Help! I’m a Deacon’s Wife
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As it became widely known we would produce a book for deacons’ wives, several questions surfaced. One of these involved the need for such a book. That answer came easily. For some time deacons’ wives attending various conferences that we led have asked us when we would publish a book for them. The previous book by Martha Nelson had been in print for a number of years, and the feeling among many was that a new book was needed. I received this feeling most strongly from the ladies who lead conferences for deacons’ wives. This book, then, comes as a result of an overwhelming request from wives and conference leaders in the churches of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Another question concerned the contents of the book. What topics needed to be addressed in a book of this nature? Since I am not a deacon’s wife, I enlisted the help of some deacons’ wives from around the country to write the book. The topics covered in this book are a result of conversations I had with these ladies. Of course, not all of the suggested topics could be included. We have included those topics that were identified most often. The content topics also were chosen because of their practical application to the role in which deacons’ wives find themselves.

The other important question which required an answer before the book could be written involved who would write the various chapters. I would not write the book. Since I am not a deacon’s wife, I could not understand all the dynamics involved in serving in this strategic role. In selecting those who would write the book, we turned to ladies who had experiences in writing and/or leading conferences. All of
them share the reality of living a ministering lifestyle as a deacon’s wife. They know from personal experience what it means to serve in many roles at one time. These writers bring practical experience and helpful suggestions to their particular subjects.

To illustrate this, I offer a summary of each chapter.

Chapter 1. In this chapter Barbara Sheffield explores the role of the deacon, the role of the deacon’s wife, and the roles they share. We are reminded that the deacon serves as a minister in the life of the church. In so doing, the deacon acts as a servant of the Lord to the church. Deacon responsibilities involve the task areas of leadership, proclamation, and caregiving.

The role of a deacon’s wife can best be summed up in supporting her husband as he ministers and ministering alongside him. This chapter also gives some practical suggestions on how a deacon’s wife can accomplish these responsibilities.

Finally, this chapter points out that the deacon and his wife need to share in ministry by growing spiritually; witnessing together; making ministering visits together; and being faithful, active, and peacemaking members of their local church. They need to be a strong example of Christian family life.

Chapter 2. This chapter will help you, as a deacon’s wife, handle the time pressures of your many roles. The author, Faye Robbins, accomplishes this through a series of personal lessons she learned concerning how to thrive and not just survive. These lessons include something she learned in the kitchen, from daylight savings time, from a college roommate, at PraiSing II, in learning to play the piano, from observing a busy person, while on a mountain, from a jonquil, while praying, and during a bout with cancer.

Chapter 3. Fayly Cothern gives guidance for “Continuing to Grow.” She indicates the way to continue growing involves committing the you God called, remembering your covenant with God, focusing on the Father, spending time with God, sharing in fellowship with other Christians, ministering in your giftedness, and maintaining a teachable mode.
Chapter 4. Denise George provides helpful hints on how to balance all of the roles in which a busy deacon’s wife, like yourself, serves. She gives guidance on how to handle the everyday stresses of life. She writes about the art of communication in the home. She gives suggestions on how to keep the romance alive in your marriage and how to keep your marriage strong. She also includes a helpful section on what to do to disagree properly with your spouse.

Chapter 5. Barbara Sheffield details some practical ways in which you can minister as a deacon’s wife. She does this by emphasizing the uniquenesses that each person brings to a ministry situation. She writes about finding easier ways to accomplish tasks, learning to delegate, earning the right to minister to some people, and being involved in follow-up ministries. In the appendix she has included some easy-to-put-together recipes. Try some of these recipes as you minister to others through your kitchen.

The final section of the book is a list of recommended resources. Information in these resources will help you understand more about the role of deacon and help you minister more effectively.

I am glad you chose to read this book. I think you can tell from the chapter summaries that you will be glad you did. When you have finished reading the book, tell others about the blessing you received so they can read it also. Better yet, why not give the book as a gift?

I would also suggest the deacons’ wives in your church study this book. In a group setting, each person can share experiences and learn from the experiences of others. This is especially helpful to the wives of newly ordained deacons. However you make use of the book, I commend you on your interest in being better equipped to serve in your role as the wife of a deacon.
Chapter 1

Serving Together

Barbara Sheffield

His Role

Shannon sat listening to Harold, the deacon nominating committee chairperson, talk to her husband, Zachary, about becoming a deacon. Questions flooded her mind. Yes, she wanted to know what Zachary's role was going to be. How would his decision to become a deacon change their lives? What would be her role? What would the church expect from Zachary? From her?

When she had the opportunity, Shannon asked Harold to help her answer some of her questions.

The Bible shapes our understanding. Harold began by explaining the meaning of the word deacon. The word deacon (diakonos in the Greek language) means “servant” or “minister.” This word was not given to deacons in the beginning. In its first usage the word applied to the whole church. Each Christian receives the charge to minister as a servant of Jesus Christ. As Christians, Christ enables us to live as people who minister in His name. Deacons receive this same charge. Because of this, deacons perform their ministry as servants of the Lord to the church.

Harold opened his Bible and read to Shannon 1 Timothy 3:8-13. This text highlights the qualities needed by persons who wish to serve as deacons.

• Christian dedication. The word grave (see 1 Tim. 3:8, KJV) has as its meaning “respect for Christ’s teachings.”
• Truthfulness in speech. Not “doubletongued” (1 Tim. 3:8, KJV) describes a person whose speech can be trusted to be truthful.
• Disciplined Christian living. The phrases “not given to much wine” and “not greedy of filthy lucre” (1 Tim. 3:8, KJV) admonish deacons to
be disciplined in their conduct. A deacon’s decision about the sale or use of alcoholic beverages should be made on the basis of influence. Will a deacon’s decision lead other people closer to Christ? A deacon’s attitude about money and material possessions should bring honor to Christ.

- **Integrity In Christian conduct.** “Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience” (1 Tim. 3:9, KJV) means that a deacon’s lifestyle should reflect a sincere effort to keep the teachings of Christ.

- **Proven spiritual maturity.** “Proved” (1 Tim. 3:10, KJV) means “tested.” The deacon should be a person whose spiritual maturity has been proved.

- **Christian family life.** First Timothy 3:12 points out that a deacon must demonstrate commitment to the sanctity of marriage vows. In his home, a deacon is a leader who advocates Christian teachings and loving relationships.\(^1\)

**Each congregation determines roles.** Deacons serving in Baptist churches are governed by Baptist understandings of the church and by Baptist polity. The church exists not as an organization but as an organism. This statement means a church consists of people. As deacons do their work, the needs of people become their priority. Deacon work involves helping people come to know Christ, nurturing them in their spiritual growth, and assisting them to become involved meaningfully in the life of the church.

Additionally the church functions autonomously in regard to the Southern Baptist Convention. Each church has the responsibility for doing this. Deacon qualifications may vary from church to church, but in each case qualifications need to be based on those found in 1 Timothy 3:8-13.

**The Holy Spirit gives direction.** As deacons accomplish their ministry, they do so with the understanding it is the Spirit who tells them when, where, how, and to whom they are to give ministry.

**Deacons perform their ministry role in cooperation with others in the church.** As Shannon listened to all of this, she began to wonder, *If deacons have the responsibility to do ministry, just what does that include?* Harold was only too happy to help her with the answer. He told her that the word *ministry* in its verb form comes from the Greek word *diakoneo*. He helped her understand ministry by giving her the following definition. “Ministry is individual, redemptive, loving service
given inside and outside the church under the leadership of the Holy Spirit which meets people’s needs and fulfills the church’s mission.”

They also serve in a partnership with all others who help lead the church. This includes other deacons, the pastor, staff, Church Council members, and those who serve as leaders in the various church organizations and members of the various church committees.

As a partner, the deacon walks alongside the pastor and staff of the church. They work together in ministering to needs of the congregation and helping the church accomplish the purpose for which God led it to be established. Pastor, staff, and deacons work best together when their relationship is one of friendship as well as partnership.

Deacons perform three major tasks. “So,” said Shannon, “deacons do their work not as a board of directors or as a group of business managers, but as ministers.”

“That’s right,” agreed Harold. “Three major tasks are central in effective deacon work.”

- One task is leading the church to accomplish its mission. The work of deacons involves leadership. To accomplish their leadership role, deacons serve as examples to the church, as faithful participants in the church’s life, and as catalysts for appropriate change within the church.
- Another task is proclaiming the gospel to believers and unbelievers. This task includes witnessing to the lost, being involved in outreach activities, discipling the saved, participating in baptism and the Lord’s Supper, and preaching when it is appropriate. Deacons carry out this task through concern for the outreach program of the church, the mission program of the church, and the worship services of the church.
- The third task is caring for church members and others persons in the community. Through activities such as the Deacon Family Ministry Plan, deacon of the week, meeting the benevolence needs of the church and community, deacons carry out this valuable task area.

As Shannon listened intently to all that had been shared with her, she began to realize deacons occupy an important place in the life of the church. She saw them as spiritual leaders who serve in partnership with the pastor and others in the congregation to enable the church to be successful. She came to understand that Zachary would be undertaking a ministry which would involve him in some time-consuming activities. She thought about her need to share him with the church. She also
knew he would need to continue to learn and grow as a Christian and in the skills necessary for him to do his work effectively as a deacon. As she understood this, she also realized her vital place in this ministry of serving the Lord through the church.

**Her Role**

As she began to think about her own role in deacon ministry, Shannon thought about the deacons’ wives in the church. She knew that these women were involved with their husbands’ ministries in many ways. She had seen some as they were visible in ministry: preparing and serving meals, witnessing, and greeting newcomers. Often they served on committees and had leadership roles in Sunday School, Discipleship Training, music, and missions. She knew there were times when these women went with their husbands to visit people at home and in the hospitals. She also knew that others stayed in the background, assisting with Lord’s Supper preparation, baptism, and praying. No two were alike. Although the church seemed to have some expectations for deacons’ wives, there was room for individuality. Would she be able to be herself? Could she express ministry through her own personality and exercise her own gifts?

Shannon wanted to understand more fully what her role in ministry should be. She asked Harold if he thought his wife, Nancy, would be willing to talk to her. “I’m sure she would be more than happy to give you a wife’s point of view. Nancy can share some of her experiences with you,” was his reply. Shannon made a telephone call and set up a meeting.

Shannon was soon put at ease as the wife of this deacon recalled some of her special ministry opportunities. “I wish I had sat down with the wife of a deacon early in my own experience,” Nancy lamented. “It might have saved me some frustration. For a long time I thought I had to be supermom and superwife. I tried to live up to the expectations everyone had for me. I thought I should teach a Sunday School class, lead a Discipleship Training group, sing in the choir, lead a children’s choir, work with Mission Friends, attend Baptist Women, help in the library, teach in extended sessions for preschoolers during worship, serve on committees, feed the youth at their fellowships, visit the hospitals and nursing homes, and more!”
Nancy suggested that the role of a deacon’s wife could best be summed up in two ways. First, Shannon would need to support Zachary in his ministry. Second, Shannon could minister alongside him at times. She suggested that they read *Equipping Deacons in Caring Skills.*

Shannon’s support would take many forms. She admired Zachary’s commitment and had faith in him and his work as a deacon. But for Zachary to be at his best in ministry, she and others in their family needed to allow him to minister. Zachary needed to know that they were not only proud of him, but that they considered this ministry important. The family needed to understand that Zachary was following what he believed was the Lord’s will for his life. What better example was there for children! As they grow older, it will be a logical thing for them to listen also to the Holy Spirit as He works in their lives.

*The Bible shapes our understanding.* Shannon knew that 1 Timothy 3:11 contained some instructions directed to wives of deacons. This verse makes clear that the Lord’s work is not to be taken lightly. The wife needs to share her husband’s serious outlook on his ministry as a deacon. Because of the way she conducts herself, the deacon’s wife needs to inspire respect. She needs to be self-controlled and trustworthy. Shannon knew she would need to continue to grow spiritually.

*Gifts and interests focus your role.* Nancy went on to explain that in her earlier days as a deacon’s wife she wasn’t ministering; she was spinning her wheels. For her to realize she could best serve in the boundaries of her own personality, with her own gifts, and in her own time constraints took time. By spreading herself too thin, she wasn’t doing her best in any one area. She finally understood that she wasn’t the only one in the church who could take care of things that needed to be done.

As an example, Nancy explained she loved 4- and 5-year-olds. She loved her own children when they were that age. But after two weeks as a leader of Mission Friends, she knew that was *not* where she needed to be. Nancy was trying to fill a spot that could be better filled by another person.

*Responsibilities require that you balance priorities.* Nancy offered Shannon this word of caution: Don’t let your family feel that Zachary’s commitment to ministry is pushing them aside. A balance of priorities must exist. This means that it will sometimes be necessary to make personal sacrifices. Plans might need to be changed. Sometimes interruptions will occur. Occasionally he will be late. You and Zachary will
need to share goals. You will need to talk about attitudes, likes, and dislikes. Help him keep his ministry opportunities in perspective. Don’t let deacon work come before your family, but don’t let your family become an excuse not to minister.

**Circumstances impact your responses.** Nancy told Shannon about an incident that happened recently. “A friend was out of town when there was a crisis in a family in her church. When she returned home several weeks later, she visited the family. She found that while many people had been attentive at first, no one had called or gone by to visit in quite some time. This friend told me that she now makes it a practice to put a notation on her husband’s calendar for follow-up visits. Holidays, birthdays, and anniversaries are difficult for people who have experienced such a crisis. Don’t assume that someone else is ministering. Be sensitive to needs.”

Zachary would not be able to share some information with Shannon. He should be able to relax in the fact that she would not be jealous or feel left out. During the times he needed to share information with her, he would rely on her to keep confidences. She needed to be a good listener.

**Your touch enriches his ministry.** Shannon realized she would need to help Zachary keep track of ministry opportunities. Because of demands on his time, she saw the importance of helping him plan ways to maximize the quality of family time and cope with demands on him. She could help him keep a calendar of ministry opportunities. She could make notations of birthdays, anniversaries, and other dates special to those to whom he would minister. At times she would learn of needs and be able to share these with him.

**You can act independently.** Nancy reminded Shannon that many times deacons and their wives are hesitant to minister because they are afraid they won’t know what to say in particular situations. She had found out that the ministry of presence was valuable. Sometimes there was no need to say anything—just be there.

One other thing Nancy had found to be important was to be specific. She recently talked with the young mother of a new baby. She almost made the mistake of saying, “If there is anything I can do, let me know.” A more appropriate statement would be, “May I keep your baby for you while you run some errands?” or “May I run some errands for you?” Sometimes she called one of the ladies who had difficulty getting out
and told this lady that she was on her way to the grocery. Did she need anything? There were times when the offer of help should be general. However, people are often hesitant to call and ask for help. She reminded Shannon to be careful not to intrude or embarrass anyone. An offer to do laundry or clean the kitchen might cause hard feelings.

Many wives of deacons love to cook. They feel they can minister through their kitchen. Some double a recipe and have a casserole to share. When they make a batch of cookies or a cake, they take some to a shut-in or a lonely person. One person doesn’t need the whole cake. In fact, one friend who loves to cook only has herself and her husband to cook for since her children are grown and away. She keeps a small portion for her husband and herself and gives the large portion to a family where both father and mother work outside the home.

Other women are more comfortable ministering in other ways. Some spend time with shut-ins or people in nursing homes. Others draw newcomers into the fellowship of the church. One deacon’s wife said her favorite ministry is in assisting with baptism. She doesn’t seem to notice the wet towels and baptismal clothing. The expressions on the faces of people following their baptism makes it all worthwhile.

Nancy suggested that Shannon’s family could participate in ministry by praying for Zachary as he visited people who were sick, in sorrow, in crises, or lost. Zachary could depend on their prayer support as he answered questions about his faith and about their church.

She would need to encourage him at times when he would be tired or feel overwhelmed by his responsibilities. She would need to affirm his gifts and help him find his own special way to minister.

Their Role
As Shannon thought of ways she could minister alongside Zachary, she was reminded of the differences in his gifts and her gifts. Rather than this being a problem, she began to see this as an advantage. She realized his strengths and her strengths would lead to many ministry opportunities. Still, she was aware that he was the one who had been chosen to be a deacon and that she was his helpmate.

Share ministry. A deacon and his wife form a partnership to use their gifts, interests, and resources for ministry through their church. As Shannon thought of the team relationship, she realized that she and
Zachary would need to be sensitive to one another. They would need to accept the uniqueness of one another.

**Grow together.** One thing Shannon was sure of—she and Zachary would need to continue to grow spiritually in order to minister effectively. She knew that their daily Bible study and prayer would be essential. She also knew that growth could sometimes be painful. She recalled times in their lives when trouble had caused them to rely totally on the Lord.

Shannon and Zachary would need to help each other to minister without burning out. They would need to take time to shape the ministry.

**Visit together.** As Shannon and Zachary would go about their daily activities, she knew that they would have opportunities to share their faith with non-Christians. At times Shannon would accompany Zachary as he visited with families who had attended their church and were looking for a church home. Together they would be able to show the kind of caring fellowship that existed in the congregation.

For her to accompany Zachary as he had opportunities to minister in the homes of women would be important. Together they could visit the hospitals and nursing homes.

They would be able to express to church members and nonmembers what their church was all about. They could share about missions. They would have to know what they believed. As a team they would need to uphold the programs of the church, as well as those in leadership positions.

Shannon and Zachary as a team would be able to personalize the love of God in many ways. She would be able to assist him in his caring role. Together they would be able to express care to families in the congregation. They would minister in times of stress or sorrow. They could offer counsel or refer people to someone who could help.

Shannon remembered how comforting it was to her when a deacon and his wife ministered to her during a time of crisis in her own life. This couple had rejoiced with Shannon and Zachary when their children were born. They had encouraged them when they were seeking ways to serve in and through their church. The deacon and his wife felt a freedom to minister in a time of crisis because they had established a relationship with Shannon and Zachary during good times.

**Know and support your church.** For them to know of the activities and ministries of their church would be important. In dealing with newcomers and visitors to their church, Shannon and Zachary would need to answer questions about the time and place of activities for the
entire family. Was child care provided during choir practice? When did GAs and RAs meet (or did they meet at all)? What special activities were available for young people during the week and on Sundays? How could new members be brought into the fellowship of the church?

They and other deacon couples would provide a stability in the life of the church by being faithful, willing, and available. During times of conflict, they could have a calming influence. When the church might be without a pastor or other staff member, they could show faithfulness to the activities and worship opportunities.

*Be an example.* Their family would show patterns of Christian family life. They could demonstrate, not the perfect family life, but a family seeking to follow biblical principles. Shannon and Zachary could be an example by working through difficult times. Their faithfulness to worship and Bible study should be a model for others.

Shannon recognized that she and Zachary could be key people in developing a caring church fellowship. They would encourage people to participate in social occasions. As a couple Shannon and Zachary would be able to help families develop respect for their pastor, staff, and other church leaders. They could help others find ways to use their gifts to serve through the church.

Shannon reminded herself that she and Zachary each had individual gifts. However, their togetherness as husband and wife would add to their effectiveness. Because Shannon and Zachary came from different backgrounds, they each added a special dimension to ministry. Their life experiences gave each of them insights into different situations.

Some ministry opportunities would be planned, organized projects that might be for a short or long period of time. Others might be a spontaneous response to a current situation. Many opportunities would involve maintaining a high level of caring and ministry to the fellowship of believers in their church.

Shannon thought about the amount of time she and Zachary had available for ministry. She realized that, as their family grew, their time priorities would change. She thought of the hectic routine of couples with young children and those with teenagers. She thought of the time availability of couples whose children had moved away from home. She thought of retired couples. She reminded herself that commitment to ministry is not for a 30-day period but is a way of life.
She realized that working alongside her deacon husband would be a way to center her attention away from her own personal interests. She thought of the sense of purpose, well-being, and personal satisfaction they would both feel. She knew that following in Jesus’ steps in ministry would bring God’s “Well done” (Matt. 25:21, KJV) to their lives.

2. Ibid., 15–16.
3. Ibid., 32.