
DEACONS AT ECC

From its earliest days, the Church faced a dilemma.

How were the elders of the local church to sufficiently devote themselves to “the ministry of the Word and to prayer” (Acts 6:4) while also eagerly caring for the practical and shepherding needs of God’s people, faithfully equipping “the saints for the work of the ministry” (Eph. 4:12), and conscientiously leading the growing organism that was the early Church?

Their answer: ***deacons***.

Deacons play an integral role in a thriving faith community. They humbly and enthusiastically embrace the title of “lead servant,” assisting the elders in their leadership of a local church and stewarding their unique skills, spiritual gifts, and ministry passions for the furtherance of the gospel and the glory of God.

This paper seeks to outline Eastside Community Church’s beliefs related to what a deacon is, who the Bible invites into this position, and how deacons function specifically at ECC.

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS - *What is a deacon?*

The Greek word *diakonos* appears twenty-nine times in the New Testament, first in the Gospels in reference generally to one who serves another (see Matt. 20:26; Mark 9:35; John 12:26) and then later in the writings of Paul to speak more pointedly to service of God himself and for the sake of the gospel (see 2 Cor. 3:6, 6:4, 11:23; Col. 1:25; Eph. 3:7). However, on a handful of occasions in the writings of Paul — Philippians 1:1, 1 Timothy 3:8 and 12, and likely Romans 16:1 — *diakonos* is used to go a step further, denoting something more specific, namely a formal position within the local church.

The origins of this “office” find themselves in Acts 6. The church had outgrown the capacity of the apostles to meet the ever-increasing needs of God’s people, and they were therefore left with a choice: neglect the ministry of the Word and prayer or neglect God’s people. With neither an acceptable path forward, the diaconate was born. The apostles appointed seven members of the church of Jerusalem to the task of caring for the needs of the body and assisting them in their leadership and shepherding of the flock.

Today, while deacons may take any number of forms, these foundations remain the same. A deacon then is one who has been nominated by the church body and then appointed by the elders to be a “lead servant” within the local church and to assist them in effectively shepherding and strengthening God’s people.

QUALIFICATIONS - *Who can be invited into this role?*

Now that we have established what a deacon is, the question remains: who does the New Testament invite into this critical role of “lead servant” within the local church?



The apostle Paul is again helpful. In 1 Timothy 3:8-12, we get the most direct explanation in all of Scripture of the biblical qualifications of a deacon. In verses 8-10, Paul upholds that deacons must be: “dignified” (honorable and worthy of respect), “not double-tongued” (sincere in heart and consistent in speech), “not addicted to much wine” (attentive to oneself and self-controlled), and “not greedy” (a generous and trustworthy steward of finances). By their lives, deacons show themselves as ones who hold fast to their faith, honor Jesus in all things, and are willing to lay down their lives for the sake of those around them.

Then, in verse 11, Paul moves on to speak specifically of women, using the Greek word *gynaikas* which can be translated either as “women” or “wives” depending on the context. There is debate around Paul’s usage here. If he is speaking of the wives of deacons, the text would seem to exclude women from service in this biblical office. However, there is compelling evidence that would seem to lead us to a different conclusion.

For one, Paul’s use of the word “likewise” in connection to *gynaikas* at the beginning of verse 11 seems to equate these women with the male deacons mentioned elsewhere in the passage. While some English translations add the word “their” in describing *gynaikas*, it is not included in Greek. Therefore, we can most naturally read *gynaikas* in verse 11 as Paul introducing a new category of deacon - the deaconess - rather than reading it in direct connection to the preceding verses.

This view is bolstered when we read Romans 16:1 where Paul commends Phoebe as a “*diakonos*” of the church in Cenchreae. Is Paul using the term in the more general sense of “one who serves another” or does he mean to speak of the biblical office of deacon? While we cannot know for sure, Paul’s connection of Phoebe to a specific local church, rather than calling her a “servant of the gospel” or even a general “servant of the church,” as he speaks of himself throughout his writing, suggests service in an official position.

A third argument also adds more weight to this view. If *gynaikas* does mean “wives” and Paul is listing qualifications for the wives of deacons, we should ask why he does not also include qualifications for the wives of elders. Since elders hold spiritual authority within the local church and exercise overarching leadership, it would seem significantly more important to assess the qualifications of an elder’s wife than those of the wife of a deacon. Yet, Paul and the rest of the New Testament is silent here. For these qualifications to make sense logically, we can again reason that Paul must be speaking of women deacons — and not the wives of male deacons — here in verse 11.

In light of these arguments as well as significant other examples throughout the writings of the early church, we believe this role of “lead servant” can be held by any church member - man or woman - who meets the character qualifications Paul upholds in 1 Timothy 3:8-12 and has a proven track record of faithful devotion to the Lord, personal holiness, and diligent service to God’s people.

ROLE - How do deacons function at ECC?

At ECC, deacons function across a number of primary ministry areas: 1) hospitality, 2) men’s discipleship, 3) women’s discipleship, 4) family discipleship, 5) communications, 6) worship ministry, 7) finance, and 8) missions.



Within these areas, deacons serve, organize, and strengthen the vision the elders have set forth, and their prayers, perspective, and service help fuel the day-to-day ministry of our church in countless ways.

Deacons are asked to serve in two-year terms and can serve two consecutive terms before being asked to take at least one year off before being re-nominated.

Practically, deacons can expect to be asked to fulfill a number of responsibilities in each of these areas, including but not limited to:

- Praying and caring specifically and proactively for those involved in ministry areas.
- Helping coordinate, organize, and execute key ministry initiatives and events.
- Assisting elders in noticing and encouraging individuals to use their God-given gifts.
- Modeling repentance and belief as a follower of Jesus, in accordance with the biblical qualifications for deacons listed in 1 Timothy 3.
- Meeting quarterly with their ministry team for the purposes of ministry planning.

