

A Biblical View of the Diaconate

The office and ministry of the diaconate has fallen on hard times in recent years. These “hard times” are the direct result of a lack of attention by the church, to whom they are called to minister, to the teaching of the Scripture, as it relates to their calling and purpose. A multitude of misconceptions exist in today’s church in regard to the exact nature of the Diaconate.

Misconceptions of the Diaconate about. Many churches have deacons who function as elders. Others view the deacons as glorified grounds keepers. Some see the deacon as a “Jack-of-all-trades” sort of a guy. Have something that needs doing: Call a deacon - he’ll do it - that’s his job! Others see the deacon as little more than filling an empty hole. All of these misconceptions are to the detriment of the church of God.

Alexander Strauch in his book on deacon ministry, Minister of Mercy: The New Testament Deacon, has noted the following regarding this problem:

A serious, fundamental problem regarding the diaconate still exists: far too little in-depth consideration is being given to the Biblical texts and the Biblical parameters set for deacons. This problem is symptomatic of a much bigger problem among Christians today, which is a shameful lack of trust in God-breathed, Holy Scripture. But, as we shall see, the Scripture is perfectly sufficient to answer our questions about deacons. Indeed, the only diaconate worth discovering is the one found on the pages of the inspired New Testament. No matter how limited that information may at first appear, God, in His perfect wisdom, has given us all the information we need. If we don’t adequately consider the texts of Holy Scripture or limit ourselves to Biblical teaching on deacons, we invariably corrupt God’s design and invent a diaconate of our own imagination.

Here at Faith Community Baptist Church, we are committed to a Diaconate set apart by God and acknowledged by the fellowship. The deacons of FCBC serve the purpose of ministering through deeds of mercy to the needs of those within our fellowship and touching all with the grace of Jesus.

The deacons are distinct from the Eldership of FCBC, yet do provide leadership in

the area of ministering to the needs of those allotted to their charge. The deacons of Faith Community function under the direction of the eldership and seek to minister to the body in service. This call to service has been modeled since the early days of the life of the church of Jesus Christ. In the book of Acts, in the New Testament we find the following account of a potential crisis that was developing in the life of the early church.

1 Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. 2 And the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, " It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. 3 "But select from among you, brethren, seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. 4 "But we will devote ourselves to prayer, and to the ministry of the word." 5 And the statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. 6 And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them. 7 And the word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith (NAB Acts 6:1-7)

This text provides early testimony in the life of the church as to the early development of “needs based ministry,” or “ministries of mercy.” We see here in Acts 6 the recognition of needs that recur in every location and every generation throughout history. This “mercy ministry” later developed in the early church into the primary ministry of the diaconate.