



## A PDC TRAINING SESSION FOR DEACONS AND OTHER CHURCH LEADERS

(This material will need to be broken into multiple sessions due to its length. It incorporates questions which integrate the purpose driven church concept into the deacon selection process. The standards are quite high and may need to be adjusted to your own particular situation. However, the standards may actually prompt some deacons/leaders to rise to the next level and become someone very, very special in our Lord's work. The opening comments are specific to my church. They are included for the purpose of background. Numerous examples and illustrations are provided.)

(Use the flip chart.)

Let's begin with a discussion. Give me the name of a Baptist church in our area which in the last twenty years has been considered a leader...a trendsetter...a model for the other churches...someone that is really out in front of the other churches.

(Record the audience's answers on the flip chart.)

I recall talking with some of the area pastors about pastoring this church. One of them said, *"Don't forget you're between three powerhouse churches with great programs."*

Your pastor search committee talked the same way. I also remember that a number of you had a similar attitude that we were the poor cousin of those churches, and we would always be the poor cousin. We would always be in the shadow of those churches with an inferior building, an inferior budget, and an inferior program.

If you also felt that way, then think with me about this question: was this church always in the shadow of those churches? No. There was a day when this church stood toe to toe with the very best of those churches. As a matter of fact, this church is the mother church of one of those churches.

So where are we now?

1. God has given us enough good people that we can do an Easter program or a Christmas program as good as them. When was the last time you

finished a program like last Sunday's program with the people giving a spontaneous ovation of appreciation and celebration?

2. We've now enlarged our children's ministry. Any good church has both a Sunday morning Children's Church and a second program like our Sunday night Good News Club and Pals program.
3. We have a new Basics Sunday School class plus some other classes that are beginning non-traditional studies in discipleship.
4. We're getting the third floor ready for ministry plus we have the best minister of youth in the association. We have finally gotten him the right facilities and some budget dollars to do this ministry right.

Before it's totally finished, it is my hope that we will actually be able to teach the other churches a few things. If we reach that level, we will be back to being a leader like we were fifty years ago!

The attendance probably won't be what it was fifty years ago due to the increase in the number of churches, but the influence can be what it was fifty years ago...and do you know what influence is?

*Influence is the ability to show churches how to do God's work better than they are already doing it.* There are two keys to making this progress happen:

1. Improved Vision – “Where there is no vision, the people perish.”
2. Improved Leadership – “Everything rises and falls on leadership.”

This study is a great study for us at this stage, because our church is going through a generational change. It is sad to say but the old generation has left or is in the process of leaving us. One of our oldest deacons woke up the other morning and said, “I suddenly felt old.”

We have two deacons over the age of seventy-five. Their years of effectiveness are limited. We also are blessed with four deacons under the age of Medicare! Someday we will look to add some new deacons, too.

What ingredients should we look for in choosing a new deacon? In an even broader view, what kind of leadership does our church need?

One of the keys to choosing a new deacon is realizing what a deacon's role really is. You should take as much care in choosing a deacon as in choosing a pastor, because the odds are that you'll have to live with the deacon longer than the pastor.

Our church is completing its transition from older leaders to younger leaders. What do we need to know to help the younger leaders become effective leaders?

Unfortunately, most of you have never heard a series on leadership...oh, maybe a comment here or there...but nothing in detail. This type of study will be new to you! I can assure you that it will also be important to you!

I encourage you to take good notes. I'm going to ask you do the one thing you don't want to do: T-H-I-N-K.

During these studies, we will look at the specific office of a deacon but also reach out further and do some training for all of our leaders.

Remember: your deacons set the example for everyone else. So be sure your new deacons will set a good example for everyone else.

Let's begin. Our text is Acts 6:1-7.

“Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, ‘It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.’ And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them. And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.” (ESV)

Many scholars believe this passage establishes the *principle* of the deacon office. I believe the highest office that a man can attain in God's church is that of a pastor. The second highest office, though, is that of a deacon.

Let me say it another way. I believe the highest office that a man can attain *in this entire world* is that of a pastor of the Most High God. The second highest office that a man can attain *in this entire world* is that of a deacon of the Most High God.

Who can name our deacons? (Write their names on the flip chart.) These men hold the second highest office in this world, because they are deacons of the Most High God. I say that to emphasize the office of a deacon is not just any ordinary office, but rather it is the most sacred office that any non-pastor can ever attain.

## THE BACKGROUND

Let's examine first the background to Acts chapter six. The early church had grown quite rapidly from 120 people in chapter two to 5,000 people in chapter four to perhaps ten to twenty thousand people in chapter five *before* it established this particular ministry in chapter six.

What does that tell us? It tells us two things. First, a church does not need deacons to be a biblical church. Some churches think they must have a minimum number of deacons, so they make the mistake of putting in someone who is unqualified in order to satisfy a number. How foolish, but it is done!

Second, a church does not need deacons to grow. The key to growing a church is all of us...not just the pastor or the deacons! I will agree that deacons ought to be adding people to the church on a regular basis, but growing the church is the responsibility of all of us.

Remember: the first church did not have any deacons until Acts chapter six and yet it grew to an enormous size.

But guess what happened when the church put in the right men? Verse seven says, "And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith." I like the word "continued," don't you? I like the words "multiplied greatly," don't you? I like the words "great many," don't you? That's what happened after verses one through six.

This ministry represented a big change for the early church because the church had *never done it this way before*. Have you ever met anyone whose favorite words were, "We've never done it this way before"?

If those people had been in charge, they would never have established the first deacons, because it had never been done this way before.

Here is what happened. A problem arose because there were two different cultures in the church. Both of these cultures were Jewish. You must remember there were few Gentiles in the church at this time!

The first group was known as the Hebrews. The Hebrews were native Palestinian Jews who spoke Aramaic and used the Hebrew scriptures. The second group was known as the Hellenists. The Hellenists were Greek-cultured Jews. They used the Greek Old Testament translation known as the Septuagint. We could say that the Hebrews were the local newspaper Jews and the Hellenists were the New York Times Jews. They saw the world differently.

We know from experience that different cultures don't always understand one another. It's like a marriage between someone who is rich and someone who is poor or someone who is educated and someone who has no education. *Their lifestyles are different, and that has the potential to create problems!*

Let me share an example from my childhood years. Our church welcomed a missionary to Africa for a Sunday evening service. The missionary sang and played an African hymn like they do the song in Africa. The same African musical style...the same African language! As I recall, perhaps wrongly, the song was "Amazing Grace." I distinctly remember our church culture looking down its nose at his presentation. The drumbeat sure didn't sound like Amazing Grace. The words didn't sound like Amazing Grace, either. The sad truth is we weren't smart enough to realize the Apostle Paul never sang Amazing Grace in English...or any other language! We weren't smart enough to realize that we wouldn't have enjoyed David singing the Psalms in that Jewish beat of his day.

We failed to bridge the cultural divide! How do you bridge a cultural divide? You bridge the divide by emphasizing Jesus and deemphasizing the differences!

If you love Jesus, that should solve the cultural problem! Amen!

Let's go back to the problem in Acts chapter six. The Hellenist widows were not being given as much care as the Hebrew widows. This care was likely in the area of food. The complaint probably had some validity, because it was not denied.

Who was taking care of this problem? The apostles! It is very clear that the apostles were overcome with the work. The work was too much for them!

Seven men were then selected for the exalted task of serving tables. Does this work sound important to you? Maybe not, but it was important to the Hellenist widows!

Underline the word "serve" in verse two. This word will become a very important word.

Remember: deacons were chosen to *help* the apostles – not *boss* the apostles. God didn't design them to be the bosses; God designed them to be the servants. That means there are things they will know how to do and there are things they will not know how to do, but one thing at which they should excel is serving people.

(Point out a well-respected servant-deacon in the church as an example for all to follow.)

Let me add something for free: one of the biggest problems we create for our deacons is we put pressure on them to be something they can't be! God didn't design them to be bosses; He designed them to be servants. There is a big difference between being the boss and being the servant.

Notice, first, that the church identified its need. This need was specifically identified. Please write down the next statement in your notes: *every church needs to have a continuing process of identifying its needs.*

A few years ago, we put in place a Building Review Committee. That committee identified needs in the building and set the stage for our current renovation. That committee helped make this building an issue which we could no longer ignore. Likewise, every committee ought to evaluate its mission, identify the needs it can meet and have those needs specified on paper.

Notice, second, that the church developed a solution to this need. *Many solutions require a change in the way we do things.* Doing it the same way that it had always been done apparently didn't solve this particular need.

The church had two available options. First, the church could look to the past for how the people in the past solved the need. Second, the church could look to the future for how it wanted to deal with this issue in the days ahead.

One principle should always be clear: the solution is more important than doing it the same way as it has always been done. Don't worship an old method by falling in love with it! Fall in love with the people instead, and that will create a more agreeable solution!

## THE MEANING

The Bible says in Philippians 1:1, "Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons." The first item that must be done is to define the word "deacon." The Greek work for "deacon" is "*diakonos*" which means "servant." Our English word "deacon" is just a transliteration of the Greek word.

It is important for you to know that the Greek word "diakonos" is *not* the Greek word for "slave." The translation of slave comes to us from the Greek word "doulos" and "doulos" emphasizes one's relationship to his master as an actual slave...in other words, "I belong to him as his slave." But "*diakonos*" *emphasizes one's relationship to the work* – to what you are to do - and that is much different than being treated as a "doulos."

I mention this difference because some church members treat their deacons like doormats or slaves. I urge you to remember that this office of a deacon is the second highest office that any man can ever achieve. Therefore, don't *ever* treat a deacon like your personal slave. After all, he is *not* your slave; he does not have to take any of your abuse!

It should not surprise you that the Greek word “diakonos” is a very common word in the New Testament. It appears around 100 times in the New Testament, but it is only translated deacon in two places: Philippians 1:1 and 1 Timothy chapter three. Here are some of its appearances (all verses are from the ESV):

- ▲ Matthew 4:11. “Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were *ministering* to him.”
- ▲ Matthew 8:15. “He touched her hand, and the fever left her, and she rose and began to *serve* him.”
- ▲ Matthew 20:27-28. “Whoever would be first among you must be your slave (it’s the Greek word “doulos”) as the Son of Man came not to be *served* but to *serve* (it’s the word diakonos or deacon), and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Some years ago, we recognized one of the best deacons I have known. His name was Taft Hutchison. Taft was still visiting people in the hospital when he was ninety years of age. We presented a plaque to Taft that included the words from Matthew 20:26. The words are, “But whoever would be great among you must be your *servant* (or diakonos).”
- ▲ Matthew 23:11. “The greatest among you shall be your *servant*.”
- ▲ John 2:5. “His mother said to the *servants*, ‘Do whatever he tells you.’”
- ▲ Acts 6:2. “And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, ‘It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to *serve* tables.’”
- ▲ Romans 12:6-7. “Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our *servicing*” or ministry. This passage identifies the deacon’s spiritual gift – he has a heart for serving others.

To summarize, the word deacon does not mean a leader like a pastor or a leader like an administrator or a leader like a teacher but it means a servant. Don’t confuse the two and ruin a good deacon!

The question arises, “But all of us are supposed to be involved in ministering or serving others!” That is indeed true, but these people called deacons have some additional qualities that place them in a higher category as examples to the rest of the ministers.

Be sure to write this down: a deacon is our most qualified male servant.

Have you ever heard someone say, “We ought to ordain so-and-so as a deacon, because he’s been doing deacon work for a long time?” The reason that is

so is because he has *already* been serving *and* he meets the qualifications to hold that office.

In other words, the person fulfills the meaning of the position!

## THE QUALIFICATIONS OF THE DEACON

Just about every job has some qualifications associated with it. The same is true for the office of a deacon. Those qualifications are listed in 1 Timothy 3:8-13.

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.

The most important qualification is found in verse ten, “*And let these be tested or proved first.*” The Greek word translated tested or proved is one of my favorite Greek words: “dokimazo.” This word has the idea of “putting something to the test for the purpose of approving it.” In other words, a test must be passed!

Let’s pretend that all of you are on a search committee to identify potential deacons. Someone asks, “Who are our best candidates to be a deacon?” Here is how to begin!

First, make a list of all the men. Verse twelve makes it clear that deacons should be men. It is true the masculine form of “diakonos” is used for both men and women in Greek literature; grammatically, it could refer to either man or woman, but verse twelve makes it clear that only men are chosen to this office.

Second, one must determine how many candidates meet the following qualifications! Let’s identify the qualification then I will give you a key question to help you make a correct judgment.

1. *Dignified.* The King James Version uses the word “grave” which has the sense of dignified or worthy of respect. If the church selects

someone who is unworthy of respect then you lower the dignity of the office. Here are some questions to guide your evaluation.

- Will the overall church reverence this person? Will the people see this person as special?
  - Can the candidate get along with people? You can't minister to people unless you can get along with people.
  - Can you go to the candidate with your problems?
  - Do the people tell jokes about this person? I think of a leader in another church who was recently replaced in his position. The demotion deeply hurt his feelings. His biggest fault lay in his credibility. The congregation would often tell jokes about this person. Would you like to hear one? I better not tell.
2. *Not hypocritical* or double-tongued. Mark this down: consistency is a Christian virtue. President Abraham Lincoln once asked, "If I were two-faced, would I be wearing this one?" Here are some questions to guide your evaluation.
- Is the person honest or two-faced? That doesn't mean he can't change his mind! But he can't change his mind every time he turns around!
  - If we gave him total control of the church, what is the *first* thing he would change? That question should be asked of every potential leader such as a deacon or associate pastor. The answer will reveal the candidate's agenda.
  - Will he support the policies of the church constitution? That means you have to go through the church constitution with the person.
    - Unfortunately, some people have personal agendas or views which are outside of the church mainstream. Make a good effort to learn whether the person can be trusted with your church.
    - Also, some people think your church is like their previous church. Guess what? It's not.
    - Rick Warren writes that he had a congregation of ten people in the early days of Saddleback. One man kept talking about, "We did it like this and this in our last church." Finally, Rick said, "Why don't you just go back to your old church?" And he did.
3. *Not addicted to much wine* which is another way of saying *not a drinker of intoxicating beverages*. The Greek scholar Alford prefers the word "addicted." Let's look at the key question: does he drink intoxicating

beverages? Yes or no. It is always possible this question may create other questions. Here is my line of reasoning:

- There is abundant historical evidence from Josephus and other sources that biblical wine was not necessarily like modern day intoxicating wine. For health reasons, wine in Bible times was often diluted with water by a ratio as great as 20 to 1. You couldn't get drunk on that ratio! By contrast, today's water supply is healthy.
  - The Old Testament makes so many comments against alcohol that I find it disturbing that any Christian would wish to drink alcoholic wine today. For example, Proverbs 31:4-7 says, "It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine, or for rulers to take strong drink, lest they drink and forget what has been decreed and pervert the rights of all the afflicted. Give strong drink to the one who is perishing, and wine to those in bitter distress; let them drink and forget their poverty and remember their misery no more." (ESV)
  - Any recovering alcoholic would have problems with a deacon who drinks, because he knows the evil of alcohol. Do you know the Bible takes the position of the recovering alcoholic? "So if what I eat causes another believer to sin, I will never eat meat again as long as I live—for I don't want to cause another believer to stumble." (1 Corinthians 8:13, ESV) That surely applies to alcohol, too!
  - If the candidate wishes to argue about total abstinence, I suggest that you mark him off the list. His contrariness on this subject will likely tell you everything you need to know!
4. *Not greedy for dishonest gain* or filthy lucre. This was important in Acts chapter six because the deacons handled the money to buy food for the widows. Therefore, someone had to ask the question, "Can that deacon resist the temptation of embezzlement?" Many fail in this regard. Here are some exploratory questions:
- Does he gamble? I'm not talking about giving five dollars to the school and maybe winning a tv. Most of us view that act as a donation. But is he trying a get rich quick scheme through gambling away the Lord's money? Remember: the Lord's money is more than our tithes! It includes *all* of our money...including what we keep!
    - One of the greatest dangers to our churches is not the homosexual movement. It is the gambling industry converting church members to covetous living!
    - Never forget: gambling is motivated by the sinful desire of coveting what God has refused to give you through honest means.

- Does he tithe? His money should be a tool to be used for God's glory! I do not recommend this action, but some churches even require deacons to bring in their pay stub so the church can accurately calculate their tithe.
  - Does he pay his bills on time? All of us make mistakes including financial mistakes.
    - For example, sometimes doctor bills overwhelm us or we lose our job and we need the church to take up a special offering for us. This question, though, is about normal life situations. Sadly, some people just don't know how to live within their means!
    - I remember someone who tried to begin a ministry in our area. One day I was at the grocery store counter. I spotted one of his checks on public display with the words, "Do not take a check from this man." I called the man and said, "I saw your check on display at the supermarket. Would you please settle up with them?" And he did.
5. *Holding the mystery of the faith* is another way of saying the candidate is well grounded in basic Bible doctrines. Our church constitution has a list of doctrines that we believe; each deacon candidate should make it clear that he is in agreement with those doctrines. Here is how to proceed:
- "*Do you believe what we believe?*" Take the time to review the doctrinal statement with every candidate. The candidate does not have to know as much as a pastor, but you need to know that you have a man with basic Bible knowledge. Can you imagine putting in a deacon and then finding out he believes in homosexuality?
  - This goes beyond head knowledge, though. "*Holding*" is an active word. A longer translation might say, "They must be committed to the revealed truths of the Christian faith and *must live* with a clear conscience."
  - How do you know if people currently hold to the faith? Is it because they say they do, or is it because you observe it?
  - Ask the question, "Do you practice what you say you believe?" Follow up that question by asking questions which are tied to the five purposes of God's church.
    - The Purpose of Worship.
      - Do you have a regular quiet time with God? Describe that time and how often it occurs.

- Can you give us an example of God answering your prayers?
- If given a choice between church attendance and overtime, which would you choose?
- The Purpose of Fellowship or Assimilation.
  - There are three questions to ask. Are you following the example of Jesus in growing God's church? Who was the last person that you helped add to our church? What new member are you befriending?
  - Let's explore why those questions are so important. Would you hire a shoe salesman who worked for five years and never sold a shoe? No, that tells you something is wrong! Likewise, would you keep a pastor who has never added anyone to the church? Of course not.
  - (Advice for the pastor: if the deacons are not adding to the church, the pastor may as well start looking for another church! Your ministry will soon fail because God will not bless failing leadership.)
- The Purpose of Discipleship. Discipleship not only includes following Jesus but also becoming like Jesus. Here are some probing questions:
  - What is your most Christlike virtue?
  - In what area have you grown the most in the last five years?
  - Do you have any skeletons in your closet that would endanger the church? I ordained one deacon who had declared bankruptcy many years before. This bankruptcy was so far in the past that it was no longer an issue. I knew of another deacon who had killed a man in the war. We could live with that situation, because that's what happens in wars. But both issues were discussed!
- The Purpose of Ministry.
  - What ministries have you had in this church or prior churches? Note: ministries are not always the same as positions.
  - What ministry would you most like to do?
  - An evangelist held a meeting in a Baptist church. A man went to him and told him what a great preacher he

was. The evangelist asked, “What do you do in this church?” The man said, “I am a deacon.” The evangelist asked, “Ok. But what do you do in this church?” The man said, “I am a deacon.” The evangelist said, “I know that, but what do you do in this church?” The man said, “I just told you I’m a deacon. Why don’t you listen?” The evangelist patiently said, “Sir, a deacon is what you are. I asked ‘what do you do’ and that’s an entirely different question.”

- Deacons should never be known for their position; they should be known for what they do.
- The Purpose of Evangelism.
  - Are you following Jesus in leading people to salvation? (Why is that important? If you’re not involved in soulwinning, then you’re not following Jesus.) In Matthew 4:19 Jesus said, “Follow Me and I will make you into a fisher of men.” The meaning is clear. If a person is really following Jesus, then he is being made into a fisher of men. He is involved in getting people saved.
  - Jesus said, “I have come to seek and to save that which was lost and *where I am there my servant will be.*”
  - The scriptures are clear: you can’t follow Jesus and ignore soulwinning.
  - I would ask any candidate to share with me a soulwinning experience where he was directly responsible for leading someone to the Lord.
  - Quite honestly, and this standard may not prevail in every church, but I would mark the candidate off my list if the candidate is not involved *in some capacity* in soulwinning.

Let’s pause for a discussion on something which is critically important to the future of every church. Do you know why so many churches have lost their mission program? It is because those churches have leaders who are not interested in getting people saved. And because the leaders are not involved, the rest of the church is not involved.

Let me give you an example of why the church needs leaders who are also soulwinners.

Write this down in our notes: every person emphasizes what he is good at doing! Deacon Jim was the chairman of the deacons in one of my churches. He emphasized what he was good at doing. In many ways he considered himself to be the guardian of the church. He screened every potential new member to make certain they would not create any doctrinal problems!

But Deacon Jim didn't have anything to do with Vacation Bible School and helping people get saved. He had nothing to do with the bus ministry and telling people about Jesus. He did not participate in the visitation ministry. He once told me, "I have never led a soul to Jesus Christ." But what he did do was reproduce himself in the other deacons, and none of them were involved in soulwinning either. During my pastorate not one of those five other deacons led a single person to the Lord. Not one added a single new member to the church either!

I'll never forget preaching one Sunday morning and closing out the service. As soon as the service was finished, someone brought Deacon Jim's son-in-law to our old-fashioned altar and began counseling him for salvation. I grabbed hold of Deacon Jim and said, "Get down there next to your son-in-law and lead him to the Lord." And he did. I watched him and I thought, "I'm not going to have a chairman of the deacons who isn't involved in soulwinning. Lord, you solve this problem right now."

Sometime later I left the church. The next pastor came and suggested that the same deacons join him in attending a soulwinning conference in another state. To everyone's surprise, Deacon Jim and the other deacons attended with the pastor. They spent three days hearing sermons about soulwinning and praying about soulwinning.

When Deacon Jim returned, he had undergone a complete change. He actually became one of that church's biggest cheerleaders for the soulwinning emphasis. That church began a big visitation program plus a big bus program. Something really strange happened! The same people that *complained* when we set the Vacation Bible School attendance records were *no longer* complaining, because they were now sold out to soulwinning.

How many of you want a soulwinning church? You have to have three things in place: a soulwinning pastor, soulwinning deacons, and soulwinning leaders.

I am very proud of my deacon grandfather, but let me tell you something that I treasure above all. Our former pastor, Dr. Lee Roberson from Highland Park Baptist Church in Chattanooga, was holding a two day conference at my grandfather's church. Dr. Roberson preached then gave the invitation. My grandfather walked over to a teenage boy that I knew, put his arm around the teenager, then brought him to the altar and the boy was saved.

I also remember going on hunting trips with my deacon grandfather. I recall sitting in the car while my grandfather witnessed to those farmers about the Lord.

Remember: soulwinning is the heartbeat of Jesus! If you want a church to be blessed by Jesus, it must also have a heartbeat like Jesus!

Let's get back to the qualifications.

6. *Blameless*. Verse ten ends with the word "blameless." Of course, no one is perfectly blameless except our Lord Jesus Christ. That means we need to interpret the word in its context.
  - The Greek word "anekletos" has the idea that a public investigation has been undertaken and no charge or guilt can be brought against that person. It is as if the police investigated the person and found that the person committed no crime!
  - That means there needs to be a process of careful examination!
  - In other words, the deacon is not chosen because he's with the "in" crowd, but because he has passed the examination.
  - That means there are two key questions. First, has the church conducted a reasonable examination? Second, has the candidate passed the reasonable examination?
7. *Husband of only one wife* which is another way of saying he is a one woman man. Some say this phrase means that a deacon absolutely must be married plus have children (*ruling their children*), but who would be disqualified by such a standard? Jesus and Paul. Ouch!
  - The traditional interpretation is that the candidate has to be faithful to one woman. That does not mean "one at a time." It means he is not to be divorced and remarried then divorced and remarried and on and on the cycle goes. Why not? If you allow one divorce and remarriage, why can't you allow ten divorces and remarriages?
  - It is clear that the deacon's marriage should be an example to all.
  - I asked a pastor search committee if they had any deacons who had been married more than once. They saw that question coming and had fun with me! Someone said, "We have one deacon who has been married three times." I asked, "Three?" "He has been widowed three times." Yes, I swallowed it hook, line, and sinker!
  - Here are two reasonable questions to explore, "Are you faithful to your wife? Is your wife faithful to you?"
8. *Good managers of their home*. Their home should be an example to the rest of the church.

- There is, of course, an age when children have the freedom to go their own way and you can't change that.
- Is the candidate's home an example to the church? (Hint: don't ask the trick question, "Have you stopped beating your wife?")

### **THE QUALIFICATIONS OF THE LEADER'S WIVES**

There is more screening to be done, too, and that screening involves the candidate's wife. Many, including this pastor, believe the qualifications expressed in verse eleven extend to the pastor's wife as well as the deacon's wife. In my mind, it simply has to be so, because it is impossible to surmise there are zero qualifications for the pastor's wife. It is very unlikely that Paul would expect the deacon's wife to maintain higher standards than the pastor's wife.

Others believe that verse eleven refers to the office of a deaconess (see Ryrie's defense of the office in his excellent text *The Role Of Women In The Church*) and the qualifications to occupy that office. Based upon Romans 16:1, I would not dispute that such an office may have existed and may still be appropriate as long as such an office is specifically related to assisting the women of the church. However, the evidence is weak in my view. Thus, I suggest using verse eleven as a list of qualifications for the wives of both deacons and pastors. If I am wrong, I will find out in glory! But there is certainly no harm in following this interpretation.

I believe that all of us can agree, though, that there ought to be a special reward in heaven for a good pastor's wife and a good deacon's wife.

Here are the qualifications.

1. *Dignified*. What a way to begin! It is the same word as appears in verse eight. This lady is determined to be worthy of respect.
  - We could ask, "Do the people want to be around the candidate's wife?"
  - Unfortunately, some men would be great deacons except no one wants to be around their wives. I pastored one church where we had many horrible combinations. If the husband was a saint the wife was a devil; if the wife was a saint the husband was a devil.
2. *Not slanderers*. Do you know the Greek word for slanderer? It is the Greek word "diabolos" from which we get the word "devil." The warning is clear, "Don't be a devil with your tongue!"

- Is the leader's wife a malicious gossip or critic? One of the reasons this question becomes so important is because a leader's wife will often know things that other people don't know.
  - A loose tongue can ruin those whom you are supposed to be serving! The old military slogan still rings true: "Loose lips sink ships!"
  - The wife needs to be careful that she does not cheapen herself by becoming part of the gossip line! Every church has a gossip line, but I've never known a church which had a gossip line worth believing. Is yours?
3. *Sober-minded.* The word suggests one is to be self-controlled or temperate.
- What is the opposite attitude? It is someone who goes ballistic, someone who explodes on a regular basis!
  - One woman had a problem with her temper. She said, "My temper is like a shotgun. It explodes but then it's over." Her friend said, "Yes, but look at all the damage it did!"
  - During this week's activity, I was told about a pastor's wife speaking her mind at a church gathering! She was on a tirade! The pastor finally grabbed his wife's arm and dragged her away, saying, "Come on before you make everyone mad at you!" What a shame!
  - Is the candidate's wife under control or out of control?
4. *Faithful in all things.*
- Two questions come immediately to mind. Does the wife faithfully attend church? Does the wife support her husband's ministry?
  - Please note that this does not mean the husband spends all of his time with the church instead of his wife or family. We never want that to happen! There are other people who can do God's work, too.

It is time now to regroup. How many names are still on your list? Surprise! We're not yet finished.

Verse ten says that the candidate, "Must first be tested or proved." It is time to write down everything the candidate is already doing in the church. "Sitting in a chair" does not qualify! Nor does praying in the auditorium service! Those items are too elementary!

When you write down everything, you will clearly identify who is already serving! Here is what you will learn: if the candidate really has a servant's heart, he will find a way to serve and *he will already be serving!*

It is time to mark out the ones who are not already serving.

I once overheard the Nominating Committee discussing so-and-so as a prospective deacon. This man only attended Sunday morning worship. He was on zero committees in the church. He did nothing. His only qualification for the office was that he was a male and married once. The committee's reasoning was, "We need to meet our quota of deacons and maybe he will attend more if we make him a deacon." I called the committee chairman in the office and said, "I want to hear no more discussion about this. That man has never proven himself." Thankfully, there was no more discussion of it.

What have you just done? You have just narrowed the list to those servants who meet the most basic qualifications.

### **MORE ISSUES TO CONSIDER**

Look back over everything we have covered. Are any of those questions truly unreasonable? No. They're questions that help you understand what a "best effort" really is. During my more than forty years of ministry, I have encountered many deacons that served our Lord with that level of distinction. They are men whom I would enlist to join me in a foxhole when the enemy is charging straight at me! They are men of honor, dedication, wisdom, and humble spirit. I thank God for bringing them into my life. I say this to point out that many deacons do indeed achieve the standard presented in these pages.

This discussion, though, would not be complete without addressing a few sideline issues.

What is, thus far, missing from our discussion? Four items:

1. Deacons do not have to be teachers. Pastors have to be teachers (verse 2d) but the Bible doesn't make that requirement of a deacon. One of the best deacons I knew couldn't teach worth a lick even though he tried! But, oh my, could he serve God's people!
2. Deacons do not have to be leaders. You need to add this statement to your notes: leaders can be deacons but deacons don't have to be leaders. It is interesting that in Acts chapter six, seven men were chosen to be deacons but only Stephen and Philip were ever heard from again! May I salute Clyde Moore as one of the greatest deacons I have ever known. He had a heart of gold, a great serving spirit, but he was not a natural leader. But a great, great deacon.

3. Deacons do not rule the church. Look at 1 Timothy 3:1. The HCSB translates it, “If any man desires to be an overseer..” What is an overseer? He’s the supervisor. In this particular case, he is the pastor.
  - I recall once asking my predecessor, “Were you ever the pastor here?” He said, “No, and you won’t be either. They want to run the church. All they want you to do is preach and visit the sick.”
  - That created a big problem, because you can’t run the church if you don’t have the required gift to run the church! Can you imagine the servants in the White House running the country? They aren’t trained in that level of administration!
  - Hence, don’t put pressure on the deacons and think they have to run or boss the church. You can try all you want, but you can’t put a round peg in a square hole! God gave us administrators to do the work of administration!
4. Deacons are not always the most influential people in the church. Deacons sometimes imagine, “Since I am a deacon, I have influence.” That is not always so. Life teaches us that influence is something you earn regardless of what position you hold in a church.
  - John Maxwell teaches, “Leadership is influence! If I think I am leading but no one is following, I am only taking a walk by myself in the woods!” How true!
  - Someone commented, “The worst thing I have seen in life is a man who thought he was called to preach but no one was called to listen!” The same can be said about people in position, too. Positions don’t lead. Leaders lead! And you must have the ability to lead in order to lead.
  - Believe it or not, I pastored one church where the most influential people were the deacons’ wives. My father pastored one church where a difficult vote arose in a business meeting. A group of people needed to know how to vote. Would you like to guess where they looked? To one deacon’s wife! She was the one with the influence!

We have now come to the end. Hopefully, this study has helped you realize that God’s work truly deserves our best effort. That effort began with Jesus Himself. Did Jesus give you His best? Yes! Would you agree that Jesus now deserves our best? Of course.

May you so run the race that someday you will hear Him say, “Well done, good and faithful servant!”