

What is.....



Church Leadership



In this leaflet, we are referring to “church” leaders, that is Elders (the Pastor for example) and deacons, rather than any other leaders, for example of organisations, in the church. Where we say leader(s) / leadership, please read it in that context.

THE MINISTRY OF ELDERS

Elders and Deacons are the titles given to men and women in the local church who are set apart to lead the church practically and spiritually in the direction that God is asking.

A Biblical Pattern:

The word elder (Greek = presbuteros) is often translated as either ‘bishop’ or ‘overseer’ in our Bibles.

Today this office is most closely associated with the minister. But the Bible makes it clear that in the local church there was more than one elder. Note the greeting (plural) to the Elders in Philippians 1:1. Though quite small the church at Philippi had a plurality of Elders. Other examples:

Acts 14:23 - Elders (plural) appointed in each church. (Lystra, Iconium, Antioch).

Acts 20:17,28 - Elders (plural) of the Church (at Ephesus).

Titus 1:5 - Elders (plural) appointed in every town (in Crete)
Likewise James assumes each church has a plurality of Elders (James 5:14).

Qualifications:

Qualifications can be found in two passages of scripture: 1 Timothy 3:2-7 and Titus 1:5-9.

The church member’s role in the election of Eldersis to recognise that which God the Holy Spirit has already given to a person.

Whilst it would be right to say that there is a large overlap between Deacons and Elders it will be noted that more detailed and specific qualifications are required of the Elders. Ability to teach is stressed

in the Elders case. Also stressed for Elders were qualities for successful relationships.

Note: The church member's role in the election of Elders (and indeed Deacons) is not to *bestow* the gift of Elder or Deacon. Rather, it is to *recognise* that which God the Holy Spirit has already given to a person.

Function

The Elders' function is to exercise spiritual and pastoral oversight. Note 1 Timothy 3:2 where aptness to teach is seen in the Elder's role but not in the Deacon's. Hence the development in the New Testament of mature Christian's who were set apart to supervise the work of the church.

1. Shepherds of the flock - (Acts 20:28; 1 Tim 3:5; 1 Peter 2:5) They are to guard the people of God against false teachers (Acts 20: 29-30).

They are to guide the Church Family spiritually and to be listened to and 'obeyed' on spiritual matters (Hebrews 13:17). The encouragement to subordination did not imply inferiority, but was necessary for the community to be an ordered whole, able to function as an organism, as a single body.

2. To be an example - (1 Peter 5:3) that is, they are to lead by example.
3. To teach - 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:9). Part of the Elder's shepherding role is to feed the flock entrusted into their care.
4. To 'refute' those who oppose sound doctrine (Titus 1:9). To stand up to those who teach false doctrine. To be involved in matters of discipline is often a painful business but the Elders must not shirk their responsibility.
5. Manage the church - (1 Timothy 3:5). Not so much practically, but rather in the sense of overall plan and vision. They need to be people of vision.

6. Pray for the sick - (James 5:14,15). The Elders are to pray for and counsel the emotional, spiritual and physical needs of the church family.

In summary, the role of the Eldership is to exercise oversight over the Church. Directed by the Holy Spirit:-

- They are to have the prime responsibility for the direction and encouragement of the church's vision.
- They are to have the prime responsibility for the teaching and preaching ministry of the church under the direction of the Pastor(s).
- They are to have the prime responsibility in matters of spiritual guidance for all activities within the fellowship, including all forms of church discipline.
- They are to have the prime responsibility for exercising over all pastoral care of the church, and for the ministry to the sick.

THE MINISTRY OF DEACONS

The word Deacon is taken directly from the sound of the Greek work from which it comes (Greek diakonos which means servant).

1. A BIBLICAL PATTERN

a) The Seven:

Traditionally, the seven men appointed to 'wait on tables' (Acts 6) are regarded as the first Deacons. Although it was the action (the verb to serve) which is stressed, rather than the title (noun) as a recognised office.

The exact significance of 'waiting on tables' is often debated but the

emphasis should not be seen purely as administration only, but also upon caring for people. The seven were concerned for people and not just about things. They had a people centred ministry to perform: hence the need for prayer and the laying on of hands (Acts 6:6).

Luke's conclusion that this shared ministry brought immediate fruit is indeed encouraging. *"So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith."* (Acts 6:7)

b) Deacons:

'Deacon' in the technical sense is found only three times in the New Testament:

In Philippians 1:1 Paul's opening words to the church at Philippi greet the whole of the church and then specifically groups within. *"To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons"*

In Timothy 3:8-13 Paul lists the essential qualifications for a Deacon in terms of personal holiness and family discipline. However, nowhere in these three references is the actual office described. Rather, Paul lists the essential qualifications for a deacon. This it does in terms of personal holiness and family discipline.

One other point to note is that in Romans 16:1,2 Paul commends, *"our sister Phoebe a servant (diakonos) of the church..."* This reference would seem to suggest that there is no Biblical precedent for the diaconate being a male preserve. Those who argue that it is would say that the term 'diakonos' here means simply a servant and in the context of Paul's greeting here and does not refer to the office of Deacon as acted upon by the 'seven' in Acts chapter 6. Clearly no final decision can be made merely from a study of the word 'Deacon'. At HBC we understand that the Biblical pattern allows both male and female deacons.

2. ESSENTIALS FOR MINISTRY AS DEACON

The Bible says that they should be, *"known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom"* (Acts 6:3)

In seeking to nominate men and women for leadership a major criteria is that they are, “*full of the Spirit.*” Spirit-filled men and women in leadership leads to a Spirit filled church.

Similarly, being, “*full of wisdom*” is not about academic brilliance but a discerning heart that has been prompted by God. When seeking to nominate men and women for leadership a major criteria is that they are (already) familiar and comfortable with acting under God’s guidance.

In 1 Timothy 3:3-13 the Bible more fully lists the qualities of Deacon. In this brief leaflet we would simply emphasis:

1. Deacons must be people of good moral character. Clearly the leadership must reflect the qualities of the Kingdom of God that all Christ’s followers are called to pursue.
2. Of recognised good reputation and spiritual maturity. The guardianship of the faith and biblical teaching clearly rests with the leaders. What the leaders ARE the people will BECOME.
3. Also that a Deacon’s family life should be well ordered. Christ’s Church is Christ’s family. If a leader cannot organise, lead and set a correct example in his/her own family then there is little chance of that person being able to do so in the wider family of the church.

**What the Leaders ARE
The people will BECOME**

3. THE WORK OF A DEACON

As we have noted, a detailed Biblical job description cannot be found. The only hint would be Acts chapter 6 where the job entails the very practical aspect of ‘waiting on tables’. This, coupled with the very meaning of the word ‘diakonos’ as ‘one who serves’, has led to the understanding that this office will find its expressions in the practical ministries of a church’s life.

However, when a Deacon loses sight of Gods purpose for him/her or of Gods purpose for His church family the office of Deacon is reduced to simple management, and the church reduced to an institution.

It is the task of a Deacon to seek to execute God's vision (His will and purpose) for the Church family through the practical out workings of the local church. The deacons are intended to provide a functional undergirding for the elders who will be driving the vision and direction of the church.

Here at H.B.C., a deacon's role is their responsibility for specific areas of church life. In this role a deacon will ensure the smooth running of the work under their care and also be responsible for the pastoral support of all members involved in their particular areas of concern.

As well as this main task, a deacon's role will also include a number of other duties which assist the well-being of the church family:-

1. Sharing in the Pastoral Care of the Church. After all, a Deacon cannot serve if they do not know who they are serving!
2. Welcoming Visitors to the Church. Although this is one of the prime tasks of the Stewards, the Deacons also will need to greet, welcome and take note of visitors.
3. Visiting applicants for membership. Leadership representation is needed for such an important task and a member of the church should be accompanied by one of the Deacons for this work.
4. Participation in Leaders' meetings and events as appropriate to the Church Fellowship.
5. Participation in Church Meetings. Deacons should be willing to speak up at church meetings. Particularly where 'Deacons' recommendations' are being brought.

"The Church Meeting has appointed Deacons (and elders) from its midst - and in doing so has entrusted them with authority. Yes, of course, the Deacons (and elders) are ultimately subject to the Church Meeting; but the service of (the leadership) is to lead. They should not be afraid to exercise this leadership. True, the Church Meeting should not be a rubber stamp of the Leader's Meeting. On

the other hand, where there is a unanimous recommendation, it should only be rejected by the Church Meeting on the strongest grounds. (Heb 13:7)"

(Baptist Union Publication 'Baptist Basics')