

The Diaconate

Acts 6:1-7

Church leadership can seem like a mundane topic, but in reality it never is. The birth of the diaconate follows the mess the Holy Spirit made in Jerusalem at Pentecost (Acts 2:41). The disciples were ready to be at rest, but instead would be put to work (Acts 1:6-8). When the Spirit moves, problems arise in the church. Until the resurrection, God continues his mission, sending his disciples out as witnesses, which results in bringing new people in and with them new challenges, new complaints and new solutions. The diaconate is a glorious solution.

Men from Among You

Growth means growing pains, and in the church in Jerusalem one of those pains is a complaint by the Hellenistic Jews against the Hebraic Jews that widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. The **disciples' response acknowledges the validity of the complaint** though at the same time they refuse to take energy away from preaching in order to solve it (v2). Instead, they empower the saints to choose seven men **with good reputations, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom they'll appoint (v3)**. The leaders are chosen from the people and by the people, and are then confirmed by the disciples, a presbyterian model of government. The beauty of biblical leadership is that no part of the body exalts itself or despises another, and each celebrates the differences and dependence in the body (1 Cor. 12:21-26). These men are wanted by the people to represent the church because they already do (v3). They serve and are therefore ordained as servants.

Called by God

The church is a welcoming place where everyone is invited to come and be connected to the living body of Jesus. There are no prerequisites, special clothing, or secret handshakes (James 2:2-4). At the same time, once we come in, the call to follow Jesus is total. Bonhoeffer said, "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die." The deacons have heard that call and responded, which we know because they gladly took on a cross-cultural, multi-racial ministry to single women with daily needs! This is why they have to be Spirit-filled! Being called is an internal sense of conviction that drives belief and action. These deacons serve the Lord *because they want to*, and not from a sense of guilt or social obligation. This is why we train the called and **don't call the trained**. All service in the church must be given from a heart of gratitude to the Lord who is the one to ultimately bless, approve and reward the work. We are thankful for everyone who serves us in the **church, but our thanks can't be their primary motivation. The internal is verified by the external call, and together these express God's call.**

Full of the Spirit and Wisdom

Serving tables **was a big job that required a lot of skill and wisdom. It's a tragedy when the diaconate is reduced to a task list**. These men are ethically *qualified* (Spirit) and practically *gifted* (wisdom). Deacons must be dignified, not double-tongued, not big drinkers, not consumed with money, knowledgeable and strong in faith, and proven (1 Tim. 3:8-10). A deacon is a devoted husband whose household is well managed and disciplined (1 Tim. 3:12). The result of serving is a good testimony and great confidence (1 Tim. 3:13). Biblical wisdom is not like trivia, but is an ability to apply knowledge skillfully. The seven are chosen to deal with a particular situation in Acts 6, but we also later see Stephen and Philip preaching and evangelizing (Acts 7, 8:4ff). These gifts are not necessary to the diaconate, but show the impact it had. The division of labor is wonderful: the word of God continued to increase, the number of disciples multiplied exceedingly in Jerusalem, and a great number of priests were obedient to the faith (v7). **As a new church, we're thankful for what God is doing, not just in the diaconate, but in the all ways people are serving him and one another. We want more of it.**

NOTES FOR LITTLE SAINTS

Today's Passage: Acts 6:1-7

Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. 2 And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. 3 Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. 4 But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." 5 And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. 6 These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them. 7 And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

1. Why did the disciples need to appoint deacons in the church in Jerusalem (verse 1)?
2. In every house lots of work needs to get done in order for things to work and for everyone to be blessed. What jobs do you do at home to serve your family? What "jobs" or things do you do at **church to bless people? These don't have to be official, but they are still important!**
3. Christians serve the Lord out of gratitude, not because we have to but because we get to. The deacons model faithful for us. When they served the church in Jerusalem, what happened (verse 7)?
4. Draw a picture of the widows getting food in the daily distribution and people sitting down to eat together happily and thankfully.

Memory Verse to Recite Next Week:

Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. —Acts 6:3