

SUGGESTIONS FOR ORDAINING A DEACON

THE HISTORY OF THE DEACON MINISTRY

The deacon ministry had its beginning in Acts chapter six. It seems that the apostles were trying to meet not only the spiritual needs of the new church, but the material and benevolent needs as well. This was what the Jewish people were accustomed to in their religious background. In the temple the priest were in charge of the sacrifices and the ministry of the Word, while certain Levites, called the Temple Cultus, were responsible to supervise the maintaining of the buildings, altar utensils, the uniforms of the priest, as well to the welfare and benevolence of the members. Since the new Christians lost their standing in the temple and their benefits when they became believers it was up to the church to take care of its own. By the time that Acts six comes around the church had at least 20,000 in membership (many claim that this number was much larger). The apostles found that they could not be effective in taking care of both the Word and deed. They needed someone else to supervise the temporal things of the church. It is believed that their response was to use the same system that worked so well in the temple, which was to elect seven men who were spiritual, lived a godly life, and was mature to supervise this particular business of the church. Note Acts 6: 3 states “Wherefore, **brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.**” The Scripture states “this business,” not the business of the church. At no time does the Bible ever suggest that the “deacons” are ever the church’s or pastor’s supervisor. At no point does the Bible ever refer to the “deacons” as a “Board of Directors.” The pastor is the church’s major leader.

Early church history reveals that the first century deacons took up and distributed the offerings, whether it was money, wheat, grain, animals, or some other commodity. The deacons were in charge of caring for the widows (those with no other support), orphans, the sick, or those otherwise in need. The deacons prepared new converts for baptism (their wives helped prepare other women); the deacons cared for the sick. It is written in more than one place that a deacon would go to a city experiencing a plague and try to comfort those who were sick, knowing that he was risking his life (many times his wife would be by his side). Deacons were responsible for preparing the utensils for the Lord’s Supper. Not one place in Scripture will an individual find that deacons met once a month to make decisions for the church. True deacons met all through the week with other members of the church to take care of the members needs. There was no way that seven deacons could provide care for all those in need by themselves. However, the Temple Cultus directed the Jewish people in their benevolence by having members in each tribe to help; this is how our deacons should minister. They are not to do all the work, but direct or supervise the church members as they minister to each other.

The Greek word for “Deacon” is *diakonos* means servant, minister, and server. This is not only the title of the position; it should be the attitude of those who hold it.

Other early writings concerning the deacon ministry reveal the following:

Justin Martyr (A.D. 100- 165) wrote that the deacons distribute the bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper to those present and then take the elements to those who are absent, most likely as a result of sickness or infirmity.

Clement Epistle to James states that deacons are to inform the Bishop (pastor) of the people’s needs and sins, control disorderly people during church services, report to the congregation on those who are sick and need help: “And let them learn who are suffering under bodily disease, and let them bring them to notice of the multitude.

PURPOSE FOR TODAY’S DEACONS

Much of what a deacon was responsible for is the same today. However, today churches have land, buildings, and other material possessions that were not available in the first century of the church. However, following is a suggestion for the purpose of a deacon:

1. The deacon should be spirit –filled and able to lead by example. Therefore, he should be involved in spiritual exercises by reading and study the Word of God on a daily basis,

2. He should pray, tithe, and be a witness. He shall regularly attend all church services, functions, and events. Every expectation that a church has on their pastor and his wife should also be expected of the deacon and his wife.
3. The deacon is to assist the pastor, not feel he is the pastor's supervisor.
4. The deacon is to care for the temporal needs of the church (finance, building, benevolence).
5. The deacon should visit (especially the widows and orphans and those who are sick).
6. The deacon shall lead and direct the church members in the ministry of care to the membership.
7. The deacon should see to the needs of the pastor and his family.
8. The deacons should read and study materials that would make him more affective as a deacon.
9. The deacon should be responsible for the preparation of the ordinances (baptism, and Lord's Supper).
10. The deacon should be able to lead a person to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.
11. The deacon should know and understand Baptist Doctrine and principles.
12. The deacon is responsible to help maintain unity in the church.
13. The deacon should try to guard the pastor's time and reputation.

THE CHURCH'S SUGGESTED RESPONSIBILITY

The church and/or pastor have a responsibility to see that the candidate studies Baptist doctrine (we recommend the Baptist Faith & Message 2000) and church ministry. The church and/or pastor should examine the candidate's lifestyle and give him opportunities to minister to the spiritual, emotional, and physical needs of the membership within the church if the church does not have a regular pastor at the present, the chairman of deacons may be a good source to help develop the candidate and make any recommendations.

Once the church and/or pastor feel that the candidate has shown evidence of maturity in each of the above areas, the church should start the process of ordaining the candidate. However, it should be pointed out that the church has the right and obligation to keep the candidate accountable to his ordination. The church has the right to revoke that man's ordination. We find the precedent in the 1958 edition of the Encyclopedia of Southern Baptist. Vol. 2, p. 1057.

Following is a list that the church and/or pastor or chairman of deacons should check when a candidate is being observed for ordination into the deacon ministry:

1. The candidate's lifestyle has been observed for evidence of salvation, and spiritual growth.
2. The candidate can demonstrate knowledge of the Baptist Faith and Message 2000. It should be noted that we refer to the Baptist Faith and Message 2000 simply because that is the confession of belief that Southern Baptist has gone on record overwhelmingly a few years ago to accept. The other reason is that according to the by-laws of the Consolation Baptist Association we are to adhere, as an association body, to the Baptist Faith & Message 2000. However, each church is autonomous and may use whatever doctrinal statement they care to use.
3. Make sure the candidate's wife supports her husband's ministry as a deacon and plans to help assist him.
4. It is suggested that inquiry be made as to what is the candidate's plans for future systematic study of the Words of God and spiritual growth.

SUGGETED PROCEDURE TO START THE PROCESS

1. The church will first vote for the candidate to start the process of ordination.
2. A date will be set for the candidate to meet with a deacon ordination counsel (usually the pastor, deacon body, and other ordained deacons and ministers from sister Southern Baptist Churches). This should not be the same date

of the ordination service itself. The ordination service should not be planned until after the ordination counsel has met and decide if the candidate is ready.

3. Invitations should be extended to those who are requested to attend.

SUGGESTED PROGRAM FOR THE DEACON ORDINATION COUNSEL

1. Make sure there are refreshments and drink provided at the meeting since it may take a few hours.

2. Each person must come with an open mind and conscience to the Holy Spirit and only attend to ordain the candidate if he proves he understands what is expected of a deacon and he has given evidence of his salvation, lifestyle and knowledge of the Word of God.

3. A moderator should first be elected (usually the pastor) then a clerk to keep records of the events and read the record during the ordination service if the candidate is approved.

4. During the meeting inquiry should be made of the candidate's salvation, doctrinal beliefs, and future plans for spiritual enrichment. During the counsel meeting the following questions should be asked:

A. Please share with us your salvation experience.

B. Share your wife's salvation and does she support your call to ministry?

C. What are your plans for future spiritual growth?

D. Do you believe in the inerrancy of the Scripture?

E. How would you describe God?

F. Who is Christ?

G. What do you believe about the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ?

H. When do you receive the Holy Spirit?

I. What is the work of the Holy Spirit?

J. What does it mean to be saved and why do you need salvation?

K. Do you believe in the doctrine of Eternal Security?

L. What are the two Scriptural officers of the Baptist Church?

M. As an ordained deacon will you recognize the spiritual position of the pastor and work with him?

N. Have you read the Baptist Faith & Message 2000? If so, do you feel you can affirm it or is there any portion that you disagree with?

O. How do you understand the role of the deacon?

P. Do you see yourself as a supervisor of the church or as a servant?

Q. Are you willing to read any book or attend any deacon training that the church ask you as a deacon to read or attend?

R. Do you see yourself as the supervisor of the pastor or his helper or assistant?

S. As a deacon will you set an example to others by your own visitation of the sick, the elderly, and the widows?

- T. As a deacon will you help see to the benevolence of the needed?
- U. As a deacon will you make sure that your pastor's physical (material) needs are taken care of to the very best ability of the church?
- V. As a deacon will you agree to handle accusations against the pastor or other members of the church through the method and principles found from Matthew 18: 15?

5. The other members may ask additional questions at this time.
6. The candidate may address the counsel at this time to clarify any information or make any statements.
7. When the deacon ordination counsel has been satisfied the candidate will be asked to step out so that the counsel may vote on his ordination.
8. If the candidate receives the votes required for their recommendation for ordination a date should be set for the ordination service.

SUGGESTED PROGRAM FOR THE ORDINATION SERVICE

Preparation for the Ordination Service

After the date has been set and the deacon ordination counsel has approved the candidate for ordination the pastor and/or church should do the following:

1. The church will send out invitations to sister churches
2. With input from the candidate a pastor should be asked to preach the charge to the candidate, while another one is asked to give the charge to the church. You may have an additional pastor ask the candidate his vows.
3. There should be time to adequately plan a moving and orderly ceremony.

The Ordination Service

Following is a recommendation for the order of service at an ordination service:

1. The service should have an instrumentalist play music as a prelude to the ceremony.
2. The ceremony should begin with a lively congregation song.
3. The pastor of the church should lead in prayer.
4. Congregational singing (unless you have someone or group to sing a special)
5. Responsive Reading using 1 Timothy 3; 8-13 (since there are so many translations it would be wise to place the responsive reading scriptures in a prepared bulletin. Have every other Scripture verse in bold to help the congregation stay together).
6. Report from the clerk of the deacon ordination counsel recommending the candidate for ordination.
7. Congregational Singing
8. Candidate is asked to come in front of the altar and sit in a chair facing the pulpit.
9. Charge to the Candidate. A short sermon emphasizing the duties of a deacon.
10. The candidate takes his vows promising to live up to the qualification of a deacon, studying the word, witnessing to the lost, to be a good husband and father, to help his pastor, take care of the sick and needed, to be involved in missions and ministry of the church, etc. Following is a recommended list of vows:
 - a. Do you vow to be a servant, first to Christ then to your church as long as you're an active deacon? The candidate will answer.

- b. Do you vow to be an assistant to your pastor and do all you can to support him as God's leader? The candidate will answer.
- c. Do you vow to be consistent in your study of the Word of God showing yourself approved and a workman unto God? The candidate will answer.
- d. Do you vow to maintain your beliefs in the Baptist Doctrine you affirmed during your deacon ordination counsel? The candidate will answer.
- e. Do you vow to live up to the qualifications of a deacon found in 1 Timothy 3:8-13? The candidate will answer.
- f. Do you vow to be a witness by sharing the gospel to those who are unbelievers? The candidate will answer.
- g. Do you vow not to neglect your family and love your wife as Christ loved the Church? The candidate will answer.
- h. Do you vow to teach and encourage your church to participate and to give financially to missions, such as association missions, and Co-operative Program Missions through the Georgia and Southern Baptist Conventions? The candidate will answer.
- i. Do you vow that you will vote in the future to ordain only men who are truly qualified for the deacon ministry? The candidate will answer.

At this time the questioner will say," After being found qualified by the deacon ordination counsel, and by his giving vows, I now ask that the ordained deacons and ministers to come and officially ordain him by the laying on of hands.

- 11. Laying-on-of-the-Hands (at this time the candidate will kneel and each ordained minister or deacon will come and place their hands on his head whispering words of hope, encouragement, and prayer.
- 12. The presentation of a good study Bible.
- 13. Words from the candidate.
- 14. Charge to the church. A short sermon sharing the church's responsibility to the deacon.
- 15 Special ordination prayer.
- 17 The candidate and his wife are then called to the front of the church for all to fellowship with.
- 18 We recommend a reception at the end of the service (Books such as, *Now that You're a Deacon*, Howard Foshee, or *Ministry of Mercy: The New testament Deacon*. By Alexander Strauch could make a great gift.