

Deacon Handbook

The Deacon Ministry of
First Baptist Church, Garland, Texas

INTRODUCTION

This manual is dedicated to helping you as a deacon to serve faithfully and effectively. It is designed to acquaint you with the Biblical materials related to the office of deacon and the particulars of the deacon ministry of the **First Baptist Church of Garland, Texas**.

The church has elected you to the honorable position of a deacon because your life has exhibited the characteristics of faithfulness and loyalty both to the Lord and His church. A deacon must remember, however, that Jesus said, "**The greatest among you shall be your servant.**" (Matthew 23:11).

Three passages in the New Testament are commonly cited concerning the office of deacon: Acts 6:1-7, Philippians 1:1, and I Timothy 3:8-12. The word for deacon in the New Testament originally described a servant who "stirred up dust while waiting on tables." As a deacon, your major attention will be given to serving God under the leadership of the pastor and deacon officers in the practical ministry of the church.

I. THE BIBLICAL / HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF A DEACON

Acts 6:1-7 is the passage often cited for the beginning of the office of deacon in the early Christian church. Though the seven who were elected were not specifically called "deacons" in the technical sense, they nonetheless functioned as deacons. The office of deacon probably grew out of this experience.

Without belaboring all of the details of the Acts 6 passage, let's look at the purpose for which these men were selected. One reason they were chosen was to solve a problem that arose among the church fellowship. **They were called upon to preserve the harmony of the church.** Another reason was to **free the apostles to give full attention to prayer and the ministry of the Word** (verse four).

The **position** of deacon in Acts 6 is an elected one. A deacon should certainly feel led to serve in that position; however the initiation of that commitment rests in the hands of the local church. It is not a position to which one appoints oneself.

II. BIBLICAL / PRACTICAL QUALIFICATIONS OF A DEACON

The **Biblical qualifications** for a deacon are found in Acts 6 and in I Timothy 3:8-13. They are divided into three categories:

A. SPIRITUAL QUALIFICATIONS (ACTS 6:1-6)

1. Full of the Holy Spirit *
2. Full of wisdom *
3. Full of faith *

B. MORAL QUALIFICATIONS (I TIMOTHY 3: 8-10, 12-13)

1. Worthy of respect *
2. Sincere *
3. Not indulging in much wine *
4. Not pursuing dishonest gain *
5. The husband of one wife *
6. Manages his children and household well *

C. QUALIFICATIONS FOR THE WIFE OF A DEACON (I TIMOTHY 3:11)

1. Worthy of respect *
2. Not malicious talker *
3. Temperate *
4. Trustworthy in everything *

*All scripture quotes are from the New International Version.

D. PRACTICAL DUTIES

The **practical duties** unique to First Baptist Church, Garland, are the following:

1. Loyal support of the pastor and staff.
2. Faithful attendance at the services of the church.
3. Encouragement of and participation in the organizations of the church - Sunday School, Music, Church Training, Outreach, Prayer Room, etc.
4. "A consistent commitment to stewardship shall be attested by the Deacon's example of tithing to the Church." (from the Church Constitution)
5. Personal evangelism among the lost and visitation of the sick, shut-ins and indifferent of the membership.
6. Regular attendance at the meetings of the deacons.
7. Assistance with new member assimilation.
8. Participation in the "Deacons of the Week" assignments.
(See Article VI.J.-Page 7)

III. SELECTION OF A DEACON

GENERAL: The number of new deacons needed shall be determined by the deacon officers, as stipulated in the Church Constitution ("one (1) deacon for every thirty (30) to fifty (50) resident members"). Candidates must have been members of this church for a minimum of one year. The following provisions shall serve as guidelines for nominations for election:

- A. Over a period of two or three Sundays during late spring, a "Deacon Candidate Ballot" will be distributed and collected during church services. Deacon qualifications will be publicized.
- B. The Pastor and Deacon Officers will meet with candidates who are selected by the church and outline Biblical qualifications for becoming a Deacon. The Deacon Questionnaire will be given to the candidates at this time.

- C. A "Deacon Questionnaire" must be filled out and returned to the Pastor's office for one's name to be considered for election and service. (See Appendix A for Questionnaire)
- D. A Deacon Confirmation Committee will be made up of the past three active Deacon Chairmen in the church, plus two appointees of the current Chairman (appointees will not be deacon officers.) The appointees will have been ratified by a majority vote of a quorum of the Deacon body present at a regular meeting of the deacons. The chairman of the committee will be the past Deacon Chairman whose term was earliest. The Deacon Confirmation Committee will review the questionnaires and meet with each candidate personally.
- E. After the candidates have met with the Confirmation Committee and have agreed to serve, their names will be published. Any church member with an objection to a candidate may do so in writing to the Pastor. The Pastor will meet with the candidate privately to review the objection. If necessary, the Pastor will reconvene the Deacon Confirmation Committee to review the objection.
- F. The candidates who are confirmed by the committee and complete orientation will be submitted to the Deacon body for consideration. Candidates who are qualified to serve and who have not been previously ordained as deacons will be presented to the church for ordination.
- G. If an individual has previously served as a deacon in another church, and desires to actively serve at First Baptist Church, Garland, he must:
 - (1) Be a member for at least one year;
 - (2) Notify the Pastor and the deacon officers of his desire for active deacon ministry;
 - (3) Meet with the Pastor and the deacon officers;
 - (4) Complete the Deacon Questionnaire and Deacon Orientation sessions;
 - (5) Be approved by 2/3 majority of a quorum (50% of active deacons) present at a regular meeting of the deacons.The individual may attend regular meetings of the deacons, but will not have a voting privilege until the process for active service has been completed.

IV. SERVICE OF A DEACON

- A. A deacon shall remain in active status as long as he annually indicates his desire and commitment to serve, is regular in attendance at the deacons' meetings and participates in the ministries of the deacon body. If a deacon is absent from six (6) consecutive deacons' meetings without acceptable explanation, he will be declared inactive, and a replacement will be sought.
- B. There are some instances when a deacon feels it is necessary for him to become inactive for a period of time. As long as his inactive service does not exceed two (2) consecutive years, he will be given opportunity to reactivate himself at the appropriate time.
- C. If a deacon exceeds two consecutive years of inactive service, he may be declared active again after notifying the deacon officers of his desire, meets with the Pastor and deacon officers for an updated orientation, and is approved by two thirds majority vote of the quorum present at a regular meeting of the deacons.

V. RELATIONSHIPS OF A DEACON

Certainly the deacon's primary relationship is to his Lord. Without that vertical relationship being what it ought to be, the horizontal relationships will be distorted. A deacon should be more concerned about his walk with God than anything. Next in importance is the deacon's knowledge and understanding of his role in relation to his family, pastor, church committees, and the church membership at large.

A. Family

The New Testament mentions a deacon's responsibility in relation to his wife and children; therefore, the church feels that a deacon should give his family first priority in his devotion, care and ministry.

B. Relation to the Pastor

- 1. A deacon should serve under the leadership and spiritual direction of the pastor and be loyal to his pastor in prayer support, encouragement and fellowship.
- 2. The **First Baptist Church of Garland** looks to the pastor for giving overall leadership and administration to the church and its ministry. The church therefore expects the deacons to respect the office of pastor and to welcome the unique opportunity to learn from and serve with the pastor. As a deacon functions in the practical ministry of the church, the pastor is freed to give attention to prayer and the ministry of the Word.

C. Relation to Committees

The deacon body gives counsel to, but does not have control of, all committee actions. Nowhere in the New Testament is there even a hint that the deacon body is to function as a board of directors or as administrators of the church's business affairs. Deacons are servants first and last. Out of courtesy, committees report to the deacon body concerning actions or recommendations for information and feedback. The deacon body may indicate support or give counsel, but not instruct committees as to what they can or cannot propose to the church for official action.

D. Relationship to the Church Membership at Large

The deacons are to be active in ministry to the church family, and to promote peace, harmony and a spirit of cooperation and unity among the membership. The primary relationship of the deacons to the church is as follows:

1. **Deacons are to be problem solvers and preservers of church harmony.** Robert Naylor, former President of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, in his book, **The Baptist Deacon**, wrote concerning the deacon's responsibility to preserve harmony in the church: "When a man becomes a deacon, he loses the privilege, if such exists, of participating in a church row. A member of the ranks may claim that often-abused privilege, 'speaking his mind.' When a man becomes a deacon--selected and called by the Holy Spirit, chosen by the church, dedicated by personal choice--he forfeits the right to promote in any fashion, a division in the life of the church. The one inescapable duty of the deacon in the New Testament was the protection of the church fellowship. When things arise that are divisive, it is time for a deacon who believes the Book to stand up and say: "We cannot do it this way in this church. We must have harmony and peace if we are to follow Christ." That could make the difference between a great, fruitful church and an ineffective, dried-up one."¹

Every deacon carries two imaginary buckets: one of water and one of gasoline. He determines in many situations whether he will help put out the fires of disharmony or if he will fuel the problem.

2. **Deacons are to be active in ministry** that will enable the pastor to feed the flock faithfully and to be able to spend the necessary time in prayer for God's direction and inspiration in leading the church.

VI. RESPONSIBILITIES OF A DEACON

In accordance with the meaning of the word of the New Testament, deacons are to recognize their roles as ministering servants of the church. They are to be members of this church whose character and qualifications shall be as specified in I Timothy 3:8-13, Acts 6:1-6, and Titus 1:6-9.

Responsibility: The deacon body shall serve under the leadership of the pastor and assist him in performing duties in order to free him for the ministry of the Word. The deacons will support and work with the pastor as follows:

- A. To lead the church in the achievement of its mission;
- B. To minister the gospel to believers and unbelievers;
- C. To care for the church's members and others in the community;
- D. To have "a consistent commitment to stewardship shall be attested by the Deacon's example of tithing to the Church." (from the Church Constitution)
- E. To demonstrate Christ-like consecration, loyalty, prayer support and faithfulness to the local church program;
- F. To visit the sick, needy and indifferent of the church;
- G. To encourage and strengthen new converts and the spiritually weak;
- H. To attend deacons' meetings regularly.
- I. To be available with his wife at worship services for assisting the pastor in receiving new members. Training sessions will be offered to acquaint everyone with the procedures to follow.
- J. To be available to assist with the "Deacon of the Week" assignments for contacting guests from Sunday, providing assistance in serving and/or cleaning up from the Wednesday night fellowship meal, and participating in the Saturday morning prayer visits. If a deacon is unable to make a prayer visit on Saturday morning, he may request a prayer visit assignment to be completed at his convenience.

VII. DEACON EMERITUS

When a deacon is unable to regularly participate in the meetings and activities of deacon service due to age or health restrictions, he may request a "Deacon Emeritus" status, which exempts him from regular duties without affecting his participation and voting privileges in deacons' meetings.

VIII. DEACON MEETINGS

The meetings of the deacon body shall be restricted to active deacons of this church, those classified as "Deacon Emeritus", the pastor, and ministerial staff, unless otherwise requested by the deacon body. Regular meetings will be determined by the Deacon officers in consultation with the Pastor. Meetings of the deacon body will be scheduled no less than once a quarter.

IX. ORDINATION OF A DEACON

The ordination of a deacon is designed to be a meaningful time of commissioning to faithful service. I Timothy 3:10, states that a man first be "tested" before serving as a deacon. It is customary before ordination for a man to submit to a time of questioning concerning the following subjects:

- A. What is your view of the Bible? (II Timothy 3:16, II Peter 1:20)
- B. Do you believe in the security of the believer? Cite supportive Scripture references (Ephesians 2:8, John 3:16, I John 5:11-13)
- C. What is the mission of the church? (Evangelism - Matthew 28:19-20, and Ministry - Ephesians 4:12-13).
- D. What does it mean to be filled with the Holy Spirit? (Ephesians 5:18, Galatians 5:22-25).
- E. Do you believe in spiritual warfare? Cite a scripture reference for guidance (Ephesians 6:10-18)
- F. Are you faithful in your stewardship by tithing to First Baptist Church, Garland?

- G. Would you share your personal testimony?
- H. Is your wife in full support of your service as a deacon?
- I. Have you read together the qualifications of a deacon's wife, found in I Timothy 3:11?

CONCLUSION

The office of a deacon demands a high level of commitment, a mature knowledge of the faith and dedication to fellowship and service. I Timothy 3:13 summarizes it best, "**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 service as deacon be one of the richest and most rewarding of your walk with the Lord.