

A simple pattern of senior leaders doing a work until it becomes too large and burdensome for them to continue is the pattern of the New Testament—elders are continually appointed first in local churches, and once they are overburdened then they appoint pastoral assistants to aid them. These pastoral assistants are called “deacons.”

They are mentioned on two occasions in the New Testament. Both occasions are in relation to elders because the two groups of leaders work so closely together. Practically, elders and deacons work together like left and right hands, with elders specializing in leading by their words and deacons specializing in leading by their works.

Deacons are the servants of the church who are also qualified for the ministry of caring for God's people by qualifications that are nearly identical to the elders—minus the role of oversight and the teaching and preaching abilities. They must have theological convictions that are true to Scripture. Deacons occupy the second-highest position of leadership in the church, and serve as helpers to the elders in a manner similar to how wives serve in the home alongside their husbands who lead the family. Deacons are appointed only after they have proven themselves to the elders as faithful and mature church members.

While the duties of an elder are clearly articulated throughout the New Testament, the same cannot be said for the duties of deacons. The Greek word for “deacon” simply means “servant,” and beyond that we are given little indication of what a deacon should do. This is because while the duties of an elder are universally constant in every church in every place in every age, the duties of deacons vary according to the needs of local churches and their elders. In this way, the Bible brilliantly establishes a theologically grounded, morally qualified group of senior elder leaders, and grants them the freedom to appoint whatever deacons are needed to help them lead the church, in whatever areas they deem require a deacon to lead. From their qualifications, we can infer that deacons will generally be handling church money, managing church systems, meeting mercy needs, and assisting the elders in the care and shepherding of the members.

### **Female Deacons**

There is some dispute as to whether or not a woman can be a deacon. However, it is clear that the Apostle Paul spoke of such a position in his Epistle to the Romans: *“I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a **deacon** of the church at Cenchreae, so that you may welcome her in the Lord as is fitting for the saints, and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a benefactor of many and of myself as well.”* (Rom. 16:1-2) Additionally, other women whom Paul honors for their assistance to him many also have been female deacons. Among them are Mary, Tryphena and Tryphosa, and Eudia and Syntche.

Much of the debate seems to center around Paul's qualifications for deacons in *1 Timothy 3:11*: *“Their wives [or Wives, or Women] likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things.”* Paul's language in the original Greek of this verse is complicated. There are essentially three possibilities: 1) Paul may be speaking of women who assist deacons; 2) Paul may be speaking of women who are the wives of male deacons; 3) Paul may be speaking of women who are deacons. Various translations opt for one of these three interpretations and often include a footnote that explains the other options, as the translators are also unsure exactly what is meant. Additionally, some translations (such as the New International Version and the English Standard Version) translate the word for “woman” used there as “wives,” which adds to the complexity.

The elders have studied this and have concluded that the verse can and does mean all three things. We (Elders) believe the Bible teaches here that a woman can be a deacon, that some female deacons are married to male deacons, and that some female deacons will also be serving with other male deacons. If understood this way, the text flows nicely as the requirements of 1 Timothy 3:8–10 are for both male and female deacons—indicated by the word “likewise” in the following verse (3:11) which then applies those qualifications to women. Verse 11 goes on to list the additional requirements for female deacons, while 3:12–13 lists the additional requirements for male deacons. Practically, this also makes sense, as Paul is indicating that a male deacon is most vulnerable to sexual sins, while a female deacon is most vulnerable to emotional and verbal sins.

Those who oppose the appointment of female deacons usually do so by stating that Paul had just previously forbidden women from teaching or having authority over a man. But in that verse the word Paul uses for authority is a special word used only on this one occasion in the Bible, which means he was speaking of a special authority. The teaching he refers to is in reference to the teaching or preaching done during the gathered worship service of the church, which is clearly reserved for the male elders. Women are permitted to teach in contexts that are not related to the position of elder. Therefore, Paul does not forbid a woman from all teaching and all authority, but rather he forbids them from teaching and ruling as an elder. Again, this interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:12 also fits the context of the verse nicely, as the verses which follow it further define the qualifications of an elder.

Lastly, every church does have women in positions of leadership, even if their roles are restricted to administration, women’s ministries, and children’s ministries. Unless a church calls such women by the biblical title of “deacon” and holds them accountable to the biblical qualifications for their leadership, they are forced to invent titles like director and such. This is problematic because it has no biblical precedent.

Therefore, at The Point Community Church, we have only *male elders* who are the senior leadership in the church, and we appoint both male and female deacons as assistant leaders in the church in the same way that a wife is an assistant leader and helper to her husband in the home.

**Divorced Deacons.** It is the conviction of the elders that divorce does not necessarily disqualify a person from serving as a deacon. If a person has been through a divorce there will need to be further careful consideration, focusing on the condition of the person’s walk with Christ now. Some may point to Paul’s statement on being a ‘husband of one wife’ in regards to the qualification for deacon or even elder. But we believe that Paul is referring to the deacon as being a ‘one woman man’, in other words a person who is committed and faithful to their spouse. So divorce does not disqualify a person from serving as a deacon.

**Single Deacons.** It is the conviction of the elders that singleness does not disqualify a person from serving as a deacon. Paul states that singleness is something to be valued as a blessing in being able to serve. In fact, Paul encourages singleness for more effective service. (1 Corinthians 7:32-35)

### **Twelve Requirements and Two Rewards of a Deacon from 1 Timothy 3:8–13**

- Dignified – worthy of respect, without any character defect, holy
- Not double-tongued – sincere, heartfelt, earnest, honest, authentic
- Not addicted to much wine – without addictions, self-controlled
- Not greedy for dishonest gain – not a lover of money, financially content and upright
- Hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience – sound biblical theology held with deep conviction
- Tested – proven worthy over time

#### Additional Requirements for Female Deacons

- Not slanderers – not malicious talkers, not prone to sins of the tongue such as gossip, slander, lying, etc.
- Sober-minded – temperate, not prone to emotionalism
- Faithful in all things – trustworthy in everything, faithful in all life roles (e.g., wife, mother, daughter, sister)

#### Additional Requirements for Male Deacons

- Husband of one wife – a one-woman man, sexually pure
- Manages his children and household well – godly husband and father who leads, manages, and provides for his family

### **The Process of Appointing Deacons**

Church members can suggest themselves to serve in a specific deacon role as identified by the elders. If a church member senses that a particular person will serve well as a servant leader they are encouraged to approach that individual to present himself or herself as a candidate for that specific role.

Those interested in serving in a particular position, which the elders deem as a deacon role, will complete a deacon qualification questionnaire. After the questionnaire is completed and submitted, an interview with an elder, in person or over the phone, will take place. If the elders confirm that the candidate is both qualified and ready to serve, the candidate will be presented to the membership for consideration. The membership will be given a period of two weeks to submit a written letter which gives biblical grounds as to why the candidate is not qualified to serve. Otherwise, the candidate will begin to serve as a deacon.

Each servant leader will have a specific job descriptions relating to the particular role they are serving. Servant Leaders will be required to participate in our leadership development process.