

The Office of Deacon

A Position Paper on the Office of Deacons at Grace Covenant Church
Grace Covenant Church Elders

The Office of Deacon

The New Testament tells us that there are two offices in the church: Elders and Deacons (Philippians 1:1). While they must collaborate closely, their responsibilities and roles are unique. Elders are primarily tasked with shepherding, praying, and discipling in the Word. Conversely, Deacons are entrusted with assisting the elders in caring for the members of the local church, especially focusing on the ministries of sympathy and service.

The term “deacon” originates from the Greek word *diakoneo*, meaning servant or assistant. This word is used in many different circumstances and does not always refer to the New Testament office of Deacon.¹ And yet there is a distinct office described in Acts 6 and specific qualifications given in 1 Timothy 3. The first Deacons were seven men chosen to solve a serious conflict in the church related to food distribution (Acts 6). In contemporary churches, Deacons may manage a variety of tasks to serve the church and assist the elders (depending on congregational needs and the skills of available men).

Though the specific duties of Deacons are nowhere listed in scripture, the overarching job description is clear: assist the elders in caring for the members of the local church, especially focusing on the ministries of sympathy and service.

Qualifications for Deacons

1 Timothy 3:8-12 describes the character qualifications for Deacons:

Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well.

Deacons are expected to exhibit dignity, integrity, and sobriety. Additionally, Deacons must be the “husband of one wife” and manage their children and households well.

We recognize there is debate about whether women should be ordained to the office of Deacon. This view is based primarily on the idea that the word translated “wives” in 1 Timothy 3:11 should instead be translated “women,” thus giving the qualifications for female deacons. While we appreciate that many who hold this view have a sincere love for the Word of God, we believe this is an incorrect interpretation and that the overwhelming weight of Scripture insists that we only ordain qualified men to the offices of elder and deacon. We also believe that 1 Timothy 3:11 provides special direction to the wives of deacons because of the unique role of sympathy and service which Deacons, with their wives, must fulfill.

We also stress and remind everyone that the Bible tells us that all Christian women (and men) are to be actively engaged in “the work of ministry for building up the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4.12). Our sisters in Christ are saints and spirit-filled servants of Christ and his people. All women should seek to serve with their gifts, especially in mercy and in caring for other women in the church. No woman needs an office to serve in the church.

Additional Resources:

- Paul’s Vision for the Deacons, Alexander Strauch, chapter 7 and Appendix
- The Deacon, Cornelis Van Dam, pages 67-68 and chapter 6

¹ The New Testament describes many different people as deacons: the waiters at the wedding (John 2:5), Jesus Christ (Romans 15:8), Paul and Apollos (1 Corinthians 3:5), government officials (Romans 13:4), Phoebe, entrusted to carry Paul’s letter to the Romans (Romans 16:1), indeed every disciple of Christ is a deacon (John 12:26).