



**PROVIDENCE**  
C H U R C H

**DIACONATE POSITION PAPER**  
**JANUARY 10, 2020**

**I. Definition and Role of a Deacon:** The word *deacon* is derived from the Greek word “*diakonos*” which simply means servant. A deacon is a servant of the church. The biblical role of deacons is to take care of the physical and logistical needs of the church so that the elders can concentrate on their primary calling. This distinction is based on the pattern found in Acts 6: 1-6. The apostles were devoted “to prayer and to ministry of the word” (v. 4). Since this was their primary calling, seven men were chosen to handle more practical matters in order to allow the apostles the freedom to continue with their work. This division of labor is similar to what we see with the offices of elder and deacon. Like the apostles, the elders’ primary role is one of ministering the Word of God as they shepherd the members of the church. Like the seven, the deacons serve the congregation in whatever practical needs may arise.

**II. Qualifications of a Deacon:** The only passage that mentions the qualifications for deacons is 1 Timothy 3:8–13. In this passage, Paul gives an official but not exhaustive list of the requirements for deacons. The similarities of the qualifications for deacons and elders/overseers in 1 Timothy 3 are striking. Like the qualifications for elders, a deacon must not be an addict (v. 3), not greedy for dishonest gain (v. 3), blameless (v. 2; Titus 1:6), the husband of one wife (v. 2), and an able manager of his children and household (vv. 4–5). Furthermore, the focus of the qualifications is the moral character of the person who is to fill the office: a deacon must be mature and above reproach. The main difference between an elder and a deacon is a difference of gifts and calling, not character.

The issue of whether women can serve in the role of deacon is centered around the interpretation of 2 verses primarily – Romans 16:1 and 1 Timothy 3:11. Phoebe is called a “deacon of the church in Cenchreae” (Rom. 16:1) The word translated deacon in this verse could be referring generally to a servant but because it is used in reference to the church and to the congregation, it suggests an office that Phoebe held in the church. In 1 Timothy 3:11, the word translated “their wives” (ESV) can also be referring to the “women” and the fact that it says “likewise” or “in the same way” seems to suggest that the women serve as deacons, as the men did. If Paul had been talking about the wives of deacons instead of women deacons then he could have made this clear by adding the Greek word “their” (*auton*) But he doesn’t add these words, and the word used in Greek for “women” (*gynaikas*) does not necessarily mean wives. Whether it means wives or women must be determined by context, and the context is talking about deacons. Also it would seem strange that Paul would give a requirement for the wives of deacons and not for the wives of elders since elders have a greater responsibility for leadership of the church. Therefore, we believe that women can serve as deacons along with men whereas the office of elder is restricted to men only.

### III. Practical Application of the Diaconate at Providence Church

**A. Responsibilities:** The Deacon body cares for the needs of the church in four primary areas:

1. **Physical Needs:** The Deacons minister to the physical needs of hurting or needy members or non-members, including the sick, the invalid, the widow, and others in need.
2. **Benevolence:** The Deacons administrate requests for and distribution of funds and financial support for the needy.
3. **Facility Needs:** The Deacons care for and maintain the church property and prepare the church building for worship services and church events.
4. **Ministry Operation Needs:** The Deacons care for the operational needs of worship services and church events, by extending hospitality, ushering, preparing and distributing the elements for communion, and preparing for baptism.

**B. Structure and Leadership:** The Deacon body will consist of men and women who are members of the church and who believe and confess our Providence Church Statement of Faith and meet the qualifications of a deacon as specified in 1 Timothy 3: 8-13. The Deacon body is led by four Lead Deacons: Deacon of Physical Needs, Deacon of Benevolence, Deacon of Facility Needs, and Deacon of Ministry Operation Needs. A Deacon's responsibilities are not restricted to any one of these areas of responsibility, but Lead Deacons serve as the primary points of contact for their respective areas of responsibility.

**C. Term Limits:** Once an individual is appointed to the Deacon body as a Lay Deacon, he or she is expected to serve in this capacity for two terms of three years, but no more than six years per turn. After the first term, he or she may opt out if desired. Lay Deacons may be re-appointed after a one-year absence from the Deacon body.

**IV. Appointments and Confirmations:** The Elders shall have the sole authority to appoint Deacons. The Elders shall communicate prospective Deacons to the Church or a subset thereof no less than twenty-one (21) days prior to an Elder vote. Comments received from the Church will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Confirmation of Deacons will be at the final discretion of the Elders and requires a passing vote.

**V. Removal of Deacons:** Any Deacon may be removed from office for valid cause. A written notice of proposed removal of any Deacon shall be given to the Elders at least ten (10) days prior to the meeting at which an action to affect such removal is to be taken to ensure that the Deacon is given a reasonable opportunity for defense. The Deacon shall have the opportunity to answer the charges in the presence of his or her accusers, but shall not be present during the discussion and vote on his or her removal. The removal of a Deacon requires a passing vote of the Elders.

Vacancies in the Deacons of the Church by reason of death, resignation or otherwise, shall be filled by election of the Elders at their discretion.