

# ***Pleasant Valley Community Church***

## ***The Role and Identity of DEACONS***

### **1) Paul indicates that 2 offices exist within the church:**

- a) pastor/elder/overseer (1 Tim. 3: 1)
- b) deacon (1 Tim. 3:8-13)

### **2) The word we translate as "deacon" comes from the Greek word *diakonos*.**

- a) The word *diakonos* (a noun) is used 29 times in the New Testament and is usually translated as either:
  - i) "servant" or ii) "messenger"
- b) However, there are only 3 occasions where the word *diakonos* is translated as "deacon" (referring to the church office spoken of by Paul in 1 Tim. 3)
- c) When we think of the word "deacon," we should immediately think of the word "servant."

### **3) The Scripture calls for ALL of us to be "servants" in the general sense.**

- a) John 12:26, Matthew 20:26, Luke 22:26-27
- b) While ALL church members are to "serve," the church is to recognize and appoint certain individuals as official "deacons" who meet the qualifications set forth in 1 Tim. 3:8-13
- c) \* ***Why shouldn't we simply appoint EVERYONE as an official "deacon;" after all, ALL of us are called to "serve?"***

2 reasons:

- 1) Paul gives specific qualifications for the office (qualifications that not all people will clearly meet)
- 2) Philippians 1:1, "*Paul and Timothy, servant of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the **overseers and deacons.***"

Paul here addresses 3 "groups" of people from within the church:

- i. "all the saints" (the congregation)
- ii. "the overseers" (pastors/elders)
- iii. "deacons"

### **4) What is the PURPOSE of deacons?**

- a) The early church (soon after the ascension of Jesus) had Apostles; these Apostles did the "preaching" and "teaching." (Acts 2:14-40, 3:17-26, 4:8-12, 5:42)

\*Later, Paul instructed that “elders” (pastors) should be appointed to fulfill this “preaching” and “shepherding” role (Acts 14:23, Titus 1:5)

b) Hence, the main ROLE of the “elders” (pastors) would be to TEACH (1 Tim. 3:2, Titus 1:9)

c) Most Bible scholars agree that Acts 6:1-7 is the first example of the appointment of what we would call “deacons”

1) v.1: a) the church was growing

b) widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food

2) v.2: The apostles affirm the importance of this ministry to the widows, but indicate that it should not take priority over their time given to preaching and teaching God’s Word (in other words, the job HAS to be done, but it is best if WE are not the ones to do it)

3) v.3: The apostles instruct the church to choose 7 men to fulfill this role of “serving the widows” (literally, waiting on tables)

4) v.4: Again, their main reasoning for appointing these men to fulfill this role (instead of them doing it) is so that they might “devote themselves to the prayer and to the ministry of the Word.”

d) Although the Bible does not explicitly use the word *diakonos* in this passage, this model would be carried on through the years and probably developed into the office of “deacon.”

## 5) What are the ROLES of deacons?

a) No explicit “job description” is given for deacons; Acts 6 would be the closest thing we have (however, we do have explicit *qualifications* for deacons in 1 Tim. 3)

b) **The most accurate SUMMARY of the role of a deacon is as follows:** *To assist the pastors and serve the church in whatever ways necessary, in order that the pastors might be freed up to concentrate more fully on teaching and preaching God’s Word.*

c) Examples of the deacons’ responsibilities in the 2<sup>nd</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> Century church:

i) reading or singing Scripture in church

ii) receiving offerings and keeping records thereof

iii) distributing offerings (to widows, for example)

iv) serving communion

- v) leading prayer
- d) Examples of potential deacon ministries at PVCC:
  - i) benevolence (determining the need and delivering money to needy individuals in congregation)
  - ii) facilities (clean up, maintenance, sound system)
  - iii) finances (collecting and counting offering, keeping records, assistance on budget)
  - iv) shut-ins (visitation)
  - v) guest visitation (visiting guests to PVCC)
  - vi) physical needs of people (taking a person to doctor's appointment who could not drive)
  - vii) helping maintain people's homes (yard work/maintenance)
- e) **Note:** There has been no mention of the office of deacon being one of "governing" or "ruling." The role of the deacon is to SERVE. Again, note there is a clear distinction between the office of pastor and the office of deacon (Phil. 1:1, 1 Tim. 3:1-13)

## 6) Who can be a deacon?

- A) The qualifications are mostly MORAL qualifications and are very similar to that of the pastor/elder (1 Tim. 3:8-13)

### ***Key Question: May a WOMAN serve as a deacon/deaconess?***

- A) In v. 11, the word translated "wives" in the ESV is the Greek word *gunaikas*
  - 1) *gunaikas* can either mean "women" OR "wives"
  - 2) If it is translated "wives," then women probably CANNOT be deacons as v. 11 is referring to the WIVES of the MEN deacons
  - 3) If it is translated "women," then it is likely that WOMEN can hold the office of deacon
- B) Arguments FOR female deacons
  - 1) from 1 Tim. 3:11
    - a) the word "their" (in the ESV and most translations) is NOT actually present in the Greek (so, v.11 may not explicitly be speaking of "their wives," meaning the wives of the men deacons)
    - b) the word "likewise" probably carries the idea of introducing another office (notice the transition to a NEW office from v.7 to v.8 via the word "likewise" (going from the office of elder to the office of deacon; thus, "likewise" in

v.11 may be introducing a NEW office, the office of female deacon)

c) \*It is odd that Paul would give qualifications for the wives of deacons when he does NOT do so for the wives of pastors in v.1-7

2) from 1 Timothy 2:12

a) this verse would not disqualify women from serving as deacons because it refers to TEACHING and AUTHORITY over men (deaconing would not require either of these)

3) from Romans 16:1-2

a) the word *diakonos* used for Phoebe is in the masculine form (perhaps indicating a more standardized form of the word, perhaps referring to the OFFICE of deacon)

b) Paul uses the phrase "*diakonos* (servant) of the church" (he usually says "servant of the Lord)

c) Phoebe was given an "official" task from Paul

C) Arguments AGAINST women being deacons

1) from 1 Tim. 3:11

a) in 1 Tim. 3:2, Paul uses the word *gune* to refer to a "wife," so it is likely that he uses the word in the same way in v.11

b) the word "their" is not required (if speaking of "wives," he would obviously be speaking of the wives of the men just referred to)

c) if Paul is referring to women deacons, it is odd that he would not give any qualification dealing with their marital status (as he did with pastors AND male deacons)

d) if he is referring to women deacons, it makes for a very ODD flow in the passage (if he is referring to their wives, then v.8-10 deal with moral qualifications and v.11-12 would nicely deal with family qualifications)

e) it would be ODD to simply "add on" 2 more qualifications for men at the end (almost as if he had "forgotten" them the first time)

f) it is odd that Paul would only give 4 qualifications for women deacons while he gives 15 for pastors and 9 or 10 for men deacons

- g) the qualifications given are specific to the church at Ephesus and their particular situation
- 2) from 1 Tim. 2: 12
  - a) deacons may show authority at times
  - b) if there is "no authority" in the office of deacon, why even make it an office? Why not just call "all of us" deacons?
- 3) from Romans 16: 1-2
  - a) the word for *diakonos* used for Phoebe may not have existed in the FEMININE form (so, they HAD to use the masculine form)
  - b) the fact that Paul described Phoebe as a "servant of the church at Cenchrea" may have simply been his way of identifying what church she was from
- 4) from Acts 6: 1-7
  - a) the original 7 chosen were men
  - b) the purpose of choosing these 7 was to minister to WIDOWS (women); if women could be deacons, what better time to appoint them than to minister to other women?
- 5) We only see men being "ordained" in Scripture
  - a) Acts 6: 6
  - b) Acts 13: 1-3
  - c) 1 Tim. 4: 14
  - d) 1Tim. 5: 22

*\* since we do not see any evidence of women being ordained in Scripture, it is advisable that PVCC does not begin this practice*

## **7) What should PVCC do?**

- 1) It is not recommended that PVCC "ordain" women and refer to them as "deacons" or "deaconesses" because we do not see this in Scripture (the ordination we definitely do not see, and it is unlikely that we see a woman [Phoebe] referred to as an official "deacon")
- 2) However, we recognize that some women are more qualified and proven as "servants" than others
  - \*every church has "Phoebes"*
- 3) We could formally recognize these specific women as something such as "sisters of service"
  - a) these women would be in some sense "set aside" and recognized by the church as being ones

that can always be counted on to serve PVCC in a number of ways (ministering to other women, working with children, decorating, preparing meals, etc)

**8) What are the qualifications for these men who are to serve as deacons? (1 Tim. 3:8-13)**

A) dignified (v.8)

1) the same Greek word is used in 1 Tim. 2:2 and 1 Tim. 3:4

2) it carries the idea of "honorable, respectable, esteemed, or worthy

3) This is ALSO a qualification for the deacon's wife (v.11)

B) not double-tongued (v.9)

1) can also be translated "not devious in speech" or "sincere"

2) NOTE: a deacon's wife must similarly "not be a slanderer" (v.11) (not a gossip, etc)

\*note the similar thought in dealing with widows in 1 Timothy 5:11-14

C) not addicted to much wine (v.8)

1) see notes on same qualification for pastors

2) he may not be a drunkard

3) in order not to be a stumbling block to another, a deacon should be one who abstains from the use of alcohol

D) not greedy for dishonest gain (v.8)

1) similar to pastoral qualification of "not a lover of money"

E) must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience

1) the "mystery of faith" refers to the Gospel of Jesus Christ (Colossians 4:3, Romans 16:25, 1 Tim. 3:16)

2) he must KNOW the Gospel and other related doctrines in Scripture

3) not only must he *know* these things, he must *practice* them (with a clear conscience)

F) a time of testing (to be dealt with in 2 weeks)

G) qualifications for the deacon's wife (v.11)

1) dignified

2) not a slanderer

3) sober-minded

4) faithful in all things

\*A deacon's wife MAY disqualify what would otherwise be a "qualified" man. She must be one who shows evidence of walking with Christ and one who is committed to and faithful to PVCC.

H) he must be the husband of one wife and manage his children and household well

**Husband of one wife**

1) This does NOT mean he has to be married

\*note, this is the same qualification given for pastors in v.2 and if it means "he must be married," it would have disqualified Paul and Jesus.

2) This does not NECESSARILY mean he can not have been divorced. While divorce does not AUTOMATICALLY disqualify a man from being a deacon, it MAY. Can he still be "above reproach" and "dignified" after having been divorced?

3) To be the "husband of one wife" means he must be faithful to the current (one) wife he has.

**Manage his household well**

1) as a rule, a deacon's home must be "in order"

2) his children must *generally* be respectful and submissive

3) his wife must meet the qualifications set forth in v.11

**9) How are deacons to be appointed?**

A) Both the pastors AND the congregation are involved in the process of nomination and appointment

i) the congregation must rely on and trust *heavily* the pastoral leadership

1 Tim. 5:17, "*Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.*"

\*the word "rule" above can mean "lead, manage, or direct"

ii) We particularly see the congregation's involvement in the appointment of officers in Acts 6:1-6 (the appointment of what would likely later become "deacons")

B) There is not a "definite" model in Scripture for how to appoint deacons; thus, each church must select a model that best fits its particular church culture.

C) We so know from Scripture there is to be a time of examination before one is appointed as a deacon (1 Tim. 3:10)

D) PROPOSED MODEL for PVCC

1) Nominations

- a) pastors may make nominations
- b) the congregation may make nominations in private, via a "nomination document" (this document will seek specific information as to why the individual is being nominated)
- c) Church members will have the opportunity to nominate no more than 7 men (this number is subject to change) (will take place over an approximate **one month** period)
- d) The 7 (or appropriate number) with the most nominations will proceed to the interview.

2) Interview with pastors

- a) a person that has been "nominated" only becomes an official "candidate" after approved for candidacy by the pastors in this initial interview
- b) sample questions during interview:
  - i) "do you even *want* to serve as a deacon?"
  - ii) "tell us about your spiritual life"
  - iii) "tell us about your relationship with your spouse and children (or grandchildren)"
- c) Based upon the outcome of this interview, the pastoral staff will present the official candidates to the church and thus begin the examination period.

3) Period of examination and testing

- a) for a deacon, this would be approximately a 3 month period
- b) during this time, this person is being *closely* observed by the congregation and the pastors
- c) the candidate will be asked to some selected readings as well as serve along side the pastors in hospital and/or in-home visits, etc.
- d) the candidate's boss or co-workers *may* be contacted by one of the pastors
- e) the candidates will meet frequently with the pastors during this time to discuss the readings, etc.
- f) the candidate's *wife* is also being observed during this time
- f) during this 3 month period, members are to continually bring to the pastors any questions or concerns they may have about the candidate

- 4) Interview with the congregation
  - a) *near* the end of the 3 months, the candidates will sit before the congregation at which point members will have the opportunity to ask the candidate any appropriate questions.
- 5) Evaluation meeting with pastors
  - a) this meeting will be the "final" meeting between the candidate and the pastors.
  - b) sample question:
    - i) "Do you truly feel as though God is leading you to serve as a deacon at PVCC?"
  - c) at the conclusion of this meeting, one of 2 things will happen:
    - i) it will be decided by the pastors that this person is either "not ready yet" or not qualified  
OR
    - ii) the pastors will recommend to the congregation that the candidate be appointed as a deacon of PVCC.
      - \*in this case, the congregation would be called to largely fast and pray for 1-2 weeks
- 6) Congregational vote
  - a) at the end of the time of prayer and fasting, the congregation will vote as to whether or not to appoint the candidate as a deacon of PVCC
    - \*an 85-90% "yes" vote will likely be demanded
- 7) Ordination
  - a) at the conclusion of the ordination service, the person will be deemed a "deacon" of PVCC.

**10) Tentative schedule for PVCC's appointment of deacons**

- A) Sunday night, August 3: Town Meeting
  - \*a brief biblical overview of deacons will be given and the above-discussed appointment process will be shared
- B) August 3 – August 31: church-wide nominations
- C) September 2 – September 26: nominees meet with pastors for interview
- D) Sunday, September 28: official deacon candidates are presented to the church body
- E) October/November/December: time of examination
- F) Sunday, December 14: Interview with congregation
- G) December 15 – December 26: final meeting with pastors
- H) Sunday, December 28: final congregational vote
- I) Sunday, January 4, 2009: ordination of deacons

