

CHAPTER SIX

SPECIALIZED MINISTRIES OF THE DEACON

Some qualified observers admit that there is a distinct difference in emphasis between the qualifications of a deacon and the area of specialized ministries. They agree that one seems to stress character while the other stresses opportunity for service. Both statements are correct. A deacon is a man of character. However, his character can never be fully divorced from his ministry. Even though these ministries may be designated specialized in the sense of opportunity, they still are a very essential force in the deacon's ministry.

Indeed, it may well be stated, with a great deal of factual support, that a Christian can be of greater assistance to those who are in need, rather than to those who are living in the clear, calm, smooth waters of life. Those who have no real concern of anxiousness are seldom aware of the hands that offer assistance within the deacon body. Many Christians live in a euphoric fairy tale land, looking through rose-colored glasses, seeing not reality, but a fable of how they believe our society ought to be. Consequently, they may never have to admit to needing

help. However, everybody has problems; some just talk about them more than others. The deacon must stand ready to offer his assistance to those who are in need. The ministries in this section are considered specialized simply because they are vitally important, not to the deacon, but to those to whom the deacon ministers.

This includes the fact that the deacon will be concerned with a spirit of care about people to whom he ministers and will be willing to meet their needs. This type of ministry occurs only when one is trying to emulate the example of Jesus Christ. The most interesting aspect of our Lord's ministry as He came in contact with the needs of a hurting humanity is the fact that He cared beyond the principle of the law and took time to minister to individuals.

In one experience of our Lord, He is found literally running for His very life. The Jews had taken up stones to kill Him and Jesus still paused long enough to heal a blind man. His ministry was a caring ministry of restoration for the body, soul, spirit, and mind; a deacon would do well to follow His pattern of ministry. Jesus gave a command to His followers:

"For I was hungry and you gave me food,
I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I
was a stranger and you welcomed me, I
was naked and you clothed me, I was sick
and you visited me, I was in prison and
you came to me. Then the righteous will

answer him, 'Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee to drink? And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothed thee? And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?' And the King will answer them, Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Matt 25.35-40).

Again Jesus responded to a question which was asked by a lawyer, "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "Your neighbor, regardless of background, color, creed, or origin is anybody near you who is in great distress" (Luke 10.29).

Christian love seeks to act in the best interest of another. Jesus Christ has set for the believer an example of specialized ministries as He walked for three years in an earthly body of flesh, meeting those needs which were put before Him on a daily basis. Can one expect those who are called deacons, ordained by the church as Christ's representatives in the church, to be anything less as they try to follow His example in meeting the needs of those who are put before them on a daily basis? The deacon must be prepared not only to work in the church but also to respond to the crisis hours of life.

Counseling

The deacon, as an ordained representative of the church, will face people who are troubled and in need of guidance. He must be willing to listen and then help in

any way possible in order to alleviate distress and discomfort. The deacon counseling ministry will inevitably touch the lives of the sick, the bereaved, the dying, and others who have experienced difficult situations.

In his book, The Ministry of the Deacon, Howard B. Foshee expresses this idea by writing:

To become effective as a counselor, deacons must develop a concern for persons. Like Jesus, they must reflect compassion for those in need. "When he (Jesus) saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Matt 9.36). The know-how of counseling is surpassed in importance only by one's attitude toward counseling. If a deacon wants to help another person through a counseling relationship with him, he needs to examine his own feelings about counseling and about the situation.¹

In order for a deacon to examine his life in regard to counseling, he needs to remember the idea ingrained in the word "counsel." Using an acrostic for the word "counsel," will help draw into focus one's counseling ministry.

The Acrostic

1. "C" equals "Concern". This is the most important aspect of the counseling ministry. Concern, means " a marked interests in another's well being."²

¹
Howard B. Foshee, The Ministry of the Deacon (Nashville: Convention Press, 1968), 78.

²
Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, 1975 ed., S.v. "Concern."

Jay E. Adams, in his book The Pastor's Life, has written the following:

The stand-offishness of the congregation at Jerusalem would have excluded the potential apostle of the Gentiles from its midst if it had not been for Barnabas (Acts 9.26-28). The deacon must learn how to follow the lead of Barnabas, whether he is bringing into the church a converted persecuter like Paul, or whether he is seeking to reinstate a repentant failure like John Mark. Barnabas was truly a "son of paraclesis," i.e., one who was outstanding for the ways in which he learned how to stand by those who needed him in their hour of need, regardless of who thought to do otherwise. Fearlessly, he cared for others in the face of intimidation and opposition. In these ways too, God calls upon deacons to function.¹

So, the deacon's first step toward a progressive attitude of counseling others is determining his own concern for them and their need, regardless of the difficult situation that they are facing.

2. "O" equals "Others." There is yet another acrostic, which someone has designed, that fits this concept of ministering to others first. One discovers the meaning in the word "joy" in "Jesus first, other's second, and yourself last." The deacon would do well to remember this idea and live by the word joy. When Jesus is first in a man's life, all the world falls into place. When Jesus is first, the deacon will have little

¹
Jay E. Adams, The Pastor's Life (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1974), 108.

trouble fitting the pieces of his life together in a happy, enjoyable environment of ministry, and no problem accepting himself and helping others accept themselves even in the most deplorable conditions. This means that the helpful deacon will convey to the other person that it is safe to reveal his pain, as sordid or as complex as it may be.¹

3. "U" equals "Understanding." A seminary professor, with whom the author is acquainted, Dr. Harold Rutledge, insisted that his students use the Rutledge "grunt and nod" technique in order to encourage and help identify with the need of others. This was a very special technique, and Dr. Rutledge recommended its use repeatedly at precise moments during the session. The technique will allow the person who was hurting to perceive in his mind, by actually seeing motion and hearing the sound of another person, thereby gaining acceptance. Many times, a person is seeking acceptance, and needs nothing more than a strong shoulder to lean on and someone who cares enough to listen.

Understanding is a very rare human quality. Too many deceptive incidents have occurred in one's life, causing one to recoil with a critical judgement upon an entire system of values or individuals rather than carefully evaluating the evidence and trying to understand,

¹
Howard B. Foshee, The Ministry of the Deacon
(Nashville: Convention Press, 1968), 78.

with love and concern, why certain things have happened. Whether this phenomenon is psychological or a placebo matters not. The pain is real, the fears are merited in many cases, and the situation is potentially destructive; consequently, one with a deep sense of compassion and understanding can do much in the way of helping to alleviate the stress and tension. One must face the fact of life. One person cannot really change a situation, but through friendship and understanding, the deacon can do much in offering support, an understanding spirit, and help for those who are hurting. After all, is that not what a deacon is really called to do?

Even though the deacon is not a trained professional, he can watch for certain characteristics which will be clearly evident in those who are seeking his help. They are (1) fear, (2) denial, (3) guilt, (4) insecurity, (5) a feeling of hopelessness, (6) a feeling of helplessness, (7) hostility, (8) betrayal, (9) anger, and (10) hate. These and other characteristics are merely symptoms of a deeper-rooted problem, and many times the person will not share, at first, the real problem. He will "put on a front," and the wise deacon will simply listen until the real problem surfaces. These symptoms will be a helpful guidepost which will aid in moving the person toward the real problem.

The deacon must listen without judging on the basis of these outward symptoms; yet, he must try to work beneath the surface and help the person discover and deal with the root problem which is causing the manifestation of the symptom.

A final aspect of counseling seeks to aid the deacon to obtain a healthy understanding of others, but first and foremost, he must understand himself. A deacon needs to be able to communicate his own stability. This will only occur when one really understands who he is in relationship to Jesus Christ. A deacon who is not sure of his relationship with Jesus will not be able to offer hope and assurance in difficult situations. The deacon must realize that he is complete only in Jesus Christ, and that he, as a child of the King, has command over circumstances of life. Because he is in Christ, all things are possible in Him and through Him. Because of his relationship to Jesus, his position in the body of Christ, and his loyalty to the Father, the deacon knows that all he is and will be depends upon the power of Almighty God working in him.

Man was made in the image of God. Therefore, he was made to dwell above life with all its unpleasant, dark circumstances. However, human beings tend to allow life to get the better of them. Instead of living above the circumstances, one finds a tendency to sink below them. In reality one tends to move in an opposite direction,

away from God, feeling unhappy, hopeless, helpless and miserable, thinking, "Oh, woe is me, woe is me." If one is not very careful, the circumstances of this life will dominate and destroy that which God has created.

The dedicated deacon realizes that God in Christ Jesus has won every battle that will be faced in this life. Since the deacon finds life in Jesus Christ, he has become victorious, and now, instead of living under the circumstances of life, he, in the power and authority of the name of Jesus, rises above every situation in life. The good news of the gospel is not only about salvation, but in Jesus one receives the power to live above the dark doubts of life without being dominated by them. The Bible says, "In Jesus, all things work for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose (Rom 8.28). When a deacon understands his position and power in the name of Jesus Christ, he then will be able to win victories over the circumstances in his life, thereby, being able to help others to become victorious over their circumstances.

4. "N" equals "Neutrality." Since the deacon is not a professional counselor, he must be very careful to remain neutral. He does not have the freedom to give professional advice, or judge others being implicated by the person being counseled. If, in fact, a judgmental attitude is detected by him, the counseling relationship will be severely hampered and could be destroyed. The greatest

asset of the deacon is simply being ready to listen and to pray while being ready to recommend a pastor or a professional counselor to the person being counseled.

The deacon must remain neutral in any solution that may be reached by the person being counseled. Howard B. Foshee states:

Each person needs to find his own solution to his problems. The importance of a deacon's counseling ministry is that he can facilitate the process by which another person finds his solutions.¹

Another danger lies in being actively drawn into the personal conflict and taking sides. By doing this, the deacon may be singling out someone in the church with whom he has a working relationship. Later, the two parties may reconcile. Now the problem really begins for the deacon. The deacon who has judged and taken sides must face both the individuals and they are well aware of his choice. He now becomes the victim. For this reason, it is imperative that a deacon remember his major calling, and if a counseling session takes place, he must remain neutral, thereby providing an atmosphere in which a person feels love, acceptance, trust, empathy, and genuineness. The job of a deacon is to provide a context in which a person is free to deal with and to solve his problems.²

¹ Howard B. Foshee, The Ministry of the Deacon (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1968), 79.

² Ibid., p. 79.

5. "S" equals "Sensitivity." One of the most beneficial qualities desired in a counselor is sensitivity. A deacon needs to feel genuinely sensitive within himself in order to be willing to accept, love, empathize, and trust that which he is trying to convey to the other person. If a deacon tries to fake these attitudes, harbor resentment, hostility, or suspicion toward the other person he will not be helpful.¹

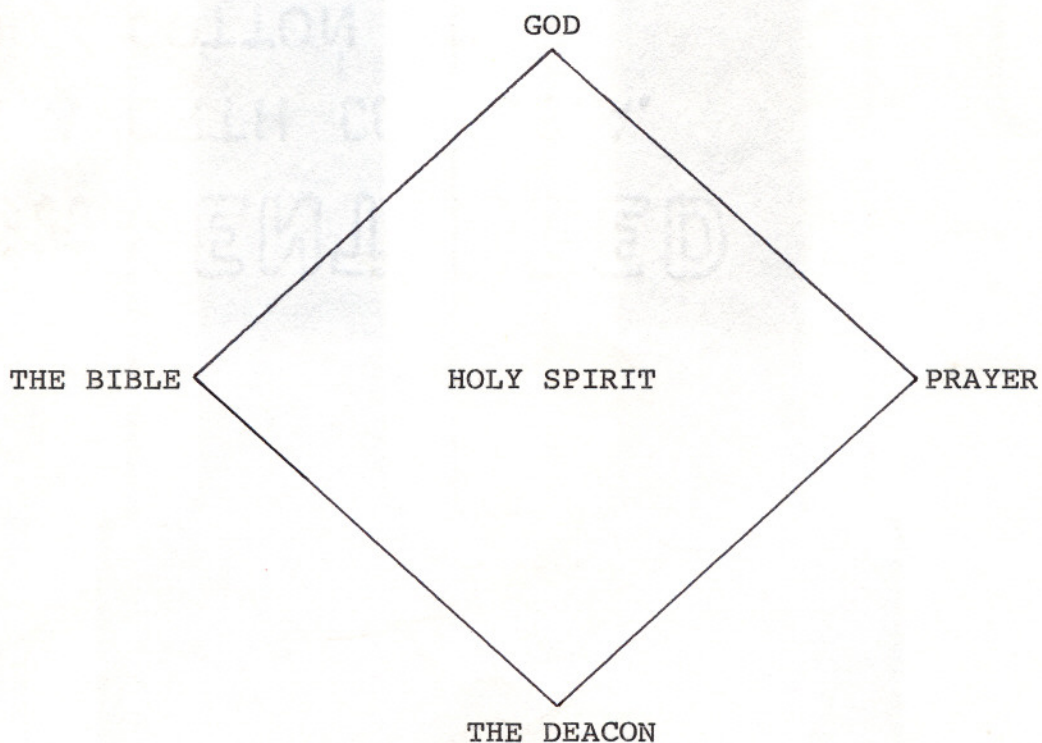
Genuine sensitivity is based on the concept of giving to and receiving from other Christians. God allows one the sensitivity of spirit for the purpose of mutual encouragement and growth, and the quality is usually developed in the midst of adversity. Paul writing to the church in Galatia, says, "Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal 6.2). Circumstances are simply God's way of producing a more sensitive spirit within our hearts. Paul emphasizes this in his letter to the Corinthian church. He writes,

"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort; who comforts us in all our affliction so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the

¹
Howard B. Foshee, The Ministry of the Deacon
(Nashville: Convention Press, 1968), 79.

comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ" (2 Cor 1.2-5).

These truths are illustrated by the following diagram. Notice, the leadership of the Holy Spirit is at the center of all the deacon ministries with an emphasis on God, the Bible and prayer.



The deacon who is sensitive to the leadership of the Holy Spirit, through prayer, Bible study, and worship has a direct relationship to God, and can express his faith and assurance in Him. The deacon, through these resources can:

- (1) know man's basic nature: a creature created in the image of God;
- (2) know man's basic problem: sin;
- (3) know God's basic solution: salvation;
- (4) know what man's problems in life are: to glorify and enjoy God forever;
- (5) know how a man's life must be patterned: according to the life of Jesus, who alone perfectly exemplified the meaning of the commandments by loving God and his neighbor as they require;
- (6) know the One who provides the power to live according to God's requirements: the Holy Spirit.

All of this, and all that it implies, belongs to the deacon as a counselor.¹

6. "E" equals "Empathy." According to Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, the word means, "the capacity to participate in another's feelings or ideas."² It may well be summarized that a person who is in deep distress will seek out those in whom he can place his trust, therefore, it is imperative the deacon understand the three

¹
Jay E. Adams, The Pastoral Life (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975), 107.

²
Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, 1975 ed., S.v. "Empathy."

basic needs of all human beings: (1) feeling of self-worth, (2) intimacy with others, and (3) intimacy with God. These aspects must be taken into consideration simply because human nature will try to deceive another by taking advantage emotionally.

Many people will try to use the counseling session as a mechanism by which to vent their anger and "get even" with others. The deacon must be aware of this problem and never allow his feelings to become interwoven in this type of vendictiveness. Another potential problem develops as individuals use their sessions as a means to gain attention in order to try to manipulate others. The deacon must be aware of these and other traps which seem innocent but are very real and dangerous.

These are only a few of the many problems facing the deacon as he goes into a counseling session. He may face physical, emotional, or psychological disorders, not to mention the everyday stress and strain which will cause many problems. He does not have any professional authority to try to solve these situations; therefore, he must maintain his role as a listener and be ready to help the person find professional assistance from a pastor or trained counselor.

He can empathize with the person by maintaining a non-professional position. He must be willing to try to identify with the anxieties and fears of the person being

counseled but, under no circumstances, is he to give solutions to the present problem. He must "lead" the person to an acceptable biblical solution to the problem. The person being counseled must believe that the solution is his idea.

In many cases, the deacon may have experienced a similar situation in his life or in the life of his family; consequently, he feels that he is an expert in this area. While it is true that he may draw knowledge from his experience, he must refrain from giving advice to the person being counseled. Empathy simply allows the person to feel that he is in a room with a person he can trust and one who feels the pain, frustration, and anxiety of the moment. Empathy simply creates an environment of confidence in which one can open his heart to another who will be willing to listen and who has demonstrated an attitude of concern and care.

7. "L" equals "Love." The last letter in the acrostic for the word "counsel" is the letter "L." This letter represents the real essence of the idea behind counseling. Paul writes,

"If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong and a clanging cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but

do not have love, it profits me nothing. Love is patient, love is kind, and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truths; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Cor 13.1-8).

What more could a deacon possess than that which has the power to change the destiny of a man's life? When one truly comes to understand his position as a child of the King, life will be viewed as a wonderful experience of true freedom. Jesus Christ has forgiven sin, and yet, sin still remains. But, even in sin, God loves. His love does not change. God does not love one because he is valuable; one is valuable because God loves him. Simon Peter quickens the spirit by reminding one, "that love covers a multitude of sins" (1 Pet 4.8). Love is the dominant theme throughout the entire Bible, and love will be the only real ingredient which is not a human characteristic. That quality of life is only discovered in the power of Jesus Christ and the only real quality that will help the deacon to restore a broken spirit. What is it that true science studies, if not the laws of nature, the laws established by the Creator over His creation? What is the first law? The answer to both questions is love. This author wishes for the readers of this book an opportunity to approach both God and good health with the law of love.

Conclusion

The deacon must be willing to use all the tools mentioned in this acrostic in his counseling sessions. He must, however, rely upon the guidance and leadership of the Spirit of God. He must come to the realization that this world in which we now live is hurting and crying out for help. Even though the deacon does not have all the answers, he does have the answer, Jesus Christ. He must be willing to share Jesus with this world.

Deacons have accepted an honorable position in our churches and in our communities, and with their leadership our world can be made a little better every day by their influence. This author's intentions are that in this section the deacon will realize the need to study more intently the counseling procedures so that he may improve his skills as a counselor, be more readily available to those who are hurting around him, and be willing to help others discover professional guidance which can lead them back into the mainstream of life.

Hospital Ministry

A hospital can be one of the world's loneliest places on the face of this earth, especially if one is facing surgery or a terminal illness. No one likes being admitted to a hospital; however, the deacon can

perform a vital function through his ministry. Usually, the greatest fear of a deacon is, "What do I say?" The better question is, "How may I listen?" Most of the time, people just want to talk; however, those who are really sick may simply need to be aware of the fact that someone cares and a short prayer will do. This type of visit will provide an environment conducive to the idea that God is also concerned and He does care.

Upon entering the hospital, the deacon needs to be aware of the situation unless, of course, it is an emergency. He must first check to see if the party is in the bed before entering the room. This can save many embarrassing moments, especially if the patient is a lady. The rule of thumb is to knock and await an answer before entering the room.

Another point which needs to be clarified is the dilemma of the sleeping patient. The deacon has just fought miles of traffic and spent several minutes on the road only to arrive to find the patient sleeping. What now? It may be unwise to awaken him, since sleep may be precisely what the patient needs. The wise choice is to write a note or leave a card. This, at least, shows the patient that a visit was made and that someone cared enough to take time to visit him. If one is unsure, he should return to the nurses' station and inquire as to the condition of the patient.

A deacon once asked, "How long should I stay with the patient, preacher?" To answer, one must determine the patient's condition. The rule is, the more critically ill, the shorter the visit. One can look at the patient and discover when it is time to leave. The patient will show signs of fatigue, sluggish conversation, or weariness of eyes. All are vital signs telling the deacon the visit is over. Now, in the case of surgery, short visits at first, and then possibly longer visits as the patient progresses toward rehabilitation and discharge.

One common word of caution. The deacon must be very careful to keep in mind the patient's best interest. He must not say anything that will upset the patient or the family or talk with the family about the patient's condition while in his presence. This rule also applies, even if the patient is in a coma. Medical history has proved that many patients are still able to hear and understand what is being said about them in their room.

The deacon can provide a valuable service to his church congregation while assisting the pastor in keeping the flock together in love, as he ministers to those who are confined to a hospital bed, but more than that, he becomes a personal friend in time of need to those he visits and they never forget his ministry.

The following rules may well be cultivated and serve as a model to summarize a deacon's hospital ministry.

- (1) Be in tune with the leadership of the Holy Spirit and follow His directions.
- (2) Have a desire to perform this ministry.
- (3) Have a warm, friendly, and sympathetic personality, flexibility, and a sense of humor.
- (4) Visit with a Christ-centered purpose, providing spiritual help.
- (5) Notify the pastor when there is a need for a pastoral visit.
- (6) Try to be comfortable and at ease in a hospital environment.
- (7) Go only while you are in good health.
- (8) If possible, have a private audience with the patient.
- (9) Measure the length of your visit by the patients physical conditions.
- (10) Perform services for the patient which may contribute to his comfort and well being.
- (11) Select religious resources with the specific needs of the person in mind, making use of prayer, or Scripture, or devotional materials.
- (12) Abide by the hospital regulations.
- (13) Have prayer before leaving.

While the ministry of "looking after" the sick is larger than that of making calls upon them at home or in the hospital, nevertheless that is one aspect of the work to which a deacon has been called. Following these rules, a deacon will do well as he willingly serves and ministers to others in a hospital environment.

Shut-In Ministry

Our world faces a crisis unparalleled in all the history of mankind. A tremendous revolution is under way in this country and it's not being fought with guns or nuclear weapons. The ominous cloud which is hanging over the hearts of men in this country is time. It has been predicted that by the turn of this century, America will see an unprecedented number of its senior citizens confined to a nursing home or houses. The world is moving faster and faster, and time, for many, is like a runaway train whose very power and momentum inevitably will plunge much of this nation's population into an aging crisis. This is truly a widening field of service and ministry for today's deacon.

The Problem

The problem that the deacon will confront in this specialized ministry is an abundance of time. The shut-ins have more time than any other human commodity, and the deacon will be hard-pressed to explain why he cannot visit longer with them. The major thrust of the deacon's ministry, in this situation, is to try to help the shut-ins channel their time toward meaningful endeavors. Christian books, tapes, sermon messages from the shut-ins' church, and church bulletins are ideas which can help the deacon stimulate involvement which

will generate a spirit of belonging once again to an organization that is still active. The shut-ins must be made to feel that they are still useful to society and to their community, and one great way this can be accomplished is through a praying ministry. This not only helps the shut-ins but also the church and people for whom they are praying. The author has used shut-ins to help answer a twenty-four hour prayer line which was implemented by the church. Our church used a call-forwarding method and many of the shut-ins were able to help in our ministry. This gave them a sense of belonging.

Deacons can also help stimulate an attitude of belonging by sending the shut-ins cards on special days and occasions such as birthdays, anniversaries, Christmas, etc. Just a note often times can say a lot to one whose world consists of four walls and long, lonely hall ways.

Conclusion

Finally, the deacon must not go to visit the shut-ins to simply pass away the time of day or merely gossip about local news events. He must envision a person who is in distress, displacement, and discomfort. The author has never met a truly happy shut-in who did not wish for better days. Therefore, the deacon must go with the concept of ministering to a person with a particular need. The deacon

who is sensitive to this ministry will quickly discover a far greater need than he can adequately meet personally; however, the deacon must remember that the Holy Spirit will not only provide the strength for the occasion for caring, but will also give guidance in deciding when and how to minister to this particular specialized group of people our society calls "shut-ins."

Family Ministry

This plan joins the pastor and the church staff together with the deacons in order to minister to the physical, spiritual, and emotional needs of the church membership. The obvious question may arise in the mind of a deacon, "Why have a deacon family ministry?" This question is raised in many small churches. The thinking is, "We all know each other and see each other, so why do we need to spend extra time visiting. After all, that is the pastor's job." The best reason for having a family deacon ministry has been given by Henry Webb. He says:

"The church has always assumed responsibility to care for the spiritual and physical needs of persons. The church suffers and needs go unmet when church members turn over their caring responsibility to the pastor; but even when church members do accept their part in caring, some people may still miss out on the care that is available in the congregation. The problem is that everybody's business is nobody's business. Although many people receive adequate care, some do not. Everyone assumes that someone else is meeting that

need. Many churches turn to their deacons for help in meeting the needs of church members. Assigning each church family to a deacon through the Deacon Family Ministry Plan is a simple and effective approach to reduce the possibility that some member will be neglected."¹

Henry Webb has defined precisely the reason deacons need to implement a family ministry plan in their church.

The family ministry plan promotes regular visits by concerned deacons and opens doors to homes while providing unparalleled opportunities of service in the areas of witnessing, counseling, caring, and service to the needy.

The plan operates with the corporation of each of the active deacons within a church fellowship taking part in the ministry. The plan calls for each deacon to be assigned a certain number of families for twelve months. It is the deacon's responsibility to visit, care, and help his family members cope with the situations that may arise in that year. He will be asked to keep accurate records and inform the pastor of any medical emergencies or potential trouble.

This concept has been beautifully designed in a book entitled, The Deacon Family Ministry Plan Resource Book. This book is printed by Convention Press and is produced especially for a family ministry plan. This

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Henry Webb, Deacons: Servant Models in the Church (Nashville: Convention Press, 1980), 87.

book provides essential information on the procedures of establishing a family ministry and procedures to be followed by the deacons as they report monthly on their family members. This type of ministry will bring rich rewards to those deacons who implement the family ministry plan in their respective churches.

Benevolence Ministry

This ministry is established in connection with other specialized ministries the deacon is already performing. Benevolence ministry is an integral part of the deacon's life-style. He must be alert to the potential physical needs of his people long before they cause problems. The deacon needs to have an adequate avenue by which he can move through his request for money, food, clothing, or other materialistic possessions to relieve those in distress.

In a transient area, the church must be aware of those who would take advantage of the church through deception and lies. There are those who simply go from one church to another presenting different problems to the church staff, only to extort money. Henry Webb states the problem:

In the benevolence ministry, the two great challenges confronting all Christians including deacons is those who are hungry and the homeless. These needs are complex, but

deacons who read newspaper accounts of the starving people and thousands of refugees fleeing oppression cannot ignore a sense of compassion and the need to respond.¹

Even with this concept, there are those who will be on the front steps of the church and in the surrounding area that really need help. What will a dedicated deacon do when one approaches the church for help? In John 3.17, the Scripture says, "Whoever has the world's goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?" That is a stinging question which must be reconciled within the dedicated child of God. How do we respond? What is the proper course of action? There are many churches that will not help anyone who is not a member of their congregation. There are others that simply give money away to all who ask. What are the proper guidelines? These are important questions, especially in an area where one would see one to three people a week wanting the church to pay their electric bill, water bill, gas bill, food bill, or their rent.

The deacons must provide guidelines which will work smoothly, effectively, and fairly in all situations and yet be adequate to meet the needs of a hurting society.

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Henry Webb, Deacons: Servant Models in the Church (Nashville: Convention Press, 1980), 96

The following may be helpful in establishing benevolence guidelines for a deacon committee.

- (1) Never give money away to non-church members without checking the background of the request.
- (2) Always check sources and other churches to gain information in order to discredit any shams within the area.
- (3) Investigate all reports for food and clothing.
- (4) Have a listing of all community agencies that can provide extra assistance.
- (5) Keep within a budgeted income.
- (6) Keep records of names, pictures, and requests that were made in a confidential place.
- (7) Place the final authority for decision in the hands of the deacon body.

These guidelines will not hinder the work of the deacon; on the contrary, it will expedite matters, and the sting of saying "no" to those who are merely using the church for personal gain will be minimized. The author has discovered that when the needs are real in the church family, or from outsiders who are sincerely seeking help, the needs have been met adequately and in an appropriate manner by the deacons. The church would do well to place this ministry in the hands of the deacons. They not only represent the church's best interest but they also can take this heavy responsibility off the pastor and free him from many hours of research which would take away from his study time and ministry to the church family.

Grief Ministry

In ministering to the dying believer, the deacon must remind himself of the mixture of human emotions that will be present. The most common question that will be asked is, "What will happen to my family?" This question will be of utmost importance to the dying person, but the deacon must also be prepared for many others. What options are open for the deacon as he is asked these questions? The deacon could try to avoid the issues altogether by making one or two visits and ignoring the questions and then attend the funeral and visit in the home of the family after they have lost their loved one. Even though this is one way to handle grief, it is not the Christian approach. The sincere deacon will:

- (1) call one to repentance and forgiveness;
- (2) promise to look into settlements and matters that the dying believer is now unable to handle himself;
- (3) point to the relevant words of God in Scripture pertaining to his condition or attitude;
- (4) and reassure one of his faith which is found not in man but in Jesus Christ.

Jay E. Adams sums up the duties of the deacon as he ministers to the dying:

In short, in caring for the dying, the deacon must never merely float with the current, being told what to do and what to say. As a Christian of the Word of authority, he can never do something against God's nature.

Instead, he must introduce the biblical message of redemption where it is needed, stress the importance of resolving outstanding problems, and straight forwardly attempt to pursue a ministry that confronts rather than by-passes the hard issues, to the honor of Christ and for the welfare of His sheep.¹

In many cases, this ministry deals with guilt and the deacon must use every tool at his disposal to break the hold Satan places on the dying person and his family. In order to minister properly in such a situation, the deacon must have a clear biblical view of death.

Biblical View of Death

One can understand how a deacon whose idea of death is unclear will not be able to comfort another who is dying. In fact, the deacon whose concept of death is uncertain may cause more damage by producing a spirit of uncertainty and fear within the one who is facing death. The way to help someone overcome their fear is by being able to place one's self in that same experience and produce positive concepts derived from God's Holy Word.

The Bible is the only book that will speak from an affirmative position on the subject of death and dying. Science, with all its great technological advancements, is silenced by death, and life after death.

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Jay E. Adams, The Pastoral Life (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975), 134.

Philosophy, with all its marvelous mind-bending approaches to life through rationalization and personalizations, must remain deafly silenced. Only the Bible, speaks with power and authority about the subject of death and the after-life. The Bible is the only source by which one can frame a good attitude about life and death, sin and guilt, and dying and death.

Victory Over Death

The deacon will need to have a solid idea of the concept of grief. Grief is a common human emotion all of humanity will, at one time or another, experience at some precise moment in life; however, it is grief, not despair, that must be emphasized. Jesus Christ has given us hope long after this life has ended. Paul gives one the picture of reassurance in 1 Corinthians, chapter 15 as he discusses the resurrection body in great detail. The deacon would do well to study this concept fully, for in this Scripture lies the truth of death and dying and living again. In Jesus there is life, not death. Jesus said to Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me shall live, even if he dies. And everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die" (John 11.25-26). It is the human emotion of loss and separation of a loved one in a physical sense that the deacon must face.

Paul writes,

"But when the perishable will have put on the imperishable, then will come about the saying that is written, 'Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting.' The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor 15.54-57).

The concept is very simple: a man is born and then he must die. The only exception to this fate is found in the Second Coming of Jesus. Death is real. Man will experience death unless Jesus returns. Therefore, only those who believe in Him can prepare adequately to meet man's last great enemy. Here is where a deacon finally realizes whether he has what it takes or not. When he stands by the bedside of a man who appears to have but a few hours to live, what does he say and do? The deacon can only face this situation in the power of a risen Christ who has overcome and defeated death. In Jesus, there is hope, and the deacon must emphasize the positive affirmation of the gospel. The gospel is good news not only unto salvation, but it provides a hope long after this life has been terminated by what we call death. The deacon who views death as a means of escaping this life into the presence of Jesus Christ will be able to produce hope in those who are facing death. After the deacon realizes that his faith is secure in Jesus, he can help others face death with confidence and assurance.

If people never get over their grief, or are side tracked, or a variety of other such tragedies occur, perhaps one reason is that deacons have failed to minister in a thoroughly Biblical and, therefore, adequate manner to those who suffer grief.¹

Conclusion

Genuine ministry is based on the concept of one giving to and receiving from others whatever God has given. God allows one to minister to the needs of others for the purpose of mutual encouragement and growth. His purpose and desire is to allow the deacon to live in perfect unity and harmony with one another and minister to those needs that arise in his community. One has been presented a picture of deacons working in only a few specialized ministries in order to accomplish this purpose. God has given the church spiritual leaders to help mature the body in Christ Jesus and to become effective in the ministry of our Lord.

¹
Jay E. Adams, The Pastoral Life (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975), 156.