attention of the deacon team, the team must respond energetically. The other source of input concerning problems and needs is the members of the assembly. Any member may at any time bring a need to the attention of the deacons. When this happens, the team has a responsibility to give careful consideration to the problem and evaluate it on the basis of the two criteria.

Some of the areas of service where deacons could potentially be involved are:

- " Leading home groups.
- " Managing a benevolence fund and/or food bank.
- " Managing and maintaining the property of the assembly, including buildings, equipment, and grounds.
- " Managing the finances and administrative matters of the assembly.
- " Directing the music ministry.
- " Reaching out evangelistically to the community.
- " Providing transportation to meetings and events.
- " Greeting guests at public meetings and providing ushering services.
- " Following up on guests.
- " Providing ministry to children.
- " Ministering to people in prison.
- " Visiting and providing care for the sick.
- " Helping out needy widows of the assembly.
- " Strengthening inconsistent members of the assembly.

Deacons should keep in mind that as appointed servants of the assembly, they are representatives of the Lord Jesus in His ministry to His blood-bought people. All that they say and do, whether individually or as a team, reflects on both the Lord and His local assembly. As designated servants, they are expected to function under the Headship of Jesus and the immediate oversight of the elders, showing at all times a submissive and cooperative spirit.

Term and Nature of Service

Since the Scriptures do not indicate how long a man may serve on a deacon team, each deacon may serve as long as he is willing or until such time as he is removed or asked to step down by the elders. This does not preclude the idea of a deacon stepping out of the team for a season due to personal considerations. Since the Bible does teach that human beings need periodic times for rest and renewal, it may be wise for each deacon to periodically step off the team just to take a break.

The service deacons provide to the local assembly should be thought of as a free-will offering unto the Lord. As such, no deacon should ever demand the right to be paid or reimbursed for his services. Like most believers who offer their time and energy to the assembly, deacons do their work on a voluntary basis.

As particular needs arise, however, there may be situations in which a deacon's service is deemed by the elders to be of a nature that would prevent him from holding outside employment. In such cases, the assembly may offer to provide financial support. The precise work schedule and responsibilities of any deacon thus freed will be determined by mutual agreement between the deacon, the elders, and the full deacon team.

Any deacon being compensated by the assembly should understand that his duties may frequently require time other than normal work hours. He must therefore maintain flexibility in his schedule, giving full effort to his duties as a deacon while also providing appropriate time for his other responsibilities. While the work of deacons is important, it must never be thought of as so important as to warrant neglecting family matters over a protracted period of time.

Since the church relies on free-will offerings and it is possible for unforeseen problems to arise, any number of circumstances may necessitate terminating financial support for a deacon. In such cases, every effort will be made to help the deacon and his family make it through the transition period until other employment can be found. Deacons must understand that financial compensation will always be contingent on the assembly having sufficient funds available.

Whether compensated by the assembly or not, all deacons are subject to the biblical principles of church discipline as pertaining to their personal lives (Matthew 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 5; 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15). As a consequence in any disciplinary action against a deacon, he may also be removed from the deacon team either temporarily or permanently by the elders.

As appointed representatives of the assembly, deacons must also accept that the spirit and quality of their work will be held to high standards and may be subject to

review and evaluation by the other deacons or by the elders at any time. Poor quality of work, an uncooperative attitude, and consistent failure to accept the responsibilities that come with serving as a deacon may be considered grounds for removal from the deacon team. In such cases, a deacon may be removed either temporarily or permanently by the elders. Any reinstatement at a later time will be determined by the elders after careful consideration of all relevant factors.

A Balanced Life of Service

All deacons must be active participants in the ongoing life of the local assembly in which they serve. This is not only necessary for their continued spiritual growth and well-being, but is also a necessary component of their work as deacons. As recognized and publically appointed servants, they are models to the congregation of the Christian service ethic. In addition, relationship dynamics are a factor in nearly all of their service to the assembly. The entire deacon team should see their work as an integral aspect of the body life of the church, not as a function that operates separate and apart from the members.

By being part of a team, each deacon should have ample time to fulfill his family, occupational, devotional, and service responsibilities. The work of the deacons should be structured so as not to be a detriment to these important areas of life but rather an enhancement. By maintaining a healthy balance between each of these areas, a deacon can find fulfillment in life and enjoy fruitfulness in every area of ministry.

*Those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves
a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.*

1 Timothy 3:13