

TOWELS AND TABLES

REDISCOVERING THE HEART OF DEACON MINISTRY



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FOREWORD

Introduction: The Biblical Call to Deacon Ministry

Welcome to Table and Towels workbook, designed to help you explore and develop your understanding of the vital role of deacons in the church. Whether you are a new deacon, a seasoned servant leader, or considering this calling, this resource aims to equip you with biblical principles and practical insights.

The office of deacon is not merely an administrative position but a spiritual calling established by God for the health and growth of His church. As you work through these pages, our prayer is that you will gain a clearer vision of how deacon ministry can impact both your congregation and your personal walk with Christ.

How to Use This Workbook

This workbook follows the structure of a deacon training seminar and includes:

- 1. Core Content:** Biblical teaching on the role and responsibilities of deacons
- 2. Interactive Questions:** Space to reflect on your ministry and apply concepts
- 3. Group Discussion Questions:** Conversation starters for deacon meetings

4. Scripture-Based Devotionals: Spiritual reflections to close each chapter

You may choose to work through this material:

- Individually at your own pace
- With your pastor as mentoring material
- As a deacon body during regular meetings
- In a workshop or retreat setting

The most important element is prayer. Approach each section asking God to reveal His wisdom for your specific ministry context.

"If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you." - James 1:5

Let's begin this journey together, seeking to serve Christ's church with excellence and humility.

INTRODUCTION

In your hands, you hold more than just a book; you hold the collected wisdom of countless deacons who have faithfully served the church throughout the years. This handbook isn't theoretical—it's practical, born from real-life experiences in the trenches of ministry.

As a deacon, you stand in a long line of faithful servants who have been called to care for God's people. From the very beginning in Acts 6, deacons were selected to ensure that no one was overlooked in the daily distribution of food. Today, your role may look different, but the heart of your calling remains the same—to serve with humility, integrity, and love.

This book is designed to equip you with practical tools for effective ministry. Whether you're a newly ordained deacon still trying to understand your role or a seasoned servant leader looking to sharpen your skills, these pages offer biblical wisdom and practical advice for the challenges you'll face.

My prayer is that this resource will encourage you, challenge you, and ultimately help you fulfill your calling as a deacon with excellence. Remember, you're not just filling a position—you're answering a call to serve in one of the most important roles in the church.

INTRODUCTION

THE BIBLICAL FOUNDATION OF DEACON MINISTRY

Before we dive into practical applications, let's ground ourselves in Scripture. The office of deacon is established in Acts 6:1-7, where the apostles sought men "of good reputation, full of the Spirit and wisdom" to serve the practical needs of the church. The word "deacon" comes from the Greek word "diakonos," which means "servant" or "minister."

While Acts 6 gives us the historical beginning of deacon ministry, 1 Timothy 3:8-13 provides qualifications for those who would serve in this role. Deacons are to be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain, holding the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience, tested first, blameless, faithful in all things.

The biblical model shows that deacons are servants with authority—their authority coming not from position but from their character and servant's heart. They are problem-solvers, ministers of mercy, and supporters of the church's mission.

Throughout this book, we'll explore how these biblical foundations apply to the modern church, offering practical wisdom for today's deacons who stand on the shoulders of faithful servants throughout church history.

COMPANION WORKBOOK FOR VIDEO STUDY



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INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Dear Fellow Servant,

First, thank you for your willingness to serve as a deacon. In a world that celebrates self-promotion and personal achievement, you've chosen the path of servanthood—a path that Jesus Himself walked. That choice alone speaks volumes about your heart.

You may be wondering about the title of this workbook: "Towels & Tables." It comes from two powerful images of deacon ministry in Scripture. The "towel" references Jesus washing His disciples' feet in John 13—the ultimate picture of humble service that defied social hierarchy. The "table" comes from Acts 6, where the first deacons were appointed to ensure everyone was served fairly in the "daily distribution" (the table ministry). Together, these images capture the essence of deacon ministry: humble service (the towel) that meets practical needs (the table) so that the church can thrive.

When I think about the impact of effective deacon ministry, I'm reminded of countless stories I've witnessed throughout my years of ministry—churches revitalized, pastors supported through difficult seasons, forgotten members reconnected to the body, and communities transformed by the humble service of faithful men. These stories aren't about programs or strategies but about servants who took seriously their calling to tend the garden of God's church.

We created this workbook with a singular vision: healthy, thriving churches that impact their communities for Christ. The path to such churches invariably runs through healthy, biblically functioning deacon ministries. You stand at a critical intersection in your church's life and health.

This resource is designed to be flexible for your context. You might work through it during a weekend deacon retreat, devoting extended time to reflection and planning. Or perhaps your deacon body will journey through one chapter each month during regular meetings, allowing time for implementation between sessions. Individual deacons might also use this material for personal growth, especially when starting their ministry journey.

However you use this workbook, please don't treat it merely as an academic exercise. Each reflection question, each group discussion, each devotional is designed not just to inform but to transform. The true value will come not from completing the workbook but from implementing its principles in your congregation.

Remember that healthy churches don't happen by accident. They result from intentional cultivation by spiritually healthy leaders. As you serve tables, you're doing more than handling logistics—you're creating space for the Word of God to flourish and disciples to multiply, just as we see in Acts 6:7.

My prayer is that through your ministry as a deacon, your pastor will be encouraged, your church will be strengthened, forgotten members will be remembered, and your community will witness the remarkable beauty of Christ's body functioning as He designed. May your service inspire others to discover the counterintuitive truth that Jesus taught—greatness comes through serving.

The towel and the table aren't just symbols; they're your tools for kingdom impact. Use them well.

Serving alongside you,
Steve Holt
Church Services Director, TBMB
Matt Tullos
Stewardship Specialist, TBMB

SESSION 1: THE BIBLICAL FOUNDATION OF DEACON MINISTRY

The Origin of Deacon Ministry

In Acts 6:1-7, we find the first reference to what would become deacon ministry in the early church:

"In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, 'It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables.

Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."

From this passage, we can observe:

1. Deacon ministry arose from a specific need in the church
2. The apostles recognized a division of labor was necessary
3. The focus was on maintaining unity in the fellowship
4. Specific qualifications were established for these servants
5. The result was continued growth and unity in the church

Philip: The Model Deacon

Of the seven men selected in Acts 6, Philip stands out as an example of effective deacon ministry. His life demonstrates three essential characteristics:

1. Anointed

- Chosen by God and recognized by the congregation
- Full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom (Acts 6:3)
- Demonstrated evidence of God's work in his life
- Grew in faith and bore spiritual fruit

2. Available

- Responsive to God's leading
- After persecution scattered the church, he went to Samaria and shared the gospel (Acts 8:4-5)
- When led to the Ethiopian eunuch, immediately responded (Acts 8:26-40)

- Ready to serve wherever needed

3. Added To

- God blessed his ministry beyond the original assignment
- Began as "one of the seven" and became known as "Philip the evangelist" (Acts 21:8)
- His daughters were used by God in ministry (Acts 21:9)
- Demonstrated the principle that faithfulness leads to increased responsibility

Deacon Qualifications

In 1 Timothy 3:8-13, Paul outlines specific 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. 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."

These qualifications emphasize:

- 1. Character** - Personal integrity and spiritual maturity
- 2. Testimony** - Reputation both inside and outside the church
- 3. Family Life** - Evidence of leadership in the home
- 4. Spiritual Maturity** - Holding to sound doctrine with a clear conscience
- 5. Proven Service** - Testing before appointment

Interactive Questions

Personal Reflection

1. Which of Philip's characteristics (Anointed, Available, Added To) do you find most evident in your own life? Which needs development?
2. Review the qualifications in 1 Timothy 3:8-13. Where do you see areas of strength in your life? Where do you need growth?
3. How would you explain the difference between "being" and "doing" in deacon ministry?

MINISTRY APPLICATION

4. What specific needs in your congregation might require deacon ministry attention similar to the widows in Acts 6?

. . .

5. How can your deacon body better support the pastoral staff in their focus on "prayer and the ministry of the word"?

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does it mean for deacons to be "full of the Spirit and wisdom" in today's church context?
2. How should the selection and testing process for deacons work in our church?
3. What tensions exist between the administrative and spiritual aspects of deacon ministry?
4. In what ways can our deacon ministry help resolve divisions in our church?
5. How can we better communicate the biblical role of deacons to our congregation?

Scripture-Based Devotional: Servants of Christ

Read: Philippians 2:5-11

"In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Reflection: The greatest model of servanthood is Jesus Christ Himself. Though He was God, He willingly took on the nature of a servant. The Greek word for "servant" is related to the word "deacon" (diakonos). As deacons, we follow in Christ's footsteps when we humble ourselves to serve others.

Jesus demonstrates that true greatness comes through service, not position. His example reminds us that the highest position in God's

kingdom belongs to those willing to take the lowest position in service to others.

A Deacon's Story: Leading by Example

Tom had been a successful business executive for twenty years before being ordained as a deacon. During his first year of service, the church planned a work day to clean the facilities and prepare for Easter services. Tom arrived early, expecting to coordinate teams and delegate responsibilities—skills he'd honed in the corporate world.

When he walked in, he found Pastor Mike on his hands and knees, scrubbing toilets in the church bathroom.

"Pastor, what are you doing?" Tom asked, surprised. "We have people coming who can handle that. You should be focusing on your sermon preparation."

Mike smiled. "I'm just following the example of the One who washed feet. Besides, I never ask anyone to do something I'm not willing to do myself."

Tom stood silent for a moment, then grabbed some gloves and knelt beside his pastor. For the next hour, they cleaned bathrooms together, talking about their families and praying for the church.

That day transformed Tom's understanding of deacon ministry. He realized that his leadership didn't come from his title or business experience, but from his willingness to serve wherever needed—even in the least glamorous tasks. Years later, when newer deacons would hesitate to take on humbling responsibilities, Tom would simply smile and say, "Let me tell you about the day I learned what it means to have the mindset of Christ..."

Personal Reflection Questions:

1. What rights, privileges, or status am I most reluctant to set aside to serve others?
2. In what areas of ministry am I serving out of duty rather than with the humble mindset of Christ?
3. Where might I be using my position as a deacon to gain recognition rather than to serve sacrificially?

Deacon's Dare: This week, identify the task in your church that is most often overlooked or avoided (cleaning, organizing storage areas,

fixing that thing everyone complains about but no one addresses). Without announcing your intentions or seeking recognition, quietly complete this task. As you serve, pray through Philippians 2:5-11, asking God to give you Christ's servant mindset. Afterward, reflect on how this experience affected your understanding of deacon ministry.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank You for modeling perfect servanthood. Help me to have Your mindset—willing to set aside my rights and privileges to serve others. Show me how to serve Your church with humility and joy, knowing that in serving others, I'm serving You. Challenge my heart when I seek recognition rather than service opportunities. May my ministry as a deacon reflect Your character and bring glory to the Father. Amen.

SESSION 2: DEACONS AS SPIRITUAL GARDENERS

Tending vs. Guarding Fellowship

Many deacons have heard the phrase "guarding the fellowship," suggesting that fellowship is something to be protected and defended. However, fellowship is not like property that can be fenced and guarded. Instead, it's an organic reality that must be tended like a garden.

Deacons serve as spiritual gardeners of the church. Just as a gardener cultivates plants with care and attention, deacons cultivate the fellowship of the church through intentional ministry.

The Gardening Metaphor

Gardens require:

- Careful planning
- Regular attention
- Protection from threats
- Proper nutrition
- Patience
- Knowledge of what is being grown

Similarly, church fellowship requires:

- Intentional development
- Consistent care

- Protection from divisive influences
- Spiritual nourishment
- Patience with growth processes
- Understanding of people and relationships

Threats to the Garden

Gardens face many threats, including:

- Drought
- Extreme temperatures
- Pests
- Disease
- Lack of nutrition

The church garden faces threats too, particularly from our spiritual enemy. Satan's primary strategy is "divide and conquer." Jesus described him as one who comes to "steal, kill, and destroy" (John 10:10).

Examples of his divisive work include:

- In Eden: Dividing Adam and Eve from their fellowship with God
- With Job: Attempting to separate Job from his love for God
- In tempting Christ: Trying to divide Jesus from His mission
- In the church: Seeking to isolate believers from the fellowship

Barnabas: Model of a Spiritual Gardener

Barnabas, whose name means "son of encouragement," provides an excellent model of a spiritual gardener:

1. He welcomed Paul (Acts 9:26-28)

- When others distrusted Paul as a former persecutor
- Barnabas vouched for him and facilitated his acceptance

2. He encouraged Gentile believers in Antioch (Acts 11:19-26)

- Rejoiced at what God was doing among the Gentiles
- Embraced God's work rather than imposing legalistic restrictions

3. He gave John Mark a second chance (Acts 15:36-41)

- When Paul rejected Mark for abandoning their mission
- Barnabas took Mark under his wing and mentored him

- Later, even Paul recognized Mark's value (2 Timothy 4:11)

Practical Ways to Be a Spiritual Gardener

1. Model True Fellowship

- Cultivate your vertical relationship with God as the priority
- Demonstrate Christ-like attitudes in your horizontal relationships

2. Actively Serve the Body

- Engage in practical service that promotes fellowship
- Support evangelism and discipleship efforts
- Be attentive to needs within the congregation

3. Be Willing to "Wash Feet"

- Follow Jesus' example of humble service (John 13)
- Serve rather than seeking to control
- Look for opportunities to encourage others daily

Interactive Questions

Personal Reflection

1. In what ways have you been tempted to "guard" fellowship rather than "tend" it? What difference does this shift in perspective make?

2. Which aspect of gardening (planning, caring, protecting, feeding, etc.) most resonates with your strengths in ministry?

3. How have you seen Satan's "divide and conquer" strategy at work in church contexts? How can you counteract this?

MINISTRY APPLICATION

4. Identify three specific areas of "church garden" that need attention in your congregation:

. . .

5. WHAT "BARNABAS" opportunities exist in your church right now? Who needs inclusion, encouragement, or a second chance?

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does it mean to have "water in our buckets, not gas in our cans" when tensions arise?
2. How can we better recognize divisive influences before they affect the church?
3. What specific processes could we implement to help "tend" our fellowship more effectively?
4. How do we balance addressing problems with encouraging healthy growth?
5. What practical steps can we take to be more like Barnabas in our deacon ministry?

Scripture-Based Devotional: The Master Gardener's Care

Read: John 15:1-8

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples."

Reflection: Jesus uses a gardening metaphor to describe our spiritual life. God is the master gardener who tends His vineyard with perfect wisdom. As deacons who serve as "gardeners" of the church fellowship, we must first recognize that we ourselves are branches that need to remain connected to the vine.

Our effectiveness as spiritual gardeners depends entirely on our

connection to Christ. We cannot tend the garden of fellowship if we ourselves are withering spiritually. The fruit we bear comes not from our own efforts but from the life of Christ flowing through us.

Just as a gardener prunes branches for greater fruitfulness, God works in our lives—sometimes through challenges and trials—to increase our spiritual productivity. This reminds us to be patient with the growth processes in others' lives as well.

A Deacon's Story: The Weary Gardener

James had been serving as a deacon for three years and was known for his tireless energy. He led multiple ministry teams, attended every church function, and was often the first to arrive and last to leave. His fellow deacons admired his dedication, but few noticed that his spiritual life was slowly withering.

One Sunday morning, James arrived to find that the church's air conditioning had failed. With temperatures climbing and the worship service starting in an hour, he frantically worked to solve the problem while coordinating greeters, answering questions from the worship team, and handling a conflict between two volunteers.

By the time the service started, James was exhausted and frustrated. He slipped into a back pew, unable to focus on worship or the sermon. As the pastor spoke about abiding in Christ from John 15, James suddenly realized he hadn't spent meaningful time with God in weeks. His calendar was full of church activities, but his connection to the vine had weakened.

That afternoon, instead of attending the deacons' meeting, James went to the park. Sitting under a tree, he opened his Bible to John 15 and simply sat in God's presence. He realized that in his effort to tend the church garden, he had neglected his own spiritual nourishment.

The next day, James met with his pastor and fellow deacons to share his struggle. Together, they restructured their ministry approach, building in time for spiritual renewal and establishing accountability for maintaining connection to Christ. They learned that effective gardeners must first be healthy branches, drawing life from the true vine.

Personal Reflection Questions:

1. What signs might indicate that I'm trying to serve in my own strength rather than remaining connected to Christ?

2. Which activities or practices best help me maintain my connection to the "true vine"? Am I prioritizing these?

3. Where in my life and ministry might God be "pruning" me for greater fruitfulness? How am I responding to this process?

Deacon's Dare: This week, set aside three 30-minute periods specifically for "abiding" practices. Turn off your phone, step away from distractions, and focus on reconnecting with Christ through prayer, Scripture, or silent listening. For added accountability, tell another deacon about your commitment and share what you learn from this experience. At the end of the week, identify one ongoing practice you can incorporate into your routine to maintain your connection to the vine.

Prayer: Father, thank You for being the master gardener who tends my life with perfect wisdom. Forgive me for times when I've tried to produce fruit through my own efforts rather than drawing life from Jesus, the true vine. Help me to recognize that apart from Him I can do nothing of lasting value. As I serve as a spiritual gardener in Your church, may I first attend to my own connection with You, allowing Your life to flow through me to others. Give me wisdom to tend the garden of fellowship with the same care and patience You show toward me. Prune away anything in my life that hinders fruitfulness, even when the process is uncomfortable. Amen.

SESSION 3: THE PROCESS AND PURPOSE OF DEACON MINISTRY

The Three P's of Effective Deacon Ministry

1. PURPOSE

Every effective ministry begins with a clear purpose. Just as the Beverly Hillbillies didn't understand the purpose of modern appliances in their mansion, deacons can sometimes miss the purpose of their ministry.

Key questions to consider:

- Why do deacons exist?
- What is our biblical purpose?
- Do all our deacons understand and agree with this purpose?

The original purpose in Acts 6 was to address a specific need that threatened church unity. Today's deacons should likewise focus on addressing needs that maintain and strengthen fellowship.

2. PLAN

"A purpose without a plan is just a dream." Once the purpose is clear, a strategic plan is necessary:

- Do we have a clear strategy for accomplishing our purpose?
- What specific activities will we engage in?
- How will we organize our ministry efforts?

Different models can be effective:

- Deacon Family Ministry (assigning families to deacons)
- Deacon Teams (organizing by ministry function)
- Hybrid approaches tailored to your church's context

Whatever plan you choose, it should be:

- Clearly communicated ("Write the vision down" - Habakkuk 2:2)
- Agreed upon by all deacons
- Regularly reviewed and updated

Examples of effective plans include:

- Regular visitation programs
- Special events for widows and shut-ins
- Community outreach events
- Support systems for pastoral staff

3. PERFORM

"People don't do what you expect, but what you inspect." The third essential element is performance with accountability:

- Are we following through on our plan?
- How do we hold ourselves accountable?
- What metrics will help us evaluate our effectiveness?

Effective accountability might include:

- Regular reporting on ministry activities
- Deacon mentoring relationships
- Clear expectations about participation

- Recognition of faithful service

Keys to Implementation

Securing Agreement

For effective ministry, all deacons should agree on the purpose and plan. This requires:

- Clear communication
- Open discussion
- Verbal commitment
- Written documentation

Handling Disagreement

Not every decision will be unanimous, but unity is essential after decisions are made:

- Unity is not uniformity (agreement on every detail)
- Unity is commitment to the same journey
- After decisions are made, all deacons should support the direction

Providing Resources

Effective ministry requires proper resources (the bonus "P" - Provisions):

- Time commitments
- Financial resources
- Training and equipping
- Prayer support

Interactive Questions

Personal Reflection

1. How would you state the purpose of deacon ministry in one clear sentence?
2. What aspects of your current deacon ministry align well with this purpose? What aspects need adjustment?
3. What personal strengths do you bring to the deacon ministry plan? What areas are more challenging for you?

. . .

MINISTRY APPLICATION

4. What specific elements should be included in your deacon ministry plan? List at least three concrete activities:

5. What accountability measures would help your deacon ministry be more effective?

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How clear is our current purpose as a deacon body? Do we all share the same understanding?

2. What written plan do we have for our deacon ministry? How could it be improved?

3. What accountability structure would work best in our church context?

4. How can we better align our deacon ministry with our church's overall vision?

5. What resources (time, money, training) do we need to fulfill our ministry plan?

Scripture-Based Devotional: Built for a Purpose

Read: Ephesians 4:11-16

"So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work."

Reflection: God has designed His church with intentionality and purpose. Every role—including that of deacons—contributes to the overall health and growth of the body. When we understand our purpose within God's design, our ministry becomes more focused and effective.

Note that the goal of all ministry is unity, maturity, and growth in love. This happens as "each part does its work." As deacons, we are supporting ligaments in the body of Christ—connecting parts, providing stability, and facilitating movement.

The passage emphasizes that growth occurs when we are "joined and held together." This reinforces the deacon's role in maintaining unity and fostering healthy connections within the church body.

A Deacon's Story:

David had served as a deacon for five years at First Baptist Church. When asked what deacons did, he would usually joke, "We handle the business so the pastor can focus on the spiritual stuff." While there was some truth to this, David sometimes wondered if there was more to his role.

The church had recently welcomed a new young family—John and Sarah and their three children. They were enthusiastic about getting involved but didn't seem to connect with any particular group. David noticed them sitting alone at church functions and occasionally missing Sundays.

One evening during a deacons' meeting, their pastor led a study on Ephesians 4, focusing on how each part of the body contributes to the whole. As they discussed being "supporting ligaments," David suddenly thought of John and Sarah.

The next Sunday, David introduced the young couple to a family with children of similar ages. He also learned that John had experience in audio/visual technology—a skill desperately needed in their worship ministry. Sarah mentioned she loved baking, so David connected her with the fellowship team.

Over the following months, David made it his mission to be a "supporting ligament." He didn't just make introductions; he followed up, checked in regularly, and helped John navigate the process of

joining the tech team. When one of their children was sick, he organized meals and childcare.

Six months later, during a testimony service, John stood up. "When we first came to this church, we almost left because we felt disconnected," he shared. "But David showed us that this church truly is a body that cares for its members. Because of him, we've found our place to serve and grow."

David realized that being a "supporting ligament" wasn't just a metaphor—it was the essence of deacon ministry. His purpose wasn't just handling business matters but connecting people to each other and to opportunities for service, providing stability during challenges, and facilitating movement toward maturity in Christ.

Personal Reflection Questions:

1. In what ways am I currently functioning as a "supporting ligament" in my church? Where could I be more intentional about this role?

2. How clear is my understanding of the specific purpose God has for me as a deacon in our church? Do I need greater clarity?

3. What people or ministry areas in our church might be disconnected and need the support of a "ligament" to join them to the body?

Deacon's Dare: This week, identify someone in your congregation who seems disconnected or underutilized in the body of Christ. Make it your mission to be a "supporting ligament" for this person. First, pray for guidance. Then, have a conversation to discover their gifts, interests, and needs. Based on what you learn, make at least one meaningful connection for them—either to another person, a ministry opportunity, or a resource that meets their need. Follow up within two weeks to see how this connection is developing, and be prepared to provide additional support as needed.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank You for designing Your church with such wisdom and purpose. Help me to see my role as a deacon within Your larger plan for building up the body of Christ. May I serve as a supporting ligament that helps connect people to You and to each other. Give me clarity of purpose, wisdom in planning, and faithfulness in performing the ministry You've entrusted to me. Open my

eyes to see the disconnected parts of our body that need support, and give me creativity in joining them together. Let all I do contribute to the unity, maturity, and love that You desire for Your church. Amen

SESSION 4: DEACONS IN ACTION - EXPERT PANEL INSIGHTS

Personal Impact of Deacon Ministry

Testimonies from Experienced Leaders

Steve Davis (Former Pastor and Denominational Leader)

- In early ministry years, deacons provided guidance and support
- As churches grew, deacons became essential ministry partners
- Recalled a deacon who prayed daily by the pulpit at 5am for his pastor
- Found that effective deacon ministry requires pastoral involvement

Ronnie Raines (Pastor, First Baptist Church, Clarksville, TN)

- Could not have led church revitalization without deacon support
- Values deacons as ministry partners, prayer partners, and accountability partners
- Seeks deacons' wisdom and counsel: "There's wisdom in a multitude of counselors"
- Transitioned deacon ministry to team-based approach aligned with spiritual gifts

Randy Davis (Tennessee Baptist Mission Board)

- Through 34 years of pastoring, saw deacons as "brothers that complimented" rather than a "board that controlled"
- Viewed deacons as "multipliers of ministry" for the pastor
- Experienced deacons who defended and encouraged him during challenging times
- Believes healthy churches require effective deacon ministry

The Three V's of Deacon Ministry

Pastor Ronnie Raines shared three guiding principles for deacon ministry:

1. VALUE

- Communicate the worth of deacons to the congregation
- Express appreciation for deacons' service
- Emphasize the biblical importance of deacon ministry
- Recognize that deacon ministry is a high calling

2. VISION

- Cast a clear vision for servant leadership
- Use symbolic reminders (like a towel representing Jesus washing feet)
- Help deacons see their role as supporting the church body
- Focus on putting out fires, not creating them ("buckets of water, not cans of gas")

3. VICTORIES

- Celebrate how God is using deacons in ministry
- Share testimonies of effective deacon service
- Recognize and affirm faithful ministry
- Use victories to reinforce vision and values

Leadership Through Service

"He gains his leadership from his service"

The panel emphasized that deacons' influence comes through their service, not their position:

- When people see deacons genuinely serving, they naturally respect their leadership
- Servant-focused deacons can help transform church culture
- Problem-solvers, not problem-creators, gain influence
- Jesus modeled servant leadership: "I did not come to be served, but to serve" (Mark 10:45)

Building Trust Through Consistent Service

Examples shared by the panel:

- Deacons visiting and praying with families during Desert Storm
- Deacons supporting pastoral families during hospitalizations
- A deacon who taught Sunday School for 57 years without missing a Sunday
- Deacons who publicly affirmed: "As long as you don't do anything immoral or unethical, we want you to know that we have your back"

The Connection Between Healthy Churches and Deacon Ministry

The panel concluded with this powerful statement: "You cannot have a healthy pastor and a healthy church without deacons or that Deacon ministry being performed."

Interactive Questions

Personal Reflection

1. Which testimony from the panel resonated most with your experience? Why?
2. OF RONNIE RAINES' three V's (Value, Vision, Victories), which would make the biggest difference in your church context?
3. What consistent acts of service could help you build greater trust and influence in your congregation?

MINISTRY APPLICATION

4. How could your deacon body better support and encourage your pastor(s)?
5. What opportunities exist for celebrating "victories" in your deacon ministry?

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How would you describe the current state of deacon ministry in your church? Is it more of a "board that controls" or a "brotherhood that complements"?
2. What practical steps could your deacon body take to shift toward a more service-oriented ministry?

3. How might you implement the three V's concept (Value, Vision, Victories) in your context?

4. What specific ministry needs in your church could benefit from more intentional deacon involvement?

5. What aspects of your deacon ministry structure might need to be reconsidered or revised?

Scripture-Based Devotional: Servant Leaders

Read: Mark 10:42-45

"Jesus called them together and said, 'You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.'"

Reflection: Jesus establishes a radically different model of leadership for His kingdom. While worldly leaders "lord it over" others, Jesus calls His followers to lead through service. The path to greatness in God's kingdom runs directly through servanthood.

This passage perfectly captures the essence of deacon ministry. The very word "deacon" (diakonos) means "servant" or "minister." Jesus Himself modeled this servant leadership, not merely by washing feet, but ultimately by giving His life sacrificially for others.

As deacons, we follow in Jesus' footsteps when we view our position not as one of authority or status, but as an opportunity to serve sacrificially. Our influence and leadership emerge not from our title but from our willingness to put others' needs before our own.

A Deacon's Story: Serving in Lowliness

Robert had built a successful construction business from the ground up over thirty years. As the CEO, he was accustomed to making decisions and having them carried out without question. When he was ordained as a deacon, the church naturally expected his leadership skills to be an asset.

During one deacons' meeting, they discussed renovating the church's aging nursery. Robert immediately took charge, presenting a

detailed plan with costs and timelines. "I'll oversee the whole project," he concluded confidently. "We'll get it done right and on schedule."

The chairman thanked Robert but suggested they first consult with the nursery volunteers and parents to understand their needs. Robert was visibly irritated. "Trust me, I've managed million-dollar projects. We don't need to complicate this with too many opinions."

After the meeting, Bill, a deacon who had served for twenty years, invited Robert for coffee. Bill had been a construction worker himself before retirement—one who had likely worked under executives like Robert.

"You know," Bill began gently, "I used to think being a deacon was about making decisions for others. I was good at construction, so I figured I knew what was best for building projects at church."

Robert nodded, feeling understood.

"But then our pastor preached on Mark 10, about how Jesus defined leadership differently than the world does. It changed everything for me," Bill continued. "I realized my job wasn't to direct from above but to support from below. The best solutions often come when we serve the people actually doing the ministry by listening to them first."

Robert was quiet for a moment. "But surely my experience counts for something?"

"It absolutely does," Bill affirmed. "But in God's kingdom, experience is best used in service, not control. What if we approached this project by first serving the nursery workers—asking what would help them care for the children better—and then using your expertise to make their vision happen?"

That Sunday, Robert arrived early and spent time in the nursery, not directing but observing and asking questions. He knelt on the floor with toddlers, felt the draft from the windows, noticed the awkward layout of changing tables. By listening to volunteers and experiencing their challenges firsthand, his vision for the renovation completely changed.

The project took longer than Robert's original plan, but the result was a nursery that truly served the needs of children, parents, and

volunteers. More importantly, Robert discovered the paradoxical truth of Christ's kingdom: his influence grew far greater through serving than it ever had through directing.

Personal Reflection Questions:

1. In what areas of my deacon ministry do I tend to lead from a position of authority rather than from a posture of service?
2. How might my professional experiences or skills sometimes hinder rather than help my effectiveness as a servant leader?
3. When was the last time I intentionally placed myself in a position to learn from those I'm serving rather than direct them?

Deacon's Dare: This week, choose a ministry area in your church where you have influence or responsibility. Instead of leading or directing, place yourself in the position of a learner and servant. Spend at least two hours participating in this ministry at the ground level—not as a deacon but as a helper. Ask questions, observe challenges, and listen more than you speak. Afterward, write down three insights you gained that you wouldn't have discovered from a leadership position. Share these insights with your fellow deacons, and discuss how this servant-first approach might reshape your collective ministry.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank You for modeling perfect servant leadership. Forgive me for times when I've been more concerned with position or recognition than with serving others. Transform my understanding of leadership to align with Your kingdom values rather than worldly ones. Remind me that true greatness comes through humility and service. Help me to lead like You did—by kneeling to serve, by meeting needs, and by putting others first. Give me the courage to relinquish control and the wisdom to listen before directing. May my service as a deacon flow not from obligation but from a heart transformed by Your sacrificial love. Amen.

APPENDIX: Resources for Further Study

Biblical References for Deacon Ministry

- Acts 6:1-7 - The selection of the seven

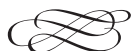
- 1 Timothy 3:8-13 - Qualifications for deacons
- Philippians 1:1 - Deacons as church officers
- Romans 16:1 - Phoebe as a deacon/servant
- Acts 8:4-40 - Philip's ministry
- Acts 21:8-9 - Philip later in ministry

Recommended Books on Deacon Ministry

- *The New Testament Deacon* by Alexander Strauch
- *Deacons: Servant Models in the Church* by Henry Webb
- *The Baptist Deacon* by Robert Sheffield
- *Deacons as Leaders* by Robert Sheffield
- *Handbook for Deacons* by J. D. O'Donnell

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DEACON HANDBOOK



*W*elcome to the Ministry of Deacon

This handbook is created to support you in your calling as a deacon, helping you serve both faithfully and effectively. We've designed it to connect you with the biblical foundations of deacon ministry while providing practical guidance for your service at First Baptist Church.

Our church family has called you to this honored position because your life reflects faithfulness and dedication to both the Lord and His church. As you begin this journey, remember Jesus' words: "The greatest among you shall be your servant" (Matthew 23:11).

The New Testament speaks to the ministry of deacon in three key passages: Acts 6:1-7, Philippians 1:1, and 1 Timothy 3:8-12. The word "deacon" originally described someone who "stirred up dust while waiting on tables" - highlighting the servant nature of this role. As a deacon, you'll primarily focus on serving God under the leadership of the pastor and deacon officers in the practical ministries of our church.

The Heart of Deacon Ministry: Biblical and Historical Roots

Many point to Acts 6:1-7 as the beginning of deacon ministry in the early Christian church. Though these seven men weren't specifi-

cally called "deacons" in the technical sense, they fulfilled this function, and the ministry of deacon likely developed from this foundation.

Looking at Acts 6, we see two primary purposes for which these men were chosen:

- To resolve conflicts and preserve harmony within the church family
- To free the apostles to dedicate themselves fully to prayer and the ministry of the Word (verse 4)

It's worth noting that being a deacon is an elected position. While you should certainly feel called to serve in this role, the calling is confirmed through the local church. This isn't a position anyone assigns to themselves, but rather a ministry the church family entrusts to those who have demonstrated servant leadership.

Growing into Your Role: Qualifications for Deacons

The biblical qualifications for deacons come from Acts 6 and 1 Timothy 3:8-13, and can be understood in these categories:

Spiritual Qualities (Acts 6:1-6)

- Full of the Holy Spirit - living with God's presence and power
- Full of wisdom - displaying godly discernment and understanding
- Full of faith - demonstrating trust in God's provision and guidance

Character Qualities (1 Timothy 3:8-10, 12-13)

- Worthy of respect - living with integrity and earning others' trust
- Sincere - speaking truthfully without hidden motives
- Not overindulging in alcohol - showing self-control
- Not pursuing dishonest gain - demonstrating financial integrity
- Faithful in marriage - "husband of one wife"
- Managing family relationships well - leading at home with love and wisdom

Qualities for Deacons' Spouses (1 Timothy 3:11)

- Worthy of respect - showing character that earns trust
- Not engaging in harmful talk - using words that build up rather than tear down

- Temperate - displaying balance and self-control
- Trustworthy in everything - reliable and faithful in all areas of life

Practical Commitments for Our Church

- Supporting the pastor and staff with loyalty and encouragement
- Attending church services faithfully
- Participating actively in church ministries (Sunday School, Music, Discipleship Training, Outreach, Prayer Ministry, etc.)
- Modeling generous giving, with a commitment to at least tithing
- Engaging in personal evangelism and visiting those who are sick, homebound, or disconnected
- Attending deacons' meetings regularly
- Helping with new member orientation
- Participating in "Deacons of the Week" responsibilities

Becoming a Deacon: Our Selection Process

General Guidelines: The number of deacons serving our church is determined by ministry needs, as outlined in our Church Constitution and Bylaws. To be considered for the office of deacon, you need to have been an active and faithful member of our church for at least one year.

Our selection process includes:

- **Nomination Phase:** A list of all qualified men (21 years and older, meeting 1 Timothy 3 qualifications) will be made available to church members one week before the deacon election. We'll also share information about deacon qualifications during this time.

- **Initial Contact:** The rotating-off deacons will serve as the Deacon Counting Committee and, along with the pastor, will contact those who are elected to discuss the responsibilities and commitments of serving as a deacon. The Deacon Questionnaire will be provided during this conversation.

- **Questionnaire Completion:** To be considered for election and service, you'll need to complete and return the Deacon Questionnaire to the Pastor's office. (See Appendix A for the Questionnaire)

- **Confirmation Committee:** This committee includes the past three active Deacon Chairmen plus two appointees selected by the

current Chairman (who aren't current deacon officers). The appointees need to be approved by a majority vote of deacons present at a regular meeting. The committee will review questionnaires and meet personally with each candidate.

- **Candidate Review:** After meeting with the Confirmation Committee and agreeing to serve, candidates' names will be published. Any church member with concerns about a candidate may submit them in writing to the Pastor, who will meet privately with the candidate to discuss the concern. If needed, the Pastor can reconvene the Confirmation Committee for further review.

- **Final Steps:** Confirmed candidates who complete orientation will be presented to the Deacon Body for consideration. Qualified candidates who haven't previously been ordained as deacons will be presented to the church for ordination.

- **Transfer Process:** If you've previously served as a deacon in another church and wish to serve actively at First Baptist Church, you'll need to:

- Be a member for at least one year
- Inform the Pastor and deacon officers of your desire to serve
- Meet with the Pastor and deacon officers
- Complete the Deacon Questionnaire and orientation sessions
- Receive approval by a 2/3 majority of a quorum (50% of active deacons) at a regular deacons' meeting

While completing this process, you may attend regular deacons' meetings but won't have voting privileges until fully activated.

Your Journey as a Deacon: Terms of Service

- **Active Status:** You'll remain an active deacon as long as you annually express your desire and commitment to serve, regularly attend deacons' meetings, and participate in deacon ministries. The standard term of service is three years. If you miss six consecutive deacons' meetings without a reasonable explanation, you'll be considered inactive, and we'll seek a replacement.

- **Temporary Inactivity:** We understand that sometimes life circumstances require stepping back temporarily. As long as your

inactive period doesn't exceed two consecutive years, you'll have the opportunity to reactivate your service when appropriate.

- **Reactivation After Extended Inactivity:** If your inactive period exceeds two consecutive years, you can become active again by: notifying the deacon officers of your desire to return, meeting with the Pastor and deacon officers for an updated orientation, and receiving approval by a two-thirds majority vote at a regular deacons' meeting.

Building Relationships: The Deacon's Connections

Your primary relationship is with the Lord - this vertical connection shapes all your horizontal relationships. As a deacon, your walk with God should be your first priority. Beyond this foundation, understanding your role in relation to your family, pastor, church committees, and the broader church family is essential.

Family Relationships

The New Testament specifically addresses a deacon's responsibilities to his wife and children. We believe deacons should give their families first priority in devotion, care, and ministry.

Relationship with the Pastor

- Serve under the leadership and spiritual guidance of the pastor, supporting him through prayer, encouragement, and partnership.
- Respect the pastor's role in providing overall leadership to the church and its ministries. As you handle practical ministry needs, you free the pastor to focus on prayer and teaching the Word.

Relationship with Committees

The deacon body provides counsel to committees but doesn't control their actions. The New Testament doesn't present deacons as a board of directors or administrators of church business affairs - deacons are servants first and foremost. Committees share reports with the deacon body as a courtesy, seeking feedback and support, but committees aren't directed by the deacon body regarding what they can propose to the church.

Relationship with the Church Family

Deacons actively minister to the church family while promoting peace, harmony, and unity among members. Your primary responsibilities include:

• **Being Peace-Makers:** As Robert Naylor, former President of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, wisely noted, "When a man becomes a deacon, he loses the privilege, if such exists, of participating in a church row." As a deacon—selected by the Holy Spirit, chosen by the church, dedicated by personal choice—you forfeit the right to create division within the church. The fundamental duty of New Testament deacons was protecting church fellowship. When divisive issues arise, it's time for deacons who believe Scripture to stand up and say: "We cannot proceed this way in our church. We must maintain harmony and peace to follow Christ." This approach makes the difference between a fruitful church and an ineffective one.

Every deacon carries two imaginary buckets: one of water and one of gasoline. In challenging situations, you decide whether to help extinguish discord or fuel the problem.

• **Supporting Ministry:** Be active in ministries that allow the pastor to faithfully feed the flock and dedicate necessary time to prayer for God's direction in leading the church.

Serving with Purpose: Deacon Responsibilities

Following the New Testament understanding, deacons are ministering servants of the church. Your character and qualifications should align with 1 Timothy 3:8-13, Acts 6:1-6, and Titus 1:6-9.

As a deacon serving under the pastor's leadership, you'll assist him in fulfilling his duties, freeing him for the ministry of the Word. Working alongside the pastor, you'll:

- Help lead our church in fulfilling its mission
- Share the gospel with both believers and non-believers
- Care for church members and others in our community
- Model generous giving, committing to at least a tithe
- Demonstrate Christ-like dedication, loyalty, prayer support, and faithfulness to our church's ministries
- Visit those who are sick, in need, or disconnected from the church
- Encourage and strengthen new believers and those who are spiritually struggling
- Attend deacons' meetings regularly

- Be available at worship services to help welcome new members (training will be provided)
- Fulfill "Deacon of the Week" assignments: contacting guests, leading public prayer, receiving offerings, and following up with those who are sick or hospitalized

Honoring Faithful Service: Deacon Emeritus

Upon the deacons' recommendation, the church may elect up to three deacon emeriti. This honorary position carries all the rights and privileges of a deacon and recognizes exceptional service to the church and God's Kingdom. To qualify, a deacon must have served for 25 years at First Baptist Church and be at least 65 years old.

Gathering Together: Deacon Meetings

Deacon meetings are generally limited to active deacons, those designated as "Deacon Emeritus," the pastor, and ministerial staff, unless the deacon body requests others to attend. Regular meeting schedules are determined by the Deacon Officers in consultation with the Pastor, with meetings typically held monthly.

Beginning Your Service: Deacon Ordination

The ordination of a deacon is a meaningful commissioning for faithful service. According to 1 Timothy 3:10, a person should first be "tested" before serving as a deacon. Before ordination, you'll typically answer questions about:

- Your view of the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20)
- Your belief in the security of believers (Ephesians 2:8; John 3:16; 1 John 5:11-13)
- The mission of the church (Evangelism - Matthew 28:19-20; Ministry - Ephesians 4:12-13)
- What it means to be filled with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18; Galatians 5:22-25)
- Your understanding of spiritual warfare (Ephesians 6:10-18)
- Your faithfulness in tithing to First Baptist Church
- Your personal testimony
- Your spouse's support of your service as a deacon
- Whether you've reviewed together the qualifications for a deacon's spouse in 1 Timothy 3:11

Closing Thoughts

Serving as a deacon calls for deep commitment, mature faith, and dedication to fellowship and service. As 1 Timothy 3:13 beautifully states, "For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus."

May your journey as a deacon be among the most meaningful and rewarding experiences in your walk with the Lord.

THE DEACON'S PERSONAL JOURNEY



THE OVERCOMMITTED DEACON: 5 KEYS TO SURVIVING THE STORM

The year 2012 had been an especially difficult year for our church. A number of key long-standing members abruptly left our church in protest to the changes we had incorporated in our schedule in the hopes of reaching new people. At our monthly deacon's meeting, we were discussing the issue when Carl stood up, grabbed his coat and surrendered with a shocking declaration. "I'm out. I've had enough of all this!"

As his pastor, no one was more surprised that I was. What had led him to this sudden outburst? After the meeting I called and asked him to meet me at a coffee shop nearby. Well into the night, I listened to him share his story. Carl had bottomed out and had nothing more to give. The demands of a new baby, a wife with postpartum depression, teaching a small group, coaching his son's soccer team and the constant care of his father in the late stages of Alzheimer's had so wearied him that his despair was unmanageable. I wept with him and realized that I had completely failed to put the pieces of his story

together. It was a stern reminder to me that we are all strugglers. The storms of circumstance and over-commitment can send the best of us to the brink.

None of us are immune to the ravages of adversity. We all have stories of troubles that come in bunches mixed with the trap of over-commitment. This includes pastors, wives and all leaders. The choices we make will ultimately determine our success in surviving and thriving in the midst of a perfect storm.

By the way, if you are in one of those seasons where everything is manageable, you might want to tear this article out and stick it in your pocket. Chances are, you're going to need it in the future.

These following five choices are lifesavers that you'll need to have on board when you feel overwhelmed and overextended.

- **Connect**

As men we often want to be that lone silent warrior holding everything together singlehandedly. Read this slowly: *This is not biblical*. There was a reason God created the church. The Bible implores us to connect and collaborate in a shared journey of discipleship. If you are struggling or feeling overwhelmed, tell someone. Phone a friend. Yes, pray. But pray with other men who will have your back and walk you through the fire. David, find your Jonathan. Moses, find your Aaron. Shadrach, find your Meshach and Abednego. Connect biblically, or you may be Samson looking for his Delilah and we know how that turned out!

- **Condition**

In other words, get moving. Make physical conditioning a part of your daily routine. Hit the gym. Take a walk. You might not feel like it when you are overwhelmed. If you get to the place where you are saying, *"I just don't have time to exercise,"* then you probably need to more than ever. Keep the body working even when life isn't working. Drink lots of water. Stay away from food that's handed to you through your car window. Fast food will send you on the fast track to burnout.

- **Clear**

Prioritize the important responsibilities you have on your plate

and clear the rest of it off your plate. I grew up believing that God was most pleased with me if I had more things to do than anyone else. In my forties, I had to create new neuro-pathways in my brain to fully accept that busyness is not next to godliness.

The following is NOT in the Bible.

Thus Jesus hurriedly got up realizing what an important day this was going to be. He ran to Galilee and there He created 13 lesson parchments, visited 15 lepers in one night. Exhausted, the disciples verily tried to keep up with the Son of God but nay, they could not. They marveled at his time management skills and his strength in persuasive skills. People flocked to him and stayed with him for they knew that if He could accomplish such management tasks with great haste, effort and fluidity that he knew the habits for being an effective person.

Nope. It never happened.

For me, living a clear life means spending some time clearing off my desk so that I can think. It also means that I need to look critically at my calendar and begin to say the most difficult two letter word in the English language. "No". I confess. I don't like the way it sounds when it comes out of my mouth. Especially when I have to say it to someone I love and admire.

Clear your schedule, clear your desk, and clear your mind. It's truly amazing how simpler life becomes when you clear it up.

• **Cool Down**

Take time to recover from a difficult meeting, hospital visit or funeral. Don't put tape over the dummy lights on your dashboard. If the pace of your life is overheating, take time to cool down. Start turning stuff off. Put your phone on silent mode and become mindful of what your body is saying to you. If you are overheating, you'll get nowhere fast.

• **Confess**

I'm not referring to making a confession of your sins, although that's a good thing we should constantly do. By confessing, I mean turning to God and confessing that you are weak. I used to believe the following statement was scripture:

"God will never give you more than you can handle."

It's not in there and it's not true. God will often give us more than we can handle for the expressed purpose of showing us that we must confess our weakness. However, God will never give us more than **He** can handle. And that's good news.

So what happened with my deacon friend, Carl? Our amazing group of deacons rallied around him, and stood in the gap as he navigated through the storms and recalibrated his life. He learned that he didn't have to do everything. He's still serving today but this time with more focus and support. His prefect storm served as a reminder of God's grace in our times of weakness and over-commitment.

7 QUESTIONS A DEACON MUST ASK

I have a confession to make. As a deacon, a father, and a husband I've often failed. *Often* is not a hyperbole either. I mean, I have *often* failed. If Paul had a thorn in the flesh, I've got the whole briar patch. But as a Christ-follower and a deacon, I can do two things with my failures. First, I can learn from our failures and actually grow, knowing that God often restores the messes we have created. Secondly, I can teach others out of the abundance of my experience. That's why I am so thrilled to share these 7 questions that I ask myself every week. Perhaps this week you'll ask them as well. I believe these questions have been game changers for me.

1. Am I *really* available?

In other words, are my kids and wife having to compete with my cell phone, my fantasy football league, my Netflix, my twitter, and my golf game for my attention? This is a difficulty for many men because we are mostly wired to be focused on one thing at a time. Women can answer the phone, fix a sandwich, text and understand the subtleties of adolescent nonverbal codes all at the same time. If I tried that mustard would be all over my child and I'd be texting with the microwave. It's just does work so well for most men. We've got to work on being there. And when we are there we must be present. Eliminate distraction. Look them in the eye. Communicate their

importance. Develop the skill of single focused fatherhood and marriage.

2. Have I grown up?

There's a big difference between growing up and grow old. The Apostle Paul said it like this: *When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put aside childish things.* So what are some childish things that we need to put away? For many of us, it's how we conflict. It's not slamming a door or throwing a tantrum. For others of us, it's not withholding affection depending on whether our day is going the way we want it. Childish things are lust, greed, bitterness, emotionally connecting with other women, spending sprees, and vulgar joking. All of these will affect our kids and our wives even if they aren't done in their presence.

3. Do my kids know I love my wife?

There's nothing that makes a child feel safer than seeing a Mom and Dad that truly love and cherish each other with their eyes, their words and their touch. Being "in it for the kids" is not enough. If you are finding it hard to love your wife, you need to address it *now*. Not when it's convenient, not when you have enough money to see a counselor, and not when you and your wife are living in to parallel universes of emotion. Invest and love your wife. Get help. Remember how much we are to love our wives. (Check Ephesians 5:25)

4. What do I say when I talk about God?

If you are anything like me, this doesn't come easy. I have to work at it. Find moments to express your faith. We can do this basically by "*exegeting the day*." I know. I'm getting a little fancy here. What I mean is that we find a way to view our daily struggles through the lens of scripture. What did your neighbors sorrow cause you to do? Share a part of your day with your son or grandson and how the Bible instructed you on how to respond.

5. Do I practice vulnerability?

Perhaps the most daring thing I will ever do is to let his children in on my true feelings, hurts, fears and loves. Our male ego is the enemy of this front. Your ego will try to convince you that its job is to keep

you safe. Your ego doesn't believe the risk is worth the reward. When was the last time you really risked and let your kids and your wife see who you really are? When was the last time you allowed people into the darker places of your heart? Vulnerability is not a weakness. It is a man-sized virtue.

6. What am I hiding?

God has never called a perfect deacon. In the same line, God has never called a sneaky deacon. And God doesn't want us to be sneaky as husbands, fathers and grandfathers. Secrets are insidious. They damage our families and our selves. Whether it is erasing the history on your internet browser, the private messages on Facebook that you send to an old flame, or the single malt scotch buried in the bottom drawer- secrets will damage others before they are ever even revealed. Let's challenge each other to be "secretless" in our private world, struggling together to make what's outside become a true reflection of what is inside.

7. Do I model generosity?

Perhaps one of the greatest legacy a man could leave to his children is the joy of generosity. The givers are the happiest people on the face of the earth. Our kids need this lesson. There's a certain deep feeling of bliss that comes from giving with no regard for receiving. We are teaching them that it wasn't ours in the first place and so money takes on a transcendent meaning that can't be found in wealth accumulation. Tithing has taught me how to avoid the virus of materialism and learn the bliss of generosity. I learned it from my dad and I continue to speak it into the lives of my sons.

These seven questions have become touchstones that continue to shape me as a believer and deacon. Even more than that, I believe in the long run they will shape the destiny of my family and my marriage.

FAITHFUL MEMBERSHIP: SERVING GOD WITH MY TIME, GIFTS, SKILLS, AND RESOURCES

Steve and Jim are a study of contrasts. And they're probably both in your church, although they go by different names.

Meet Steve. He's a member. He shows up on Sundays if he can squeeze it into his family's schedule. He and his wife feel good when attending and enjoy most of the experience. They joined the church because their church offered activities that they enjoy. They are constantly looking for programs that will enrich their lives and make a difference in their kids lives (if it doesn't interfere with their kid's activities in sports and school). They are a little frustrated with the pastor's preaching because it doesn't always "speak to them." It's a busy time, so they really can't be distracted by service opportunities. When they get to the end of the pay period, Steve looks at the checking account to decide if he's able to give some of the leftovers to the church. He was honored to be elected a deacon at the church. He has the deacon certificate on his wall at his office and that impresses the boss. And if there's a controversy the deacons are discussing, he'll definitely be there. Other than that, he comes when he can.

Meet Jim. He's a member. He and his wife don't just contribute, they are invested. They don't just come to church; they realize that they are the church. As a deacon, Jim doesn't ask, "what's in it for me." Instead, he asks, "How can I serve?" That's the tone he sets for the deacon team and when Jim serves, other deacons seem to naturally follow his lead. Jim is a family man and because he's a family man, he realizes that the greatest thing he can do for his family is to live out his faith in all phases of his life, not just on Sundays and Wednesdays. His tithe is the first thing to leave the checking account on payday, not the last. He loves his pastor, and he doesn't rate his pastor's performance week-to-week because he knows that being a pastor is a whole lot more than what happens for 30 minutes each Sunday morning.

These two deacons have been in every church I've served as a pastor and a deacon. It's uncanny! Jim and Steve, while being prototypes of two different types of deacons, serve as an illustration and a

challenge. Church membership is sometimes considered the low bar. And if church membership is signing a card and having your family on the welcome screen the next Sunday, perhaps it is. But church membership should mean infinitely more, especially for the deacon. Church membership is a statement that you are a part of a spiritual family. As the old saying goes, *you can pick your friends, but you are stuck with your family!* Seriously though, church membership comes with commitments and opportunities. We can all be like Jim, and we should avoid being like Steve. And we should encourage and model as deacons what membership looks like. As deacons, if we do that, we'll revolutionize our local church family. As church members, we do have a few standard non-negotiables. We can all serve, according to our skills and gifts. We can all show up, and we should. We can all tithe. And finally, we can all pray. This shouldn't just be in our strategy; it should be in our bones!

No two deacons are alike. (And that's a good thing.) We all have different skills. I'm lousy at repairs but we have lots of men in my church who aren't. I can attest to it because one of my fellow deacons just replaced the start capacitor in my air conditioning unit. I edit video. Nobody else in my church knows how to do that, so I know my place of service. We all have spiritual gifts. I'm not the strongest leader in my church. I've never been elected as chairman of deacons, but I can encourage my leaders. You can see where I'm going with this. We are all designed differently but we have a call to work together. Paul told the church in Ephesus, *"From him the whole body, fitted and knit together by every supporting ligament, promotes the growth of the body for building itself up in love by the proper working of each individual part."* (Eph. 4:16 CSB) This is the vision of what church membership should be: fitting, growing, supporting, loving, and working. When we engage in the mission as fully cooperating members, nothing will be able to stop the mission of the church.

5 TRAITS OF A HUMBLE LEADER

I don't know about you, but I can't wrap my brain around the task Moses faced. Can you imagine the pressure of being a leader and provider for thousands of people in the wilderness? And these weren't perfect followers by any stretch.

You can just imagine the voicemails and texts he would get before 6 AM, if there were voicemails back then.

And to top it all off, his own family took offense to his wife's nationality and let everybody know about it. But Moses, according to Numbers 12:3, was a very humble man. The Lord took care of the situation without a word from Moses and after they received God's leprous punishment, Moses even prayed for their healing. Evidently, Moses had the Lord's attention, and I would argue that God came to his defense precisely because of his humility. Ultimately, Moses' humility led to unity among God's chosen people.

"Moses, my wife's having a baby and I can't find a doctor!"

"Larry, son of Jethro, tribe of Dan has pitched his tent way too close to mine. He's keeping us awake with his snoring!"

"Moses, I'm afraid I'm manna intolerant. I break out with hives every morning!"

"That pillar of fire at night is scaring our camel! And that cloud during the day is affecting my asthma."

Humility is the secret sauce of every long-term leader. The Hogan Assessment Firm, a secular research group, offered a summary of their work in studying humble leaders:

Organizations often overlook humble employees for leadership positions in favor of those who are charismatic. Charismatic people are charming and inspirational, but many turn out to be narcissistic, arrogant, and potentially exploitative. In contrast, humble leaders empower followers and promote team learning.

1. A humble leader is teachable.

The worst thing that could happen to a servant leader is for him to believe that he has arrived. A humble leader is self-aware. He's aware that every circumstance and relationship is an opportunity to learn.

Think about it. We are unique, which implies that there are skills, perspectives and lessons that are found in every relationship. The humble leader would say, "There are some things I can only learn from you." With this as a mindset, every relationship, even the difficult ones, are treasured. Every challenge, trial and circumstance provides an opportunity for growth. Jerry, a deacon in our church recently was diagnosed with colon cancer. In the first five minutes of our initial conversation, he said something that I'll never forget. "You know, Matt, it's difficult, but I'm sure learning a lot of things through all of this. It's really amazing!" Frankly I couldn't believe what I was hearing. It wasn't a posture of self-pity or pessimism, although he had every right to go there. It was almost like a simple prayer of "What's next, Father?" A Christ-follower approaches life as a lifelong learner who is rehearsing his walk with Christ as a prelude to eternity.

- **A humble leader quickly realizes and admits mistakes.**

Perhaps the most impactful moment for the season leader to seize is the opportunity to say to his peers and mentees, "I made a mistake." Or "I need a do-over." Nothing great is ever learned when leader casts blame on others or seeks to cover up a personal mistake or a sin. The only way a team grows through a failure is when amends are offered, and mistakes are owned. Your ability to be humble means you are not only willing to recognize your shortcomings but also being able to laugh at yourself even now and then. Create a "James 5:16 moment." Joyfully *confess your faults one to another!* It will get your mind right. It might even heal you.

- **A humble leader celebrates other leaders and is quick to give credit.**

The flipside of admitting our mistakes is sharing the credit. In the church, credit is infinitely divisible. We are all part of the same body. As President Truman and Coach Wooden often said, "It is amazing what you can accomplish if you do not care who gets the credit." As humble leaders we need to look for opportunities to recognize the successes and victories in our church. This is a far greater motivator than constant corrections and tweaks. Some men have to get over the inherent fallacy that if you affirm people, they won't be hungry or

motivated. Positive motivation always works best. It's like the old parenting proverb, "Catch your kids doing something good." A narcissist sees credit given to a colleague as a lowering of their own personal esteem through comparison. Envy prevents gratefulness and joy, but the humble leader celebrates others, and he is rewarded.

• **A humble leader admits his limitations.**

Have you ever considered that a heavy workload and a life with no margin could be a hidden symptom of pride? It often connotes a man who is unwilling to delegate or ask for help because he believes that only he could do it right. The humble leader realizes that he's not the resident superman. He burned that cape a long time ago. Don't just give help. Learn to ask for help. As Larry Eisenburg put it: "For peace of mind, we need to resign as general manager of the universe."

• **A humble leader realizes that he is only vessel, not the main character.**

We are often tempted in assuming the story is all about us, but of course it isn't. We must get beyond ourselves and get the 30,000-foot view of all that is going on. We are all a part of a much bigger story than any of us can comprehend. I might not have a starring role, but I have a few lines to say. I commit to saying those few lines as best I can. You and I might not change a nation but we all can help change a child's life. Imagine what would happen if everyone led humbly. It really *would* change a nation!

Humility is a gift, but it is also a skill. It won't be accomplished overnight. We must *daily* pick up our cross. We must work on it *daily*. Jesus provides the template: "He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death--- even to death on a cross." When we focus on Jesus, it's not hard to be humble.

GENEROSITY: SIX WAYS TO KICK IT UP A NOTCH!

I must confess that I am a terrible online shopper. I find something that looks like a quality product only to realize later that it wasn't, or that it didn't work, or that I should have read more reviews. I call it "click regret." It's that dreadful moment when I realize that the cloak

of buyer remorse has fallen over my bank account like a sad blanket. *Why did I buy that? What was I thinking?* My wife is a lot better than I am at ordering what she needs, so I just try to avoid Amazon all together because, to me it's just another museum of bad ideas. **Yes, I have regretted many purchases, but one thing I've never regretted is the money I gave away.** Scientists are now saying that generosity actually changes your brain, and that generous people are happier people. One study states: *Happiness has been linked to an activation of the ventral striatum, which has been shown to play a role in the brain's reward system, giving us that feeling of satisfaction when we perform a pleasant activity.* In layman's terms, generosity makes us happy. But not only does it bless us to give, it also blesses God. He loves a cheerful giver.

Perhaps the greatest adventure you'll experience is the journey of generosity. Here are six ways to increase your generosity quotient:

1. Begin with the tithe. As a deacon, it's kind of assumed that you are a tither, but tithing is God's way of developing our generosity muscles. In the Old Testament, tithing is a start. It's our way of saying to God, "I trust you with all of my finances." As it's been said, the tithe is the one promise in the Bible where God invites us to test Him. "Prove me," He says in Malachi 3:10.

2. Transfer ownership of everything you have to God. Look around your house and say to God, "These shoes, clothes, furniture, kitchen items, and everything else, it's all yours, God. Thanks for letting me use them all for Your glory." Go into your garage, "This car is yours, too (as well as those handy tools and lawn equipment)." Pull out that laptop and hand that over to Him, along with the TV. It's really amazing to see what transferring the ownership of everything does. It forces you to think about where you drive God's car, what you watch on God's TV, and what sites you visit on God's laptop.

3. Give Anonymously. By doing this, you are paper shredding your ego. It's always nice to get a little boost of pride from someone if they know you gave, but there is something soul-transforming about the right hand not knowing what the left hand is doing. When you give anonymously to a person in need, your gifts are incarnational. In

other words, people receive it as if it were given from the Lord Himself.

4. Give Sacrificially. It's easy for a millionaire to give a thousand dollars. That's not sacrifice. Sacrificial giving is dangerous generosity and it's the kind of gift that touches the heart of God. We like comfort, pleasure, entertainment, and convenience. But when we give sacrificially, we are placed in the position of saying "no" to our earthly desires to make room for heavenly desires.

5. Practice an eternal mindset. I have to confess that I spend money on things that are temporary. In a year, there will be things that I have purchased that will become outdated, unworkable, and surprisingly unfulfilling. In financial investments, you've heard it said, "take the long view." By that they mean 10, 20, even 30 years down the road. That's a great plan for financial independence, but Jesus cares about what our investments in generosity will mean 10,000 years from now. When we give our treasures to advance the gospel of Jesus, we are making an eternal impact.

And Finally...

6. Enjoy the ride. It really is an adventure. When we give, we just have better stories than the folks who hoard riches for themselves. When we give, everything is more enjoyable because we become more like God. He is our example. How much did He give? See John 3:16.

Our Father is inviting us on a shared journey. He's saying, "Why don't you give me what you have, and I'll give you what I have. Let's do this together." In reality, God doesn't need your blessings, but we sure do need His. Once we see generosity as a partnership and a journey with God, it will make our brief time on earth so much more exciting and transcendent.

THE DEACON'S ROLE IN MINISTRY



THE RESPONSIBILITY OF DEACONS IN SERVING THEIR COMMUNITIES

Daryl is a techie deacon. He works remotely for a national "meat and three" that you might know. He's cut from a different cloth, as they say. Someone put the label of "Asperger's" on him a few years ago. How some people love those labels! I don't think he's on the spectrum that most people think he's on. He's on the servant spectrum. Every Monday afternoon, he comes to the church to help our senior adults with their computer issues, and somebody brings donuts. The number of seniors has grown, even as the computer issues have dwindled. I think they come for something more than malware questions.

And then there's Curtis. He's a retired math teacher who's found his place in an afterschool program. He's 83 and for those students who have a hard time when teachers start throwing the alphabet in with the numbers, he is their hero. According to some, he's a super-hero. He's also a master of connections, he meets parents, invites them to church, and they show up. I'm sure some of them feel like they owe

it to him, but three families stuck around and in a matter of months, we saw two moms and one dad taking the plunge (in the baptistery.)

And then there's Kale. I never asked him why his parents named him after a superfood, but Kale has been good for so many people. He's a subcontractor in town. You'd think he'd be tired of dealing with people and projects, but just about every Saturday, he's fixing something for free. We don't have to put Kale in the bulletin. His ministry is organic, and he always gives the "*church discount*" which is 100% off. He was a member for decades, but something happened to him in a Celebrate Recovery group in 2008. He turned his life around and hasn't looked back. Yes, he has a story to tell.

The common thread? These are deacons that got it. They came to realize that deaconing (I know. It's not really a word.) isn't a bunch of Mr. Superiors making all the decisions in the church and becoming general managers of the universe. These guys got the fact that deacons are all about serving the community.

So, what happens when these kinds of deacons are in the church? I can say from personal experience that it changes everything. Over time, the whole congregation learns by example that gospel conversations, reconciliation, growth, church health, and spiritual awakening flow naturally out the same hands that serve.

It all points back to how Jesus engaged the disciples during a community need. The disciples were trying to get Jesus to make a public announcement that the multitude should go back home because the show was over, and they didn't have a fish and chips stand in sight. But Jesus, the Creator of the universe, said casually to the disciples, "*You give them something to eat.*" We, too, are surrounded by a multitude and he's saying to the deacons of our churches, "*You give them something to eat.*" The disciples didn't have a lot, but that's what makes the story great. Out of the little they were given, they created the first and greatest Grubhub™ event in the long, storied history of carry outs.

Daryl, Curtis and Kale wouldn't ever think of themselves as spiritual giants. Each of them has their own particular sets of flaws and skills. Daryl is tone deaf. Curtis is a wallflower at parties. And Kale

gets a panic attack if you call on him to pray before the offering. But wow! What a great set of deacons. They just took the job seriously and God just kept blessing with basketfuls left over.

From the get-go, the role of the deacon has been about serving in the community. There are other important roles like supporting the mission of the church, assisting with the Lord's Supper, mentoring, asking important questions when important questions must be asked, having the pastors back, and just showing up. But these are all secondary to meeting the needs in the community. All God asks you to do is surrender over the things you already have and have been gifted to do. It's not brain surgery, unless you are a brain surgeon, of course. It's more organic than most would believe. Who knows? Perhaps your ministry in the community is something that's already right under your nose.

FOUR CHURCH-TESTED IDEAS FOR MINISTERING TO WIDOWS AND ORPHANS

Jeff, a young entrepreneur, reluctantly accepted the call of deacon. He said, "I don't think I am qualified, I don't think the timing is right for me personally, but I just can't seem to shake the feeling that this is something God wants me to do." Three months later he said to me, "I knew I'd be challenged but I'm realizing that God is doing something new inside me that I never would have experienced if I hadn't said, 'yes.'" If you are reading this article, I imagine that you, too, have said 'yes' and you are on the same journey of obedience.

The role of a deacon began with a problem and therefore deacons are often thought of as fixers. In the narrative of the early Church, a number of widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. Someone had to step in to preserve the integrity of the gospel. That sounds like a hyperbole. How is a simple problem like food distribution threatening to the gospel? This problem posed a threat because Jesus cared so deeply for struggling people. Therefore we have to care for everyone in our church that finds a seat on the struggle bus.

Widows and orphans are real and symbolic reminders that our world is broken, that suffering and loneliness are palpable, and that the church has the great opportunity to reconcile, heal and transform their community through service and mercy. As deacons, it's not that we *have* to do this. We *get* to do this!

Here are four ideas to help deacons and churches fulfill the Biblical mandate of serving widows and orphans.

Plan a Widows Banquet. The deacons and their wives prepare, cook, serve, entertain, and honor our widows. Decorate the Fellowship Hall and then each deacon couple will pick up the widows at their homes and escort them to the banquet. The Widow's Banquet helps us in a number of ways. For most deacons, this becomes an opportunity to get to know the widow, to understand their needs, to learn how to assist them, and most importantly, to connect spiritually with them.

Mentor. This strategy has broad repercussions on the next generation. When we think about orphans, most churches would survey their congregation and say, "Looks like we're all good on that front. No orphans here!" Look closer. Look into your community and you will find them. The orphans today are the kids in your church that have no spiritual father. They come to church without a dad. They suffer through the chaos and wreckage of a broken home. They are longing to connect with someone who can give them the blessing that their parents were never able to give them. Our youth leaders and Sunday School teachers are vital in assessing these needs. They can challenge the deacons to develop a strategy to connect children and students with spiritual mentors from the deacon body. Every year, our deacons attended graduation celebrations after several years praying, mentoring and connecting with these students. I know a number of students that have received driving lessons, camp scholarships and scholarship recommendations. I can think of five students that went on to serve in full-time ministry and it's my firm belief that the mentoring program was a tremendous part of their stories.

Support young families in the adoption process. This cultural trend in many churches is cause for celebration. Young couples,

burdened by the needs of orphans around the world are choosing to adopt. Often these adoptions are international. Deacons have a biblical challenge to help these inspiring members achieve their God-given mission. The financial toll can be overwhelming for many young couples. Our church and deacon body joined them by helping them raise funds and celebrated the arrival of these new faces. This dynamic also helps our church family become multicultural. It makes our church look more and more like Heaven - all races, backgrounds and nations!

Partner with widows and widowers in ministry. A few years ago, I said farewell to a great prayer warrior. She was a 92-year-old widow in our church. Every Thursday I would get behind the wheel of her car as she would direct me to the homes of the elderly members of our church. She turned the afternoon into a prayer event as we visited and prayed. I thought this would be a ministry to her but was I ever wrong! Vivian was a blessing to me. Vivian threw all her energies into her new ministry of mercy and prayer. I remember her in the elevators of hospitals, in Bush Jewelers, and other places around town praying for strangers. She had a knack for discerning what was going on in people's lives before she heard it from them. Vivian was an old school card-writer, spending hours purchasing and writing cards by hand and mailing them out. She wasn't on Facebook. She didn't need Facebook. She preferred face-to-face conversations. Vivian did as much, if not more, than I did in ministering to her sisters, grafted together through the loss of their spouses. I am sure there are Vivians in your church whose lives will be extended because you partnered with them to minister to their friends.

Support the Tennessee Baptist Children's Homes. There are two major ways you can do this. Make sure your church gives through the Cooperative Program. A portion of every gift given through the CP supports Tennessee Baptist Children's Homes (TBCH) ministries, which includes foster care, adoption, and residential care where Christian house parents serve in family-style homes on three campuses across the state, providing safety and biblical guidance so children can thrive. The other way to support TBCH is to give

through the Mother's Day Offering. This one time offering provides support and every dollar goes to this important, life-changing ministry.

Finally. Get organized. Know the plan for ministering to widows and orphans. Create smart assignments for connecting deacons with widows. Chart out whom on your deacon ministry team would have the best success in mentoring to children and students. Here are a few tips:

- *Avoid overstating the plan to the church.* Keep the plan soft-spoken. Otherwise it will sound obligatory or forced.

- *Encourage accountability.* The main focus of every deacons meeting should be reporting, celebrating and praying about the ministry strategy. So many Deacon's Meetings are derailed by petty issues! Keep the main focus of your Deacon Ministry Team about the task of service. Otherwise, you'll miss the whole point.

- *Adapt the plan with time.* Ministry to widows and orphans is fundamentally fluid. You'll have to change throughout the year, so remind your Deacon Team to be flexible and adaptable so that you don't have the same issues that arouse with the controversy of the Hellenic widows in Acts 6.

Like Jeff, most deacons struggle with time demands, agendas and priorities. Having a strategy in place allows us to do the work of a deacon, which ultimately will change the lives of widows and orphans and the deacon who is obedient to the call.

SEVEN PRACTICAL WAYS TO MAKE ANY MINISTRY EVANGELISTIC

A few years ago, I was blessed to be in a church full of teachers. They seemed to be everywhere I turned and when we discussed the possibility of an after-school program, our entire church was thrilled! We were within walking distance from an elementary school which was adjacent to the middle school. Lots of retirees, college students and even some high school students jumped on board and within a few weeks we were rolling. But I knew something was a little off when

one of our senior adults came into my office and said, "I have this middle schooler who is asking what church is all about and I think I could tell him about Jesus, but we aren't finished with his homework. Do you think maybe you could make an appointment with him to witness to him?"

Obviously, I was thrilled, but I also realized that I had failed as a leader to make the ultimate objective clear and prepare the students and adults.

As the church we are at our best when we are serving. But serving is not the end all! We can raise money. Feed the poor. We can help our community. We can provide meals for teachers. We can create basketball leagues. We can tutor students. We can have activities for senior adults. All of these things are great. But unless we have our ultimate goal of creating Great Commission opportunities in our church, these activities missed the mark. The church's focus must be evangelism. That's the whole point of the church. We have one grand obsession: we want to make sure that the Gospel is heard and understood by the people in our community.

But how do we do this when we are dealing with people of different talents who might not have a passion for evangelism? Here are seven strategic ways that a church can paint a P.I.C.T.U.R.E. of evangelism in every ministry model. Think about this acrostic as you build your church's ministry objective and strategies. Keep in mind that this isn't listed by priority, but rather seven basic dynamics of an evangelistic strategy.

Passionate Leadership: Often in churches we build a chart of all the positions we need to make a ministry happen. But ministry won't happen when you have to cajole people to do things in which they have no passion. Great enthusiasm for the ministry is a must. And if your leaders don't have passion for the projects they lead, it's just going to be a slog for them and a bog for the mission.

Intentional Prayer: No mission or ministry will succeed without the strategic prayers of the church, the leaders and the participants. Ask your team, what is our prayer strategy? How will we activate

prayer throughout our activity? How will I prompt the prayers of the church?

Celebrate the Harvest: Along the way, if you have new people drawing close to a decision, if a team member has a Gospel conversation, or if a baptism happens as a result of the ministry, it is time for a whoop and a holler! Grab the moment and celebrate it!

Tell Your Story: Invite team members to think about their personal story of their salvation and spiritual journey and motivate them to be prepared to tell it.

Underscore Purpose: We all have to be laser-focused on the goal of direct and personal communication of the plan of salvation and discipleship. Intentionality is the key. It's easy to get focused on the nuts and bolts of a particular ministry. We look at to-do lists, budgets and logistics. That part comes naturally for many leaders. But if we are going to equip our churches to become Gospel outposts we must constantly and intentionally communicate to the church the big "Why."

Request a Response: Gospel conversations ultimately lead to a point in time where we ask, "Would you want to commit to Jesus today?" Everyone should be ready to ask that one big question. When we take our fear of rejection and timidity out of the formula, it's the easiest part of the process. Don't ever fear asking. It might be the one thing a spiritually lost person is waiting for.

Empower People: It's easy for deacons to own their ministry responsibilities. We know how to do stuff in the church. Most of us have been at it a long time. But as we grow other leaders we are multiplying the effectiveness of evangelism. I know a student can reach another student better than I can. I need to empower people to take ownership.

These seven elements will allow spiritually lost kids and adults to get a picture of Jesus that can lead to life change. Start small. Grow. And don't forget the main thing: EVANGELISM.

5 EASY WAYS TO EVANGELIZE YOUR COMMUNITY

"I hear what you're saying about sharing my faith but I have an allergic reaction to it," One member said after my sermon on evangelism. The member continued, "I break out in a cold sweat when I even think about prying my way into somebody's eternal destiny and trying to get them to do what they need to do."

For many believers, the term "evangelism" evokes visions of awkward unexpected home visits, feelings of intimidation and inadequacy, and a fair amount of nervousness. But evangelism can be a joyful adventure and the greatest thing believers will ever accomplish in their lives. Don't get me wrong. Street witnessing and cold-calling evangelism are amazingly effective and inspiring, but every believer can do a few simple, creative, proactive things to exercise their relational and sharing muscles. Here are some easy sure-fire ways every member of your church can share their faith in a totally nonthreatening way.

1. Video your faith story using your smart phone and post it on social media. The video should be no longer than 2 minutes and can be a simple explanation for how you became a Christ-follower and how it's changed the trajectory of your life. If someone is camera shy, invite them to write their story as a post on Facebook. At the end of the post or the video, explain how someone can begin their faith journey by praying to ask Jesus to be the Lord of their life.

2. Invite members to have Gospel conversations. Many church members may shy away when you talk evangelism, but the idea of Gospel conversations seems like a more realistic goal for them. So, what is a Gospel conversation? It's fairly obvious. It's listening, asking questions and relating the Gospel. Ultimately, we are challenging people to place their trust in Jesus. Jesus illustrated this time after time. His evangelism happened organically and situationally. John Meador says "Training believers to have gospel conversations with their friends, neighbors and co-workers must be one of the top priorities for pastors and leaders today." Sam Greer, pastor of Red Bank Baptist Church, in Chattanooga, Tennessee has a unique way of moti-

vating his church to have Gospel conversations. In their worship center, they have plexiglass display that has Jesus written on the front of it. Inside are white ping pong balls and red ping pong balls inside. The white represents every Gospel conversation people in their church have had. The red ones represent someone who came to Christ. Every time a gospel conversation or a salvation occurs, members are invited to drop a ping pong ball into the display. In one year, they recorded over 1900 gospel conversations.

3. Challenge church members to adopt their block for the Gospel. We can all get to know by name the families in walking distance of our homes. Offer assistance. Give gifts on special occasions. Host a barbeque or a game viewing party. Show up at the hospital when a health crisis happens. As we do life with our neighbors, we will earn their attention and ultimately, we'll get a chance to share the Gospel with them. A little investment goes a long way in being heard when you start to share things of eternal significance.

4. Challenge your people to *practice* sharing the Gospel on a friend who is not a believer. The invitation would go something like this: *"My church is asking me to practice sharing my spiritual story with someone. Could I buy your lunch? And would you allow me to practice sharing my story?"* Recently, I've heard testimonies of people who came to faith in Jesus through this simple, non-threatening invitation.

5. Finally, *practice* prayer-paration. We all know people who are without the hope of Jesus. Above health issues, financial hardships, and personal issues, our unbelieving friends should be at the top of the church prayer list. I know that the more I pray for someone, the more courageous I will become in sharing Jesus. Ultimately, we can't save anyone. But we know the One who can. Let's challenge the church to have a list of people, we'd love to reach for Christ.

As we pray, share, give and go, we have to encourage each other to go to where the people are. It really is Good News. In fact, the gospel is the greatest news on the planet. When people in your church are challenged to share their faith, stories about evangelism and Gospel conversations will stoke the fire and increase the hunger to see more people come to trust Jesus. There's really nothing better to create

excitement, ease tensions, and grow a church than a group of people committed to sharing and celebrating this great news.

WALKING THEM HOME: Ministering to People Giving Care to their Elderly Parents

In 2016, our youngest son left home for the Army and a month later my sister called and said, "We need to talk about Dad." This conversation brought me to the realization that our lives were about to change drastically. The next year would be filled with struggle, sacrifice, financial burdens, surprise, sacred conversations, and difficult farewells. As a deacon, I observed and ministered to families in our church who had navigated through these waters. But after being on the other side of the struggle, I will never minimize the experience in all its pain, grief and questions.

Those who have cared for aging parents know that it's like living life in reverse. It's a struggle to swap roles and parent the ones that parented you for so many years.

The families that are walking their parents home deal with lots of unknowns. I wrote mine in a journal as I waited in the doctor's office with my dad who had Alzheimer's: *We don't know where it's all going. We don't know if medications will help. We don't know if Dad really knows who we are. We don't know how far the money will go. We don't know if he'll return to Mom. We don't know what started it. We don't know how it will end. We don't know how to respond to questions we don't understand. We don't know if we are doing all this right. We don't know how the meds work. We don't know what to pray for. We don't know what decade Dad will be in today. We don't know how to respond when people ask how he's doing. We don't know if this is how we'll be at the end of our lives. And we don't know what Christmas will be like.*

So how can a deacon best minister to those caring for their elderly parents? The first step is understanding. Every family and circumstance are different, but here are a few universals. Most can relate to these statements:

- **Realize that my energy level is very low.** I won't be able to do all the things I used to do with the same verve and passion on some

days. I'm trying to catch up. Right now, I'm just trying to hang on. I have no doubt that everything will be back to normal. Just keep in mind that I'm messy right now and your grace is love personified.

- **I have days of heroic acts and productivity, but these days may be few and they're not maintainable.** You'll see me laugh and you'll think I'm fine. In those moments, I do feel fine but also there will be periods of latent depression and disappointment. Unless you spend a lot of time with me you probably won't see the snot, sweat, and existential angst. Let's both thank God for that, but please keep in mind that it is there.

- I've had to make a ton of decisions over the past few months. **My decision-making muscles are fatigued right now.** So, if I seem to have lost the ability to give you a straight answer, well then... there's your reason.

- **Realize that I struggle with remorse and regret.** *It's crazy, but I am struggling with every care decision and compromise that I encounter. Just a simple word of encouragement is priceless. A simple phrase like, "You're doing good," is most healing word for me because I struggle for days about what I could be doing better.*

These statements, while not 100% universal, are baked into most caregivers. Keep in mind that most people haven't taken classes in college on caring for elderly parents, so most of us learn as we go along. Still, as a deacon we can be there to provide encouragement, support and prayer in a myriad of ways.

THE DEACON'S ROLE IN CHURCH LEADERSHIP



ALIGNING MY MINISTRY AND WORK TO THE OVERALL VISION OF THE CHURCH

Victor was a retired CEO of a hospital supply company in our town and when he agreed to be a deacon, I was absolutely thrilled. He'd bring so much insight, wisdom, and acumen to our team. He attended our first meeting as we discussed and prayed about the work of our deacon body. From the outset there was an issue. A huge one. He wanted to singlehandedly change the vision and values of the church. For the next year it was a push and pull affair rife with counter arguments and proposals that seemed to come out of nowhere. Perhaps he missed the thrill of board room take-overs or the ability to singlehandedly change things. We had recently worked across our entire church organization to prayerfully create a mission statement and a long-range plan that stretched our people's view of the church and adding Victor's force of personality and motives almost cost us three longtime leaders to resign simultaneously. Victor, as gifted as he was, just couldn't align to the plan and he left everyone frustrated, including himself. You can't minimize the importance of

alignment when it comes to vision and effectiveness in a church and deacon body. Misalignment will sabotage the tread life of any team.

Here is an easy way to remember, measure, and evaluate your alignment as deacons. I'd call it the P.L.A.N.

Purpose

Purpose reflects the important question: "WHY." Everything in your church needs to run through this filter. If you have a program or a practice which has no purpose, you are wasting everyone's time. There are lots of things that knock churches off their purpose. Sometimes it's a shadow mission of a member or a leader. A leader can press others to do something or decide on an initiative because there is something else going on. It could be a personal desire, a resentment, or an unshared agenda. In other words, a deacon may say we need to do this program because of a need that I have, or to make me look good or to right a wrong from five years ago. Every leader, especially deacons need to ask this soul-searching question "why?" When you lose your "why" you lose your way.

Leadership

John Maxwell nailed it when he said, "Everything rises and falls on leadership." For a vision to be realized, every deacon needs to think of themselves as a leader. Our goal as leaders shouldn't simply be to make more followers but rather to develop new leaders. Being a leader doesn't mean that you're going to make all the decisions. Leadership means that you will champion the overall vision of the church through your initiative and enthusiasm. That's what makes a great leader. Some deacons believe that being a leader simply means being a filter or an inspector of the actions of the pastor or other leaders. Although we do need to assess where we are, it's easy for us to get into an analytic mindset that sabotages the overall vision and purpose of the church. Anyone can stand back and offer opinions, but blessed is the pastor who has men that get in the game.

One of the greatest deacons that I've ever worked with had a simple phrase. Every time there was a consensus for our church to move in a certain direction. He'd simply say "Let's go." If he texted it, there would be three or four exclamation marks. After the sentence.

There was no "how will this affect me?" There wasn't a bit of "Why was I left out of the decision?" His job was simply to encourage and cheer on the entire team. As a pastor I cannot tell you how encouraging it was to have him on our team. If he ever had a concern or disagreement, he would always come to me first before bringing it to the entire group. But usually when it seemed right to the entire deacon body, he was my "Let's Go" man. He was never the chairman, but he was always a leader.

Attunement

Dr. Dan Siegel defines attunement this way: "When we attune with others, we allow our own internal state to shift, to come to resonate with the inner world of another. This resonance is at the heart of the important sense of "feeling felt" that emerges in close relationships." If you are aligned to the overall mission of the church, you'll want to be attuned to your team. Deacons who are attuned can read the cues of their team members. They pause to think about the "why" questions but not *just* the "why" question. Attuned deacons are not only group-aware, but they are also self-aware. In other words, they don't dominate the discussion but know how to listen, empathize, and ask important questions. The opposite of attunement might be best described in what the Gottman Institute calls the four horsemen of the relationship apocalypse: criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling. If you've been a member of any church or organization for any amount of time, you've probably experienced these four horsemen. If you align your ministry and work to the vision of your church. Make sure you stay away from these four horsemen. (They are headless!)

Nuance

Along with purpose, leadership, and attunement, an aligned leader also understands the power of nuance. He understands that no person or vision is crafted by cookie cutters or lead by robots. A successful plan in one church or with one team doesn't guarantee the same amount of success in another environment. Many pastors and deacons know their Bibles. That is paramount. But secondarily, we need to understand our community and adapt our vision to provide

strong biblical solutions in the context of our surrounding environment. We must learn to nuance our vision so that our church understands the objectives and ministries. Shepherds don't drive their sheep, they lead them. That's what we should do. And we should do it with a winsome heart and nuance. It will allow you to customize, improvise and strategize effectively.

If a church's alignment is off, the tread-life will be short. To be in proper alignment, we must know our PURPOSE, practice healthy LEADERSHIP, ATTUNE our minds, and adapt with NUANCE. I challenge you to take some time in your next meeting to ask each other how you're doing in these vital dynamics of effective vision.

STRENGTHENING YOUR FAITH IN THE MIDST OF CHANGE

4 Questions to Ask

Ralph served Calvary Baptist for 12 years as a deacon under the leadership of his former pastor. Ralph and his pastor shared a strong bond through years of victories, late night phone calls, and the day-to-day struggles of a growing church of 120 active members. As Pastor Mick approached retirement, Ralph knew change was on the horizon, but he had no idea how difficult change would be for him. With every new plan and pivot away from the strategies of the past few years, Ralph struggled to stay on board and support Hank, the young pastor, full of new ideas but lacking the experience of his former pastor. Ralph grew cynical, angry and frustrated. After a few difficult private conversations, Hank and Ralph's relationship reached a breaking point. Ralph transformed into the type of deacon he never wanted to be ---- the old grumpy man with his arms crossed in the back of the sanctuary.

One night after small group, he came to the realization that underneath his seething bitterness was something he coined, "transition grief." He knew this was a heart issue and he needed an internal change, or it could wreck him and the church that he loved so much. In almost every major transition and start of new initiative, there's

some transition grief. Everything in a transition has a spiritual dynamic, even if it's a 15-minute change in the Sunday morning schedule. Transition is an opportunity for a breakdown or a breakthrough. The good news is that we have a choice. Change can be a catalyst of spiritual growth or decline. Here are four questions every deacon needs to ask as they grapple with the kinds of transition Ralph faced.

Do I have the right perspective? Some deacons have the perspective that their job is to be the church maintenance man. No, I'm not talking about the one changing the air filters in the activities center. Some of us believe it's our job to keep everything going like it's been going for the past few decades. Not true. Everything changes whether we like it or not. If my dog stayed in the same place for a day, you can be assured that I'd check to make sure he was still alive, because living, healthy things tend to move. Only dead things stay the same. Through Isaiah, God spoke this word about change*.*

"Look, I am about to do something new; even now it is coming. Do you not see it? Indeed, I will make a way in the wilderness, rivers in the desert." (Isaiah 43:19)

God's story is saturated in change. When we hold onto the safe, the familiar, the predictable, we can rest assured that He is calling us into the future. He's asking us, "Do you not see it?"

Am I willing to move ahead even when I don't have all the answers? We'd all love to know exactly how things will go during change. We long for lives of lifetime warrantees, mulligans, and perfectly accurate forecasts, but that's not how God does things. Do you remember the story of the Israelites in the wilderness? God fed them manna each day for that day *only*. Moses explained that this was the way God tested their faith. In fact, even how he provided was rather mysterious: *When the Israelites saw it, they asked one another, "What is it?" because they didn't know what it was.* (Exodus 16:15) I'm sure you've asked that question a time or two at the church potluck! Seriously though, God's ultimate plan for us is to trust him step by step, day by day.

Am I willing to make provision for the change? Jesus warned

us: *"For which of you, wanting to build a tower, doesn't first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? (Luke 14:28)* Every change has a price tag! Significant change costs us time, money and sometimes friends. It's going to cost us something, but when we are in step with the Lord, the returns are incredible. The concept of change saturates the book of Nehemiah as he revitalizes Jerusalem and builds back the walls of the city. In the last verse of Nehemiah, he reports to God that he has made provision for the wood. Are you willing to make provisions?

Will I take the change personally? I hope so! Last week I had a chance to visit Ralph. I wish I could explain the miraculous transformation. Sure, the church was growing, and they had more baptisms than they have ever witnessed. It really was miraculous but there was another miracle ---- the transformation in Ralph's heart. That's what happens when we choose to embrace the changes God works in our ministries, churches and lives.

A DEACON'S ROLE IN LEADING DURING A PASTORAL CRISIS

In 1973, my grandfather was a deacon in a small church of around 150 members in rural Louisiana. The longtime pastor dropped by to visit my grandfather who was in poor health at the time. After he left, the pastor walked into the parsonage and shot himself. This suicide sent shockwaves throughout the church and the community. It reverberates even today, 48 years later. Longtime members who were children at the time, still discover ancient grief from time to time from that dark afternoon, so many years ago.

Today, we've seen an increase of pastoral crises. They present themselves in many forms and circumstances. Each one proliferates pain, stress, and sometimes a departure from faith in some believers. Obviously, there's a lot at stake when a church faces a pastoral crisis. As a deacon, if you've never faced a leadership crisis in your church, there's a good chance you'll face one in the future. Let's look at three types of crises that could threaten the health of your church and

consider a few values a deacon must adhere to avoid the hidden traps and be a catalyst of healing. Biblically, the role of the deacon leans toward service and not "decision-making authority." However, most deacons have dual roles in committees and teams. But every deacon will need to embrace a standard of ministry which will foster healing.

1. The Family Crisis

Here are a few examples of common crises a pastor family may face.

- *The pastor's daughter leaves home while still in high school after it's discovered that she is pregnant.*
- *The pastor's wife is placed in a psychiatric unit.*
- *The pastor is diagnosed with stage 4 cancer.*
- *The pastor's adult son is charged with a DWI.*

I'm sure you can think of many scenarios that would fall into the realm of a family or personal crisis. Each of them comes with scads of implications. There is no one-plan-fits-all procedure, but there are a few universal truths that should guide us as deacons.

Authenticity is paramount. If you pastor is in crisis, he needs you to be real. The instinct of most church members is to back away, but we must lean in. Sadly, church is not always a safe space for authenticity. A healthy deacon will realize that rarely does a family crisis call for disciplinary actions. When the crisis involves the child of a pastor, or any church staff member's child, it's imperative to remind people that the church hired the pastor, not the child. Don't allow gossip to go unchecked. As deacons, we can throw water or gas on any family fire. Choose water! Blame does nothing but bring shame. If you find yourself snooping around a crisis looking for someone to blame, ultimately you are nurturing a shame-based community. Instead of placing blame, pray. Also, as your pastor's friend, encourage and facilitate an environment where your pastor feels encouraged to seek counseling. We have to get over the hurdle of the stigma of family or personal counseling.

The other type of family crisis pastors may encounter is an unexpected illness. A deacon can be a powerful advocate to assure that he has every tool and opportunity to get his mind and body right. Many

studies have shown that the job of pastor is among the top five most stressful jobs. If you add a personal health crisis, the burden can be unbearable. Your prayer, attentiveness, and availability, when he calls on you, counts for a lot.

2. The Moral Crisis

Throughout the Bible, we find leaders who experience glaring moral failings. It happens, but it shouldn't be regarded as pedestrian. Whether it is a discovered addiction to pornography, an affair, a financial fraud, or a series of fantastic lies to cover up a failure, it's important to realize that the whole church will carry the burden. Sadness and anger might be the first response of many in the church. When a fall becomes public, these feelings must be expressed. The lay leadership of the church must support those who've been harmed. A deacon's response is critical and every response you make must be bathed in prayer. Discipline must follow. It's biblical. No true leader enjoys the process, but the Bible is clear on this. The church's job is to discipline with all gentleness.

Keep in mind that when a leader falls, it's not the end of their story or the church's story. The church is always larger than a leader. Otherwise, the church would become just another cult following. Discipline is always redemptive, not merely punitive. The fallen pastor who repents should be able to rise out of the sin and return to wholeness. That doesn't mean that his place will be one of pastor and spiritual authority, but there must be a path to reconciliation and forgiveness.

3. The Conflict Crisis

What happens when a battle of personalities or leadership gets to the place where the ministry and witness of the church is untenable? It often ends with a forced resignation or termination. These times demand the presence of peacemaking deacons who prayerfully unite the church. Many churches make the mistake of sailing these troubled waters alone. If your church is experiencing conflict, it may be a good time to call on an outside mediator, such as your associational missionary, your state convention, or LifeWay. A mediator can either assist the church in bringing about reconciliation or moderate a

termination much easier than the church leadership. A church mediator is trained to bring fairness, a fresh set of eyes, and fair solutions. He can negotiate a fair exit strategy. If the leadership within the church tries to go it alone, the conflict could corrupt the future of the church moving forward. Gary Rickman, a certified church mediator in Tennessee shared this important truth: "If both parties of any conflict are not on board with mediation, it's a waste of time".

No one desires a crisis, but the good news is that God uses crisis to grow us all. It's not a time to fold. It's a time to engage. Crises have a stubborn habit of accelerating, if swept under the rug. Embrace the process and trust God with the outcome.

WHEN THE WORLD FALLS APART: LOVING BROKEN FAMILIES IN YOUR CHURCH AND YOUR COMMUNITY

"Matt, I need to talk to you. My world is falling apart."

I'll never forget that text and the conversation my wife and I had with Julie a few years ago. I was the interim pastor at Julie's church. She had just returned from Hawaii on a vacation with her husband of six years and their two young sons. On the flight back, her husband announced to her, in very businesslike tone, that he was going to divorce her in the next few months and that he would begin transitioning to a female identity. I'd known Doug as a faithful husband, great dad, and perhaps even a candidate for deacon. Doug refused to engage with anyone at the church. I never saw him again until a few months later as he appeared on my Facebook feed as Daniele. The culture of sexual ambiguity landed on the church's front steps. Everyone in the small church was aware that beyond the initial shock, we had a mother and two young boys that would be walking through incomprehensible grief and uncertain futures.

The church wasn't perfect throughout the ordeal, but I witnessed grace, compassion, and fierce love at work which brought healing to Julie, and as much normalcy as possible for her sons. We operated on some implicit Biblical mandates that were spoken out loud consistently.

1. We are all broken. Unlike some church cultures I've experienced, this church responded with extraordinary grace, knowing that none of us are perfect or better. We are all in need of grace and this isn't (nor will it ever be) a time to step up the bravado of our religiosity and self-righteousness. Romans 3:23 reminds us, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." The Sermon on the Mount reminds us that there is no rating system for sin. The church made the explicit decision to avoid useless analysis of the situation, but instead to approach God with boldness and beg for healing and protection for Julie and the boys.

2. We will proactively express support for Julie and her sons through emotional connection and provide financial support if needed. The key word here is "*proactive*." You and I have heard tragic stories of churches stepping away from families in crisis out of awkwardness, shame and embarrassment. In those moments when some families need the church the most, they feel ghosted and isolated rather than loved. This requires deacons and wives who are courageously meeting needs before the need is presented to them. It also requires coordination. It reminds me of those rare moments when two outfielders are standing under a pop-fly ball, each thinking the other player would call for the catch and the ball drops between them, or even worse, they both think it's their ball to catch and they collide getting to the ball. As deacons and members of the same body, communication is the key to providing the right support and the right amount of support as hurting families walk through dark days. Otherwise, everyone is concerned, but feeling they aren't the right ones to get involved, or they are so bombarded with calls that it's overwhelming and unhelpful.

3. We will never gossip or say, "I knew it would happen." The first impulse when we hear of a family in crisis is to share that information with others. It's absolutely the last thing we should do. Allow the family to own their story rather than the church sharing the narrative to each other. It never, ever ends well. The Apostle Paul implores us: "No foul language should come from your mouth, but only what is good for building up someone in need, so that it gives

grace to those who hear." When we hear this scripture, our mind immediately goes to vulgarity, but gossip is most foul! It can destroy.

4. We will do the "big, little things." It sounds like a strange adage but let me explain. The big, little things are the acts of kindness that we do that don't require money and, in some cases, a lot of time. But for a family going through a crisis or hurt, they are gigantic. So, what are the big, little things? No matter what the hurt may be, here's a short punch list of things you can do:

- *Pray for them.* This is the one thing you can bombard hurting families with! Everyone who knows of the family crisis should be praying for the family.

- *Make sure they know they're included.* Families going through grief or crises may need time to heal, but they should be invited and included in the activities of their small group, Sunday School, or church fellowship opportunities. This shouldn't be a given, especially if the crisis carries stigma or shame. They may not come but they should be personally invited.

- *Pick up the pieces.* Sometimes when a family's world is shattered, the church can help them pick up the pieces. This could be as simple as mowing the grass, babysitting, or running errands. Some of these things can be done without even asking. I remember when my father died, I was awakened one morning with the sound of a deacon mowing my grass. He didn't even ask. He just did it and went on his way.

- *Send them a text.* I have a friend who receives texts from a number of church members on the anniversary of his son's death. "*That one simple act does more than you'll ever know,*" he once told me. A text is a way for you to let them know your support, especially if a phone call would seem awkward.

- *Just be there.* Sometimes the most powerful ministry of them all is the ministry of presence. Practice it early and often.

Broken families are ubiquitous inside and outside the church and we have the opportunity as deacons and church members to provide the kind of community that focuses on healing and restoration. Doug couldn't be restored, but because the church had a plan and a healthy

perspective, Julie and her boys are still vibrant members. As I think about some church cultures I've experienced, I wonder how many churches would be healthy enough to provide hope. I feel so honored to have witnessed a church that got it right.

14 IMPORTANT QUESTIONS BEFORE YOU OPEN YOUR DOORS SUNDAY

I absolutely believe that most churches long to be welcoming to first-time guests and new attendees. But there is a gaping chasm between having a desire to reach people and doing the things that must be done to reach people. Here is a deacon dare, if you will: *Ask yourself these 14 questions*. Some of them are hard to answer, especially for a longtime member. When you're a part of one church culture for years, blind spots happen. These questions are laser surgery for culture cataracts.

1. How cluttered is your space?

It's easy to overlook the useless items laying around your church. Whether it is a Christmas tree in late February unsuccessfully hidden behind a fundraising display that ended two weeks ago or a number of bulletins from past Sundays on your pews ready and willing to confuse the members and visitors alike, take a look around and cut out the clutter.

2. Who's the first person they will encounter?

You can't overestimate first impressions. So, be purposeful about your greeting strategy. Make sure that you train your greeters. They must be focused on spotting new people and making them feel at home. By the way, if the first person who speaks to them is the pastor in his sermon, that first-time guest will not be back.

3. What will you give them?

Your first-time guests should never leave the building empty handed. Find something with value to give them. Ideas might include, a jar of jam, a coffee cup or anything else that works in the context of your culture.

4. How does your church smell (really)?

I remember a line from a movie a few years back where a teenager commented on a friend's house: "*Her whole house smells like soup.*" This was *not* a compliment. Did you know that the sense of smell has a longer brain shelf-life than any other of the five senses? Think about the smells you remember from your childhood. So, if your church smells musty, funky, or like your grandmother's mothball clothes closet, you might want to have a meeting about it.

5. Do you have a plan to get their information in a non-evasive way?

Find a way to connect through an information card that you invite them to turn in at the welcome center or in the offering plate. Ask what kind of information they want to receive and how they want to receive it. Insure them that you'll protect their privacy with the information they give you. But *don't* ask for information if you are unwilling to follow-up with them.

6. Does your church know the drill?

Welcoming is an *everybody* thing. Find opportunities other than a worship service to inform people the welcoming plan and invite them to join you in the strategy.

7. Must they meet your expectations?

Are there some unwritten rules in your church such as dress, ethnicity, tattoos, hairstyle, car model and year? If these rules exist, growth for your church will not only be difficult but heretical. Don't expect people to fit your cookie cutter. Jesus never did and to do so would place you in contradiction to the Great Commission. Here's our rule for clothes: wear them.

8. Can they understand you?

Every church has a lexicon of religious terms or phrases. Make sure you speak clearly and stay away from useless religiosity. In other words, be real.

9. What's the follow-up plan?

If you don't know it, you don't have one. There are plenty to choose from and there are lots of resources to use for training, but you must have a plan that works for your church.

10. Have you prayed for connections?

Chance encounters don't just happen at church. We pray them into existence. As deacons, pray for opportune times to connect and get beyond the, "Glad to see ya!" level of interaction.

11. Will they know what you're about?

At the very minimum someone should say something about the church's vision, value, or mission during worship. It doesn't have to be a powerpoint-driven, visioneering keynote, just a simple statement that reflects why your church exist. Example: *"If you are visiting with us, we are honored that you are here. We love God and we love people. So you make today awesome."*

12. Does your church have a plan for kids?

There has never been a generation that values childcare more than this one. Parents value safety and great experiences for their children. By great experiences I don't mean meeting a life-sized VeggieTales character and having a super-slide. I mean two leaders in every room that love kids and want to be there. If you don't have that, the visiting family will be *one and done* at your church.

13. Are their needless cringe factors?

I went in the Sunday School class and it mainly sounded like a gossip group. (Cringe!) You can think of a bunch of other cringe-worthy moments. Intentional churches are standard bearers and protectors from cringe.

14. Do your people love people?

You know it's true. Some churches don't want to grow because, frankly, they don't love people. Churches that want to grow have this crazy love for people. And it's not even like they have taste. They love *everybody*! And isn't that the kind of church that could reach *anybody*? Isn't that a family worth joining?

DEACON COVENANT: OUR SHARED COMMITMENT



Our Pledge as Servants

Having been called by our church family to serve as deacons, we joyfully enter into this covenant with one another and with our church. This covenant represents our heartfelt commitment to serving Christ together.

We commit to growing toward the Christian character described in the scriptural qualifications for deacons found in 1 Timothy 3:8-13 and Acts 6:1-7.

Our Faith Foundation

- **Scripture and Doctrine:** We believe the Bible is God's Holy Word, written by people but inspired by God. We embrace it as our guide for understanding our faith and doctrine.

Our Personal Commitment

- **Living with Integrity:** With the Holy Spirit's help, we commit to:

- Walking together in Christian love
- Living thoughtfully in the world
- Avoiding behaviors that might dishonor Christ, including the use or sale of alcoholic beverages and activities that could bring reproach to Christ's name

• **Speaking with Grace:** With the Holy Spirit's help, we commit to:

- Being mindful of our words
- Approaching others with charity and compassion
- Avoiding unfair or unkind criticism

• **Leading Our Families:** With the Holy Spirit's help, we commit to:

- "Ruling our houses well" by modeling Christ-like character
- Providing spiritual education for our children
- Emphasizing devotion and prayer
- Creating homes that reflect Christian values

Our Service Commitment

• **Supporting Church Leadership:** We will:

- Partner with our pastor in the church's ministry
- Provide thoughtful input on matters of church policy, discipline, evangelism, and fellowship

• **Nurturing Church Unity:** We will:

- Foster fellowship within our church family
- Protect the unity of spirit among members

• **Modeling Faithful Participation:** We will:

- Set an example alongside our pastor in spiritual matters
- Actively participate in church organizations
- Attend both Sunday worship services and mid-week prayer meetings when possible
- Be present at regular and special deacons' meetings unless prevented by circumstances beyond our control

• **Providing Leadership Support:** We will:

- Offer counsel to finance, budget, nominating, or other committees when requested
- Assist the pastor in administering ordinances and support ushers in collecting offerings when needed
- Help the pastor provide special ministries to church members and community members in need

Our Spiritual Growth Commitment

• **Growing in Faith:** With the Holy Spirit's help, we will:

- Deepen our understanding of fundamental Bible doctrines

- Learn the distinctive teachings of our church and denomination
- Be prepared to share our faith in Christ with others
- **Practicing Good Stewardship:** We will:
 - Use our time and talents wisely
 - Honor God with our tithes, recognizing that all we have comes from Him

Our Dedication

Remembering that "deacon" means "servant" - one who actively serves - we commit to being faithful servants of our Lord and church to the best of our ability, with the Holy Spirit's help. We dedicate ourselves to this sacred calling as deacons of our church.

We acknowledge and will honor our church covenant to the best of our ability.

DEACON ORDINATION SERVICE GUIDE



HOW TO GIVE YOUR ORDINATION SERVICE THE RIGHT KIND OF MYSTERY

*A*s a child, I remember the perplexity of the ordination services I attended. They called the new deacons to sit on the front row and our pastor and two others seemed to be preaching directly to them. I thought to myself, “These guys must really be in trouble!”

Then came the laying on of hands that lasted well over thirty minutes. Another laborious yet mysterious sight to behold... The deacon candidates on their knees as men in coats and ties placed their hands on the candidates and seem to be whispering in their ears. What was the secret? Is it some sort of story? A prayer? A password? The location of the emergency key to the activities center?

I remember those feelings every time I’m involved in planning Deacon ordination. It reminds me that the Deacon ordination experi-

ence should be a holy and joyous time for the church. Here are 3 tips and a template that helps guide me through the design of deacon ordination.

1. Remember, it's worship

Even though the primary purpose of Deacon ordination should be to recognize and bless the candidate, this time should be another opportunity to give God glory and thanks.

2. Avoid ambiguity

This is another opportunity to teach your church about service and the Biblical tradition of worship - even for children that may be in attendance. The pastor should be encouraged to explain the process of deacon ordination, the laying on of hands, and the role of the deacon in the church. It won't take long, but it could help those who are new to the experience to better understand the process, the Bible, and the rationale for ordination.

3. Curtail confusion and concern

Before the day of the ordination service, the existing deacons, the pastor, and the candidates should be aware of the order of service and given specific directions of the details such as where to stand, when to kneel, and when to participate. Since the role of the deacon is not a platform-type of church role, the deacons and the deacon candidates will be relieved to know the details. Regarding an order of worship: In many churches there has been a migration away from printed orders of worship, but having one for the ordination is especially helpful. It can serve to remove the awkwardness of the experience.

ELEMENTS OF THE ORDINATION SERVICE

Below, you'll find a suggested order along with a few comments about each element.

Opening Worship: This could be a hymn or worship song. Make

sure this doesn't drift too far from your church's style. Give them what they are comfortable with as far as music. A church that worships primarily using guitars should not dust off the pipe organ!

Welcome and Introductions: You'll definitely have extended family members attending who are not regular attenders. Don't make them feel like outsiders by saying things that would only be understood by members. It's also a great time to share with them your church's vision.

Prayer: Traditionally a pastor would lead the congregation in prayer, but because this is a celebration of lay leadership, it is often a great opportunity to ask a deacon or lay leader ahead of time to lead the church in prayer.

Introduction and share time: Introduce the candidate and invite him to come to the platform. After he is introduced, give him an opportunity to speak. The most effective use of this element is to make it a brief question and answer format. The pastor might ask one or two questions. The conversation could include:

- Tell us your story of how you came to follow Christ?
- How has God led you to accept the call to serve as a deacon?
- What does this church mean to you?

Church Affirmation: Well before the night of ordination, the deacons and staff should have thoroughly vetted the candidate and the vote should be an informal affirmation of each candidate.

Worship or Solo: Select a song with a message of service. Again, if it is to be sung by the congregation, find a song they know.

Ordination Charge to the Deacons and Church: This could be a brief message of challenge to the deacons and the church. This could be given by the pastor or visiting minister.

The Laying On of Hands: Provide an explanation to the church of what this time is all about— a time of prayer and blessing of each candidate. Encourage the deacons before the service to make their prayers and blessings meaningful but brief. Select soft meaningful instrumental music to played during this time. Some churches will invite other members to participate after the deacons and pastors have participated.

The Prayer of Dedication: This concluding prayer happens at the very conclusion of the laying on of hands.

Presentation: Churches customarily present the new deacons with a certificate of ordination and often a gift such as a Bible or a plaque. This is also a great time to recognize their wives since they, too will have a role to fill in the church as deacons' wives.

After the conclusion of the service, provide a time of fellowship. Many churches delegate this to some of the deacons' wives.

Hopefully your next ordination experience will be filled with the right kind of mystery. It won't be a mystery of where people stand, and how long it will take, but rather the mystery of a Savior who calls us to serve the church -- His Bride.

AN EYE FOR THE DETAILS

• **Recommended Duration:** 1 to 1.5 hours

- **Purpose:** To formally ordain a new deacon into church service
- **Note:** Music may be incorporated throughout the service as desired

Order of Service

Opening

- **Prelude Music**

Performed by church musicians

- **Welcome and Introduction**

Led by the designated leader

- **Opening Prayer (Invocation)**

Offered by a designated person

Presentation of Candidate

- **Introduction of Candidate and Spouse**

Presented by a designated person

- **Personal Testimony**

Shared by the ordination candidate

Examination (Optional Elements)

- **Congregational Questions**

Time for church members and ordained leaders to ask the candidate questions

• **Reading of Ordination Council Recommendation**

Presented by the clerk or secretary of the Ordination Council

This follows the Council's previous examination of the candidate

• **Congregational Vote**

Moderated by the church moderator to confirm proceeding with ordination

Ordination Messages

• **Charge to the Candidate**

A brief message addressing the responsibilities of ordination

Delivered by a designated person

• **Charge to the Church**

A brief message addressing the church's responsibilities to the ordained deacon

Delivered by a designated person

Note: These two messages may be combined into a single message if desired

Ordination Ceremony

• **Ordination Prayer** (Optional)

Led by a designated person

• **Laying on of Hands**

Traditional approach: Ordained persons pray over the candidate individually or as a group

Contemporary approach: Any church member may participate in laying on hands and praying

• **Presentation of Bible and Certificate**

The newly ordained deacon receives a Bible and Ordination Certificate

Presented by a designated person

Closing

• **Benediction**

Offered by a designated person

• **Reception**

Fellowship time following the service

Planning Notes

1. Select participants for each role several weeks in advance
2. Prepare the Ordination Certificate to be presented during the service
3. Ensure the sound system is prepared for all speakers
4. Arrange for photography if desired
5. Coordinate reception details with the fellowship committee

DEACON MINISTRY MONTHLY CHECKLIST



This monthly deacon accountability form serves as both a practical tracking tool and a spiritual reflection guide for individual deacons and deacon teams. By systematically documenting outreach activities like hospital visits, family contacts, and witness opportunities, deacons can maintain a clear record of their ministry impact while identifying areas needing attention or growth. The professional development section encourages continuous learning and skill-building, ensuring deacons stay equipped for effective service. The mentoring commitment checklist promotes accountability within the deacon body itself, fostering unity and mutual support among team members. Most importantly, the personal reflection section transforms routine reporting into meaningful spiritual practice, allowing deacons to celebrate God's work through their ministry, honestly assess areas for improvement, and bring specific prayer requests before the Lord. When compiled monthly, these forms provide deacon leadership with valuable insights into the team's collective ministry health, training needs, and spiritual growth, while helping individual deacons maintain intentional focus on their calling to serve the church family with excellence and faithfulness.

Name: _____ **Month/Year:** _____

Outreach Activities

Ministry Activity

Number Completed

Personal testimony/witness opportunities

Cards sent to church families/individuals

Sunday visitors contacted

Hospital visits made

Visits to church families/members

Professional Development
Training Attended This Month:

• Event: _____

Date: _____

• Location:

• Key Takeaways:

Additional Training (if applicable):

• Event: _____

Date: _____

• Location:

• Key Takeaways:

Mentoring Commitment

Please check areas where you've been active this month:

- ☐ Praying with and for fellow deacons
- ☐ Ensuring fellow deacons have your contact information
- ☐ Modeling faithful attendance (Sunday School, Worship, Prayer Meeting)
- ☐ Developing leadership in others
- ☐ Maintaining a positive attitude about the church, pastor, and staff

Personal Reflections

Highlights from this month's ministry:

Areas where I'd like to grow next month:

Prayer requests for my ministry:

"For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus." - 1 Timothy 3:13

Please submit this form to the Deacon Chairman by the first deacons' meeting of the following month.

DEACON FAMILY MINISTRY PLAN



A Comprehensive Implementation Guide for Southern Baptist Churches

Introduction

The Deacon Family Ministry Plan is a structured approach that enables the deacons of a Southern Baptist church to fulfill their biblical role of service by providing care, support, and ministry to church families. This guide outlines how to implement such a program in your church, allowing deacons to serve as extensions of the pastoral ministry by maintaining regular contact with assigned families and addressing their spiritual and practical needs.

Biblical Foundation

The Deacon Family Ministry Plan is grounded in Scripture:

- **Acts 6:1-7:** The first deacons were selected to ensure care for the widows and address physical needs so the apostles could focus on prayer and ministry of the Word.
- **1 Timothy 3:8-13:** Qualifications for deacons emphasize character, spiritual maturity, and service.

- **Romans 12:6-8:** Spiritual gifts, including service and mercy, are to be used within the body of Christ.

- **Galatians 6:2:** We are called to "bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."

This ministry exemplifies the servant leadership model that Jesus demonstrated (Mark 10:42-45).

Purpose and Benefits

Primary Purpose

To provide systematic, personal care to every family in the congregation by assigning families to deacons who will maintain regular contact, identify needs, and coordinate appropriate responses.

Benefits

- **For Church Members:**

- Ensures no one "falls through the cracks" during times of need
- Provides a clear point of contact for prayer requests and concerns
- Creates stronger connections between families and church leadership
- Enhances sense of belonging within the church family

- **For Deacons:**

- Provides clear direction for fulfilling their biblical role
- Creates meaningful relationships with church families
- Offers opportunities to exercise spiritual gifts
- Brings fulfillment through tangible service

- **For Pastors:**

- Extends pastoral care throughout the congregation
- Ensures timely notification of critical needs
- Allows focus on teaching, preaching, and leadership
- Creates a communication network for disseminating information

- **For the Church:**

- Strengthens the overall community and fellowship
- Helps identify and address needs quickly
- Improves retention of members
- Creates more efficient care systems

rganizational Structure

Basic Structure

1. Deacon Body: All active deacons participate in the Family Ministry Plan

2. Deacon Chairman/Coordinator: Oversees the entire ministry

3. Family Groups: Each deacon is assigned 5-10 families

4. Pastoral Oversight: Pastor(s) provide guidance and support

Leadership Roles

1. Deacon Chairman:

- Coordinates the overall ministry
- Ensures deacons receive proper training
- Maintains regular communication with the pastor
- Conducts monthly meetings to discuss ministry needs

2. Deacon Secretary:

- Maintains family assignment records
- Updates contact information
- Records ministry activities and needs
- Prepares reports for deacon meetings

3. Zone Leaders (optional for larger churches):

- Oversee 4-5 deacons
- Provide additional support and accountability
- Help problem-solve challenging situations
- Report to the Deacon Chairman

IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

Phase 1: Preparation (1-2 months)

1. Present the vision:

- Pastor explains the biblical basis and vision to deacons
- Deacons discuss and commit to the ministry
- Church leadership approves the plan

2. Develop ministry materials:

- Create family assignment cards/sheets

- Develop contact logs and report forms
- Prepare training materials for deacons
- Design informational materials for the congregation

3. Organize family units:

- Compile a comprehensive list of all church families
- Determine the number of families per deacon (typically 5-10)
- Consider geography when making assignments
- Note special needs or circumstances

Phase 2: Training (2-4 weeks)

1. Conduct deacon training sessions:

- Biblical basis for deacon ministry
- Specific responsibilities and expectations
- Communication skills and active listening
- Confidentiality and appropriate boundaries
- Recognizing and responding to various needs
- When and how to escalate concerns to pastoral staff

2. Set up the organizational system:

- Assign families to deacons
- Create a master chart of assignments
- Establish reporting procedures
- Schedule regular deacon meetings

Phase 3: Introduction to Congregation (2 weeks)

1. Announce the ministry:

- Pastor explains the program during worship services
- Include information in church newsletter
- Send letters to all families explaining the ministry

2. Deacon dedication service:

- Hold a special service recognizing deacons and their ministry
- Have deacons commit publicly to their service role
- Have the church pray over and commission the deacons

Phase 4: Implementation (Ongoing)

1. Initial contact with families:

- Deacons make personal contact with each assigned family
- Explain their role and how they'll provide support
- Gather updated contact information

- Ask about prayer requests and current needs

2. Establish regular contact schedule:

- Monthly contact (minimum) with each family
- Personal visits, phone calls, or meaningful interactions
- Record all contacts and identified needs

3. Monthly deacon meetings:

- Share family needs (respecting confidentiality)
- Report on ministry activities
- Address challenges and questions
- Pray for assigned families
- Coordinate responses to significant needs

DEACON RESPONSIBILITIES

Regular Contact

- Make meaningful contact with each family at least monthly
- Use a variety of contact methods (personal visits, phone calls, church interactions)
- Document each contact in a contact log
- Be attentive to verbal and non-verbal cues indicating needs

Ministry During Life Events

- **Hospital Visits:** When family members are hospitalized
- **Bereavement Support:** During times of loss and grief
- **Celebration of Births:** When new children join the family
- **Support During Crisis:** Job loss, serious illness, family difficulties
- **Recognition of Milestones:** Graduations, anniversaries, etc.

Practical Support Coordination

- Coordinate meals during illness or after hospitalization
- Organize transportation when needed
- Identify resources for financial counseling if requested
- Connect families with appropriate church ministries

Spiritual Support

- Pray regularly for assigned families
- Share Scripture as appropriate for encouragement

- Be prepared to share the gospel with non-believing family members

- Encourage church attendance and involvement

Communication Role

- Relay important church information to families
- Communicate significant needs to the pastor (with permission)
- Report ministry activities at deacon meetings
- Maintain confidentiality about sensitive matters

COMMUNICATION METHODS

Family Contact Methods

1. Personal Visits:

- Most effective for building relationships
- Best in homes by appointment
- Can also occur before/after church services
- Should be brief (15-30 minutes) and purposeful

2. Phone Calls:

- Good for regular check-ins
- Effective for following up on known needs
- Should be made at appropriate times

3. Text Messages/Emails:

- Useful for quick check-ins and reminders
- Good for younger families who prefer digital communication
- Should supplement, not replace, personal contact

4. Cards and Notes:

- Particularly meaningful for encouragement
- Appropriate for acknowledging special occasions
- Should be personalized

Record Keeping

1. Contact Logs:

- Date and type of contact
- Brief notes about family wellbeing
- Any needs or prayer requests identified
- Follow-up actions taken or planned

2. Monthly Report Forms:

- Summary of contacts made
- Ministry needs requiring attention
- Significant updates about families
- Questions or challenges encountered

3. Family Information Cards:

- Basic contact information
- Names and ages of family members
- Anniversary and birthday dates
- Known health concerns
- Ministry involvement
- Special skills or interests

TRAINING DEACONS

Initial Training

1. Biblical Foundations Workshop (2-3 hours):

- Study of deacon passages in Scripture
- Historical role of deacons in Baptist churches
- The servant-leadership model

2. Family Ministry Skills Workshop (3-4 hours):

- Active listening techniques
- Recognizing signs of distress
- Maintaining appropriate boundaries
- Confidentiality guidelines
- Crisis response basics
- Prayer with and for families

3. Practical Ministry Workshop (2-3 hours):

- Role-playing various scenarios
- Completing ministry forms
- Hospital visitation etiquette
- Addressing common family needs
- When to involve pastoral staff

Ongoing Training

1. Monthly Training Segments (15-20 minutes):

- Include as part of regular deacon meetings
- Focus on specific skills or challenges
- Led by pastor or experienced deacons
- 2. Quarterly Enrichment Sessions** (1-2 hours):
 - Deeper exploration of ministry topics
 - Guest speakers with relevant expertise
 - Review and refine ministry procedures
- 3. Annual Deacon Retreat** (4-8 hours):
 - Spiritual renewal and team building
 - Review of ministry effectiveness
 - Setting goals for the coming year
 - Recognition of service and testimonies

EVALUATION AND IMPROVEMENT

Regular Assessment

1. Monthly Review:

- During deacon meetings
- Review contact completion rates
- Discuss challenges and solutions
- Share success stories

2. Quarterly Evaluation:

- More comprehensive review of ministry
- Identify patterns in family needs
- Assess response effectiveness
- Make system adjustments as needed

3. Annual Survey:

- Gather feedback from deacons
- Consider surveying church families
- Review overall ministry impact
- Plan improvements for the coming year

Continuous Improvement

1. Learning from Experience:

- Document successful approaches
- Note what hasn't worked well

- Create a resource file of best practices

2. Benchmarking:

- Connect with other churches using similar models
- Share ideas and improvements
- Adapt successful practices from others

3. Resource Development:

- Create additional tools as needs are identified
- Update training materials regularly
- Develop specialized resources for unique situations

SAMPLE DOCUMENTS and Resources

Family Ministry Card

DEACON FAMILY MINISTRY CARD

Deacon:

Phone:

Family:

Phone:

Address:

Email:

Family Members:

Name

Birthdate

Notes:

Anniversary:

Special Needs/Concerns:

Ministry

Preferences:

CONTACT LOG

DEACON CONTACT LOG

Deacon: _____

Family: _____

Date	Type of Contact	Notes/Needs	Follow-up
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

Monthly Report Form

DEACON MONTHLY MINISTRY REPORT

Month: _____ Year: _____

Deacon: _____

Total Number of Families Assigned: _____

Number of Families Contacted This Month: _____

Contact Methods Used:

☐ Personal Visit ☐ Phone Call ☐ Text/Email ☐ Church Contact ☐
Card/Letter

Ministry Needs Identified:

Ministry Actions Taken:

Families Needing Pastoral Attention:

Questions/Challenges:

Family Introduction Letter

[Church Letterhead]

[Date]

Dear [Family Name],

As part of our church's commitment to providing care and support to every member of our church family, our deacons have implemented a Family Ministry Plan. I am pleased to inform you that I have been assigned as your deacon.

MY ROLE IS TO:

- Pray for you and your family regularly
- Maintain regular contact with you
- Be available to help in times of need
- Communicate important church information
- Serve as a connection point to our pastoral staff

I look forward to getting to know you better and serving you in any way I can. I'll be contacting you soon to introduce myself personally, but please don't hesitate to reach out to me if you have any needs or prayer requests before then.

You can reach me at [phone number] or [email address].

Serving Christ together,

[Deacon's Name]

Deacon, [Church Name]

. . .

CONCLUSION

The Deacon Family Ministry Plan provides a structured approach to caring for the church family while fulfilling the biblical role of deacons. When implemented thoughtfully and maintained consistently, this ministry can significantly strengthen the fellowship, care, and spiritual health of your congregation.

Remember that flexibility is important—each church should adapt this plan to fit its unique context, size, and needs. The key is maintaining the core elements of regular, intentional contact with families and responsive ministry to identified needs.

May God bless your deacons as they serve in this vital ministry!

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**• Books:**

- "The Ministry of the Deacon" by Howard Foshee
- "Deacons: Servant Models in the Church" by Henry Webb
- "The New Testament Deacon" by Alexander Strauch

• SBC Resources:

- Contact your state Baptist convention for deacon training resources
- LifeWay Christian Resources offers deacon training materials
- Many Baptist associations offer deacon workshops

THIS GUIDE WAS PREPARED to assist Southern Baptist churches in implementing an effective Deacon Family Ministry Plan. Feel free to adapt it to the specific needs and context of your congregation.

