

Third – they should be enjoying healthy relationships

- Leaders lead by example in every area of their lives. The church needs to model healthy patterns of relating, and whilst growth in relationship is an on-going process leaders need to demonstrate the reality of this in their personal lives.
- The quality of their personal relationships is very often a mirror of the calibre of their relationships with God. If married, and both partners are Christians, they need to be secure in their relationship with one another and share a commitment to service for the Lord. The supporting spouse has a key role to play.
- If a leader is married to a Non-Christian, it is still important to have loving support from the Non-Christian partner for the position of leadership in the Church even though the other partner may not yet share the joys of the Christian life. Disunity in this area will very likely affect the marriage at some level with the potential for unhelpful repercussions.
- Although the importance of healthy relationships does not receive a mention in Acts 6, Paul certainly highlights the importance of family stability (1 Tim 3:2,4—5,12).

This leaflet has been produced to give a general view of the basic duties and responsibilities of Deacons and a Biblical perspective on the qualities and character of those who feel called to the position of a Deacon.

Adopted by Church Meeting on 19th July 2001

If there is anything in this leaflet which you don't understand or wish to discuss please contact me.

**Rev. Leslie Shorten
Minister
(Revised 4th February 2009)**

Sources:

A book of Services & Prayers (*The Congregational Church in England & Wales Rev.Ed. 1969*)
The Congregational Way - The Congregational Federation
Guidelines, Radical Leaders – Paul Beasley-Murray

West End Congregational Church



What is a Deacon

In the Book of Services and Prayers produced by the Congregational Church of England and Wales (Revised edition 1969) the duties of the Deacon are described as follows:- “*With all the members of the Church to show the example of a devout and Christian life; to do his/her part*

in maintaining the public worship in which the Church proclaims its faith, and the meetings for fellowship in which the Church renews its obedience to its Lord, and more particularly to share in the ministry of the Church, serving at the Lord's table and exercising a pastoral care within the congregation; to give leadership and counsel in the temporal affairs of the church, and to represent the local church in the wider concerns of God's people.”

Simply put, the main task of the Diaconate is to assist the Minister in leading the church. Different Churches will have their own tradition or agreement about how many Deacons there should be and what duties should be carried out. Some Diaconates are executive in their function, others are advisory. Here in West End Church we have seven elected Deacons; the Secretary and Treasurer are ex-officio Deacons and together with the Minister form a Diaconate of 10 members.

Deacons will have a prayerful concern for the Minister (*meeting with him and praying with him in the vestry before each service of worship*) and for all the people in the fellowship. The Church list of members and adherents is divided up, and each of the seven elected Deacons will have the names of those for whom s/he will exercise a special concern.

The names of all Deacons and the Minister also appear on the list, as there is perhaps nothing more important than that the carers are themselves cared for. The Deacons will note when those on their lists are missing, and if they become aware of illness or trouble they will inform the Minister, or Church Secretary in his absence. The Deacons will share in the Pastoral Care of members and it may be that the Deacon can help in many ways.

The Diaconate meets monthly. They will share with the Minister the pastoral concerns of the Church, and any actions which it might be thought proper to take on behalf of people in need. Much of this will be confidential, and should not be discussed outside meetings. Other business is dealt with at Deacons Meetings including bringing recommendations to Church Meeting. At services of Holy Communion, Deacons will take their place at the table in rota, and serve as indicated by tradition and custom. They may be asked to represent the Church at other meetings. Specific areas of responsibility may be allocated to individual

Deacons such as Property and Fabric, Youth Work, Mission etc. not all Deacons will have the same gifts and they will be able to contribute in different ways, but to be a Deacon is to have a high sense of God's calling to the work of the Church, and to put that first in every demand on time and talent.

Each Sunday, a Deacon will be on duty, that is s/he will have responsibility to see that the church is ready for worship and may include the following:-

- Ensuring that the doors are open in good time, at least 30 minutes before the service and that the place looks alive and welcoming.
- Being there to welcome the 'visiting Preacher' if one is planned.
- That doors are staffed by a steward or stewards to welcome people and hand out hymn books, Focus Sheets and orders of service (if printed).
- That collection plates are available and sufficient stewards appointed to take up the collection.
- Checking that the organists have put up the hymn numbers.
- Pulpit/lectern/table are properly laid out.
- That the Ministers water in the pulpit is fresh, and lights are switched on.
- The amplification system is working and microphones switched on.
- Prayer is offered for the Minister or Preacher in the vestry.
- Someone is available to assist anyone who may feel unwell during the service and to be alert during the service for any other form of disturbance in which help may be required.
- Hymn books are collected up and returned to their place, that doors are locked, the premises secure, and that lights are off.
- In the event of the Minister/Preacher not turning up or being taken ill, to arrange for the service to be conducted by a competent person. This would normally be another minister/pastor/lay preacher from within the church or one of the Deacons or a competent person from within the congregation.

It may well be that other members of the church will have specific responsibility for many of the above tasks but it will be the responsibility of the Deacon to ensure that the above is carried out and the church is ready for public worship.

What kind of Christian makes a good Deacon

If you are perhaps considering allowing your name to go forward for election as a Deacon then the following may be helpful to you. From time to time every leadership team has to face the issue of renewing the team and finding new colleagues. For this reason it seems sensible to look at the qualities of those Seven leaders who were appointed to serve in the Jerusalem church in the New Testament.

'select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task, while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word.' What they said pleased the whole community, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, together with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus ... They had these men stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. The word of God continued to spread; the number of the disciples increased greatly ...'(Acts 6:3—7a).

First – they were to be 'full of the Spirit and of wisdom'

It is not by chance that the apostles list spirituality before ability. Clearly ability is important for those who lead God's people, but at the end of the day it is not all-important. In the first place, leaders are to be 'full of the Spirit', men and women who are on fire for God because God's Spirit has invaded their lives. They are to be people 'of good standing' (Acts 6:3)—people liked and respected by the church and the community at large.

A similar emphasis is found in 1 Timothy 3:1—13, where Paul lists the qualities necessary for those aspiring to leadership in the church at Ephesus. The emphasis there is on 'graces' rather than 'gifts'. Almost without exception Paul tells us nothing of what leaders might be expected to do—rather he writes of what leaders are ***expected to be***.

- 'An overseer must be above reproach' (1 Tim 3:2); 'They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as Deacons.'
- 'If they prove themselves blameless, let them serve as Deacons' (1 Tim 3:10).
- Leaders must be 'well-thought of by outsiders' (1 Tim 3:7).
- If leaders are to be effective they must in the first place live lives that reflect the King whom they serve. 'Power', 'love' and 'self-discipline' are all marks of a spiritual leader (*For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.*) (2 Tim 1:6,7).

Second – They were to have proven qualities

- When members elect leaders, they are hopefully looking to elect people who have begun to display gifts of leadership in the context of the church's worship, ministry and mission. As Paul made clear to Timothy, age should not be an issue (1 Tim 4:12). What counts is spiritual maturity (1 Tim 3:6,7).