

A STUDY & DISCUSSION GUIDE

Developing Deacons In Your Church

DEFINING · IDENTIFYING
DEVELOPING · COMMISSIONING

STEP 1

Invitation

STEP 2

Clarification

Parts 1 & 2

STEP 3

Examination

STEP 4

Commission



How We Develop Deacons

At Redeemer we describe ourselves as an elder-led, deacon-supported church, and we believe a mark of a healthy church is that it's served by qualified deacons who use their unique gifts to support its mission, whether as gospel community leaders, leading our benevolence ministry, leading the teams that make Sundays happen, or serving behind the scenes in administration. Raising up those deacons takes intentionality, so here's the four-step process we use to develop, discern, and deploy them, and the rest of this guide walks you through each step.

1 Invitation

The process begins with the elders, who invite emerging candidates (men and women who already meet the qualifications of 1 Timothy 3 and are already serving) into a formal process of development as deacons.

2 Clarification *Parts 1 & 2 of this guide*

Over two or three meetings, the elders and candidates walk through the Scriptures and the readings together to learn more about the role of deacons and how deacons serve well alongside elders. Parts 1 and 2 of this guide, with their readings and discussion questions, are built for exactly this step.

3 Examination & Affirmation *Evaluation form, p. 9*

Candidates are put before the church in a Sunday gathering, and the congregation is invited to fill out a form evaluating and affirming each candidate's character and qualifications in light of 1 Timothy 3. Follow-up meetings are scheduled as needed.

4 Commission *Order of service and prayer, p. 11*

After a time of examination, deacon candidates are commissioned to use their gifts and serve the church, and from then on deacons and elders meet together quarterly for a time of prayer and updates.

Recommended listening: [“Deacon-Supported,” Redeemer Network Podcast](#), our conversation on deacon-supported as one of the Redeemer Network's church health metrics.

Example Schedule

Here's what the process looks like from start to finish. Use the right-hand column to set target dates for your church.

STEP		TARGET DATE
1	INVITATION Identify servant leaders. Elders identify servant leaders in the congregation who are using their gifts to support the mission (in other words, they're already functioning like deacons).	_____
2	INVITATION Extend the invitation. Invite them into a time of training and clarification to discern their readiness to serve as deacons.	_____
3	CLARIFICATION Initial meeting. Gather to discuss, pray, and go over the process together.	_____
4	CLARIFICATION Training Session 1. Work through Part 1: Defining & Identifying Deacons.	_____
5	CLARIFICATION Training Session 2. Work through Part 2: Developing & Commissioning Deacons.	_____
6	EXAMINATION Send out the feedback form. Share it with the congregation, especially those serving alongside, under, or living in community with the candidate. Consider adapting the example form on p. 9 into a Google Form for ease.	_____
7	EXAMINATION Review feedback and debrief with the candidate. Name strengths and evidence of grace, and discuss areas of growth.	_____
8	EXAMINATION Discern readiness. Determine whether the deacon candidate is qualified and ready for commissioning.	_____
9	COMMISSION Set the commissioning Sunday. Use the order of service and prayer on pp. 11–12.	_____

How to Use This Guide

Most of us inherited our picture of deacons more than we ever studied it, whether that's a board that votes on budgets, a list of people who take care of the building, or a title handed to whoever has been around the longest. This guide grew out of the process we use at Redeemer to slow down and let the Scriptures, rather than our habits, shape what a deacon is and how a church should go about raising them up.

You should be able to hand this guide to an elder or ministry leader and have it walk them through the whole process, from the first invitation to the commissioning prayer. The heart of it, though, is the clarification step, where your elders and deacon candidates work through Parts 1 and 2 together over two or three meetings. Here's how I'd encourage you to use it.

- 1 Start with the Scriptures.** Before you open a single article, sit with Acts 6:1–6 and 1 Timothy 3, because everything else in this guide is commentary and those two texts are the foundation.
- 2 Do the reading before you meet.** Every title in the reading lists is linked, and the book chapters are posted at ministrythatmatters.org so you don't have to chase them down. You won't agree with every author (they don't all agree with each other), but you do need to wrestle with what they're saying.
- 3 Come ready to discuss.** The questions under *Reflect & Prepare to Discuss* are meant to start conversations, and several of them surface the gap between what the New Testament says about deacons and what our churches actually ask of them, which is usually where the best conversations happen.
- 4 Take the parts in order.** Part 1 asks what a deacon is and how the early church identified and appointed them; Part 2 asks how we develop and commission deacons and what happens once they're serving. It's hard to develop deacons well if you haven't first agreed on what you're developing them to be.
- 5 Write it down.** Use the notes page after each part to capture convictions, disagreements, and next steps as they come up, so the conversation turns into something your church can actually put into practice.
- 6 Finish the process.** Once the clarification meetings are done, the evaluation form and the commissioning order of service at the back of this guide will help you carry the process through with your whole church.

STEP 2 · CLARIFICATION · PART 1

Defining & Identifying Deacons

BIBLICAL
READINGS

Acts 6:1–6 · 1 Timothy 3

THEOLOGICAL
READINGS

*The Emergence of Ministry,
Leadership, and Order in the Early
Church*

Arthur Patzia · *only the section on
deacons*

Church Leadership

Gene Getz

*Deacons: Shock Absorbers &
Servants*

9Marks Journal

*Were There Deaconesses in the
Early Church?*

Aimé Martimort

Women in the Local Church

Lore Ferguson

*Biblical Qualifications &
Responsibilities of Deacons*

9Marks Journal

REFLECT & PREPARE TO DISCUSS

- 1 What is the core work of deacons according to the New Testament examples and instructions?
- 2 What factors determine the order and priority of the work of deacons in the New Testament? How does this compare with our thoughts and expectations of deacons in our churches today?
- 3 How do we compare or reconcile the reality of what demands the time of deacons in our churches today with the biblical priority of time use of deacons?
- 4 How were deacons appointed in the early church?
- 5 What role did elders play in appointing deacons? What role did Paul, Titus, Timothy play? What role did the congregations play?
- 6 How do these things inform our identifying and appointing of deacons today?

DEFINING & IDENTIFYING DEACONS

Part 1 Notes

STEP 2 · CLARIFICATION · PART 2

Developing & Commissioning Deacons

BIBLICAL
READINGS

Acts 6:1–6 · 1 Timothy 3

THEOLOGICAL
READINGS*Church Leadership*

Gene Getz

*From Commissioning for Ministry
to Ordaining for Life*

Kevin Giles

Is a Deacon Just a Servant?

Russell Moore

*How to Separate Deacon Work
from Elder Work*

9Marks Journal

*The Committee-Free, Task-Specific
Deacon*

9Marks Journal

REFLECT & PREPARE TO DISCUSS

- 1 How do deacons and elders relate in the New Testament? How do deacons and church members relate?
- 2 How do elders both effectively lead deacons? How do elders effectively empower deacons to be servant leaders of others?
- 3 How does having a clear understanding of the role and work of deacons help us develop and appoint deacons?
- 4 What is our aim in developing deacons? How does this inform how we develop deacons?
- 5 What happens after deacons are appointed (or commissioned)?

DEVELOPING & COMMISSIONING DEACONS

Part 2 Notes

STEP 3

Examination & Affirmation

Once your candidates have worked through Parts 1 and 2, put them before the church in your Sunday gathering and invite the congregation to fill out the evaluation below, affirming each candidate's character and qualifications in light of 1 Timothy 3. Schedule follow-up meetings with candidates as needed.

Deacon Candidate Evaluation

These qualifications come from 1 Timothy 3:8–13. Please read the passage prayerfully before filling out this form. Keep in mind that no leader is perfect (only Jesus), but it's important that deacon candidates have a track record of maturing in Christ-like character.

Your name (first & last) _____

Name of the person you're assessing _____

How long have you known this deacon candidate? _____

CIRCLE ONE FOR EACH

1 = MAJOR CONCERN · 3 = OK · 5 = DOING GREAT

Deacons are dignified: This person is respectable and lives their life with seriousness about God.

(1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

Deacons aren't double-tongued: This person speaks with integrity, is honest, and knows when to hold their tongue and maintain confidence.

(1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

Deacons aren't addicted to too much wine: This person isn't preoccupied with alcohol (not in need of it) and doesn't step over the line of drunkenness. This also has implications for other types of addictions.

(1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

Deacons aren't greedy for dishonest gain: This person is trustworthy with the resources of the church, generous, and sincere.

(1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

Continued on next page

Deacon Candidate Evaluation *(continued)*

1 = MAJOR CONCERN · 5 = DOING GREAT

Deacons hold to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience: This person believes the gospel with conviction and lives their life in line with the gospel.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Deacons have their character tested as to blamelessness: Over time and in community, this person bears the fruit of the Spirit in all areas of their lives. They are examples of Christ-like character.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Deacons are not slanderers; they are sober-minded and faithful: This person does not have a gossiping tongue but is thoughtful of others and builds up.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Deacons (if married) are faithful in marriage: This person lives a life of sexual purity; they are not a “flirt” but devoted to their spouse.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Deacons manage their children and their households well: They demonstrate the ability to lead their households as Christ-like servants. Their parenting and home life are marked by the above characteristics.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Overall spiritual maturity: How do you evaluate his/her overall maturity as a Christian?

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Please explain any and all concerns you have about this candidate. As they submit to this process they desire to grow in grace.

Please affirm any strengths you see in this person and why they would make a great deacon.

STEP 4

Commission

After a time of examination, deacon candidates are commissioned in a Sunday gathering to use their gifts and serve the church. Here's the order we follow for that moment.

NEW DEACON COMMISSIONING

- 1 A word on the office.** A pastor shares a brief word about what the Bible teaches on the office of deacons:

Redeemer is an elder-led, deacon-supported church. Healthy churches need called and qualified deacons who are assisting the pastors in executing the ministries of the church and serving the body in specific ways. Deacons are men or women who meet the qualifications in 1 Timothy 3:8–13. They are Christ-like in character, servant-hearted in nature, and specifically gifted for their task or role.

- 2 Introduce the new deacons.** The pastor invites the new deacons up and has each of them share:

- Their name
- How long they have been a part of the church
- What their deacon role is and why they enjoy serving in that way

- 3 Read and pray.** The pastor reads 1 Timothy 3:8–13 and then prays a prayer of blessing and commissioning over the new deacons (the full prayer is on the next page).

AFTER COMMISSIONING

Once commissioned, deacons and elders meet together quarterly for a time of prayer and updates, because deacons who are supporting the mission of the church need to stay connected to the elders who are leading it.

A Prayer for New Deacons

Our Lord and God,

This morning we pray for our new deacons.

Since the time of the Apostles you have inspired the church to appoint members of your church to assist in particular ways in its mission.

We give you thanks for how you have blessed your church; for how you are continuing to build and shape your church; and for giving us the joy today of appointing new deacons to serve your church.

We would ask that you would bless these new deacons; that they may know true humility and be faithful in their service for you. Remind them of the example of our Lord Jesus Christ who in fulfilling the ministry you gave to him:

Came to serve, rather than be served.

Sought the needs of others, rather than seeking his own.

Ministered to people without prejudice, and with courage and determination.

Loved people unconditionally.

We ask Lord God that you pour generously into their lives your Holy Spirit; fill them with your love, and compassion, so that they may see their brothers and sisters as you see them, and that they are equipped to carry out the duties that they have been appointed to fulfil.

Lord God, we pray for these new deacons, and indeed all of your people here, that you would fill us anew with your Holy Spirit so that we will be:

Hearers and doers of your Word;

Ministers of all people;

Friends of the poor;

Voices of the voiceless;

And servants of our Lord Jesus.

We ask for this in His name and for His glory,

Amen.

If you're a pastor or planter working out how to raise up deacons in your church, I'd love to talk it through. You can reach out at ministrythatmatters.org/connect.