

Cross of Grace Church Deacons

1. What Is a Deacon?

Definitions: The formal term for “deacon” is diakonos in the original language and can be translated in English as “servant.” The term comes from the verb diakoneō which means “to serve” and is used broadly throughout the New Testament (over 37 times). This verb “to serve” is most often used to refer specifically to the act of providing resources to meet someone’s material needs, such as the need for food or money (Luke 8:3, John 12:2, Romans 15:25). Put simply, deacons in the church can be thought of as “servants with a capital S” who are formally recognized in their role of service to the church.

Relationship to Elders: Cross of Grace Church is an elder governed church and the office of deacon is an office of service rather than a governing office. Deacons are distinguished from elders most clearly in that while both are called to a high level of character, deacons are not required to be “apt to teach” as elders are (1 Tim 3:2) or required to be able to formally teach doctrine and refute error (Titus 1:9). Scripture shows that elders have a unique authoritative and governing role in the church body because they are those charged with the teaching and doctrine of the church (1 Tim 5:17). According to the pattern of Acts 6 elders are charged to remain uniquely focused on the priorities of teaching and prayer and deacons are appointed to lead in matters of practical service so that the church body is served both spiritually and practically.

Flexibility & Structure: Very few specifics are given in the New Testament about what exactly deacons are meant to do—run the church bookstore? Lead worship teams? Do counseling? None of the questions like this are specifically addressed, but this is to our advantage. Scripture seems to set out a simple and very flexible structure that can serve each church’s specific needs, depending on its makeup and its context. Deacon-level positions may flex and change as the church’s needs change.

Male Deacons & Female Deacons: Scripture is clear that men and women are absolutely equal in value in God’s sight and that their roles are equally significant in God’s sight. While equal in value, men and women do have distinct functions in the family and in the body of Christ. The Apostle Paul notes that the role of elder is reserved for men (1 Tim 3:2) and that women should not exercise a particular kind of spiritual authority within the church over men. In context in 1 Timothy this “spiritual authority” is tied specifically to authoritative biblical teaching (such as from the elders) in formal public contexts in the church. However, the role of the deacon is not necessarily a role in which women must exercise spiritual authority through authoritative teaching. Indeed, most diaconate roles are ones in which administrative responsibility is emphasized.

2. What Roles Are Diaconate Roles?

Since the diaconate structure can flex and change based on the needs of each individual church the following guidelines serve to set the parameters of diaconate ministry at Cross of Grace:

Roles of Active Ministry: In Scripture the role of the deacon is tied to an active ministry, as the basic meaning of the word implies. In Acts 6 when the seven are appointed to serve the Greek Widows the need for leadership is first identified, then people are appointed to fill those leadership roles. So rather than seeing prominent Christians in the church and appointing them as deacons, the church is to identify needs or areas where leadership is needed and then appoint deacons to fill those needs or roles. When the deacon is no longer serving in the role for which he or she was originally appointed, the office would be passed on to the person succeeding them in their role (if any).

Roles Focusing on Material or Practical Service: In Acts 6 the division is between the role of the elders and the role of the appointed seven. A distinction is drawn between the very practical work of “waiting tables” or “serving tables” and the teaching ministry of the apostles, indeed the very need for which the seven were appointed was to meet practical needs in the congregation. Additionally, the most basic mean of deacon (diakonos) suggests a practical service. While certainly elders can serve in practical ways and deacons can serve with aspects of teaching, deacon roles tend to be roles focusing on material or practical service. Some specific examples of these kinds of roles could include financial work, mercy or benevolence ministry, the administration of Sunday morning areas, administration of other church business.

Roles of Significant Leadership Responsibility: While the church has many who are serving not all these servants are formally appointed as deacons. In Paul’s letters Paul often recognizes many servants who may well have been formally appointed deacons (such as Phoebe in Romans 16:1). It is clear that these individuals stand out in a unique leadership role and a helpful criteria is to look not just for lead servants but leaders of leaders.

Employment: Many non-pastoral employment roles in the church would fit the qualifications of a deacon role outlined here but each role should be examined on its own merits, rather than through the lens of employment. However, as a good practice employees of the church bearing significant responsibility should meet the character qualifications for deacons because of their visibility in the church.

3. What Are the Qualifications for Deacons?

The office of deacon is a formal church office and should not be pursued lightly, but soberly and with great care for the church body. The following form the necessary Scriptural qualifications for deacons. It should be noted that perfection in every area is not in view here—every Christian has room to grow. Instead, there should be a pattern of consistent maturity and growth in these areas.

- 1) *Dignified (Serious, Earnest, Honorable)* — This person should not treat a serious matter with humor or in a manner lacking due respect. This word also means they demonstrate honesty in all that they do.
- 2) *Not double-tongued (Genuine, Authentic)* — A double-tongued person is someone who says one thing to one person, and then another thing to a different person. The implication is that they fear human disapproval.
- 3) *Not addicted to much wine (Temperate)* — This qualification seems to be speaking about addictions in general (including any form of alcohol, illegal drug use, prescription drug abuse, etc.). This is not saying wine or alcohol consumption is prohibited, only that too much is not Permitted.
- 4) *Not greedy for dishonest gain (Intense and selfish desire for money)* — The love of money clouds a person's judgment and creates fertile ground for other sins (I Tim 6:9). The opposite of the love of money is contentment (Hebrews 13:5).
- 5) *Holding the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience* — Deacons must be sincere in their faith and their consciences must be clear when they make a public profession of faith. Deacons must understand and be able to articulate the basics of the gospel. Additionally, deacons must be able to affirm the statement of faith of Cross of Grace Church.
- 6) *Tested first* — The deacon's character should be affirmed by those that know them. The deacon role should not be their first role of service in the church and those with whom they've served in the past should affirm them.

Specifically for Women¹

- 7) *Dignified, not slanderers* — The definition of "dignity" for a woman includes refraining from making false accusations against others. The implication is that the woman controls her speech.
- 8) *Sober-minded (Temperate)* — This applies to all the appetites of the candidate, including food, entertainment, lust, etc..
- 9) *Faithful in all things (Honest, Reliable)* — This was a term used to imply trustworthiness in business transactions. In whatever spheres the woman has influence and responsibility (home, work, etc.) she should be faithful in those responsibilities.

Specifically for Men

- 10) *The husband of one wife (Man of one woman)* — A deacon must be committed to his wife and model the sacrificial love husbands are commanded to show in Ephesians 5:25. The man

¹ While these of course apply to men as well, they seem specifically directed toward women in emphasis. See below section. For example, men given their unique charge toward spiritual leadership must do that well enough to be appointed as deacons.

should save himself physically and emotionally only for his wife.

11) *Managing their children and their own households well* — Deacons with families must demonstrate that they diligently manage their household. This does not mean the children are perfect, but that the father is setting a faithful example of instructing his children faithfully in the things of God.

Promise

“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.”

To serve as a deacon is a noble thing. God specifically recognizes the work deacons do and will surely reward them for it in heaven. Therefore, the office should be held in honor by all.

Length of Service

In order to serve the church we would ask that each deacon be willing to serve for a year. After the year of service is up the deacon can be invited to continue for another year.

4. How Are Deacons Appointed?

Step One: Identifying Deacon Candidates

This can happen in three ways:

First, the elders nominate the deacon. Given their role in the church it seems well within their responsibilities for elders to nominate deacons for their role.

Second, the congregation nominates the deacon. In Acts 6 the apostles ask the congregation to choose from among itself several worthy men. If a need in the church is visible, and the elders need help identifying an appropriate individual, they can bring the need before the church and ask for nominations.

Third, the deacon can volunteer. If member of the church sees a need or opportunity and desires to serve as deacon, he or she can bring this before the elders of the church who will examine whether the role requires formal appointment and whether it seems wise to nominate the deacon.

Step Two: Testing

First, the deacon candidate should be provided with a copy of the deacon qualifications form and then review the qualifications with one of the elders. If the deacon candidate is aware of something that would disqualify him or her based on the form he or she should make this known to the elders. Similarly, if in conversations with the deacon candidate the elder becomes aware of an issue that would disqualify the candidate he should make this known to the candidate.

Second, others should be asked to testify to the deacon's character. If the deacon is married then his or her spouse should be asked to read the deacon qualifications form and affirm that

the candidate has no disqualifying character issues. In addition to the spouse, those with whom the deacon has served most closely with in the past should be asked to affirm his or her character.

Third, someone should be allowed to serve in their deacon level role, or a similar role, for one year before being formally appointed as a deacon. This allows them to be “tested” practically both in terms of character and in terms of ability.

Step Three: Church Affirmation

If the elders, after receiving these affirmations, are satisfied that the candidate fulfills all the qualifications for the office, the deacon will be presented to the church body for affirmation in his or her role. The elders will announce the candidate publicly and ask that anyone aware of a disqualifying character issue make them aware of it immediately. The candidate(s) name(s), their area of responsibility, and the Scriptural qualifications will all be read. The elders will provide two full weeks for feedback from the church.

Step Four: Appointment

If the church and elders both affirm the candidate for the office, then the deacon(s) will be formally appointed. This will consist of presenting the deacons to the church, reminding the church of the nature of their office, and setting them into the office with prayer in front of the gathered church. Deacons at Cross of Grace will usually be appointed for periods of one year.

Step Five: Continued Service

At least once per year the list of deacons will be updated publicly in the church, usually at the annual church business meeting. If the deacon chooses to serve another year, their name will appear on the list of deacons presented to the church. If the deacon steps down from their role, leaves the church, or is disqualified, their name will be removed from the official list of deacons.

After being appointed the deacon does not need to be re-interviewed or formally re-affirmed each year, rather the church should be aware that they will serve again. Concerns can be brought to the deacons and pastors on a case by case basis according to Matthew 18 after they are appointed at any time. If they are found to no longer meet the practical or character qualifications for their role they will step down from the role of deacon.

APPENDIX

Pastoral Interview Questions

- As you read through the qualifications were there any specific qualifications you felt you specifically needed to work on? What are they?
- Are you aware of deficiencies in any of these areas that could potentially disqualify you from holding this office?
- Are there any other areas of sin, either now or in the past, you feel we need to know about in examining you for the office of deacon?
- When you see an area of sin in your life, how do you seek to grow and change?

- Do you have any disagreements with the church's statement of faith? Do you have any serious disagreements with the church's mission and vision?
- Do you have any questions about the role of the deacon in the church?
- Are you willing to commit to a year of service in this role?

Spouse Interview [if applicable]

- After reading the qualifications, are there any potentially disqualifying issues you see in your spouse that would prevent them from serving in the role of deacon?
- Would you affirm that there is consistent maturity and growth in these areas?
- Do you understand your spouse's role as a deacon in the church?
- Do you have any questions, concerns, or reservation with your spouse serving in the office of deacon?

Co-Laborer Interview [to be done by one or more people serving with the deacon]

- After working with the candidate do you see any potentially disqualifying issues with his or her character that would prevent them from serving as a deacon?
- Would you affirm that there is consistent maturity and growth in these areas?