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If you are a deacon in Christ's church, you have been called by God to a high office indeed. You serve a vital role in protecting the church's primary calling of the ministry of the Word. You represent to the church our God's deep

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concern
for
the
poor
among
his
people,
and
particularly
our
Savior's
own
compassion
toward
the
poor
in his
earthly
ministry.
And
you
have
an
opportunity
to
lead
the
church
of
Christ
in
adorning
her
witness
to the
world
with
deeds
of
mercy
to
accompany
words
of
gospel
truth.

This
article
seeks
to
refresh
the
perspectives
of
deacons
regarding
the
true
significance
of
their
office
as the

Lord of the church has designed it. It is my hope that it will elevate in your mind, if you are a deacon, a sense of the tremendous importance of diaconal ministry in the church, as well as enlarge your insight into the heart of compassion of our Lord, to whom this office and its ministry is so important.

The Origin of Your Office

If you are a deacon, you should understand well the

significance of Acts 6 to your office. According to the traditional interpretation of the church, dating back to the days of the church fathers, this is that portion of the biblical account in which Christ institutes the office of deacon through his apostles.

The background to the institution of the diaconate involved the church leaders' struggle with what we sometimes call "a good problem to have." As evidence of the recent outpouring of the Spirit

upon
his
church,
and
the
resulting
overflow
of the
love
for
the
brethren
that
was
the
distinguishing
mark
of
Christ's
disciples
(John
13:35),
there
had
been
a
remarkable
outpouring
of
material
generosity
toward
the
poor
within
the
Christian
community.
Earlier,
in
Acts
4:34–
35,
we
are
told:

There
was
not
a
needy
person
among
them,
for
as
many
as
were
owners
of
lands
or

houses
sold
them
and
brought
the
proceeds
of
what
was
sold
and
laid
it
at
the
apostles'
feet,
and
it
was
distributed
to
each
as
any
had
need.

No
doubt
the
wise
and
equitable
distribution
of
these
funds
for
the
poor
weighed
heavily
upon
the
apostolic
leadership,
especially
in
light
of the
remarkable
growth
of the
church
in
these
days,
and
their
primary
concern
for

evangelism and discipleship. This burden of responsibility reached the breaking point in the account of Acts 6:1–7, triggered by a controversy that arose in the church over the distribution of funds for the poor. The Greek-speaking members of the church in Jerusalem were convinced that their widows were being slighted in the distributions, and the indignation that accompanied this conviction threatened the peace of the church. The apostles were

apparently
convinced
that
at
least
part
of the
reason
for
this
state
of
affairs
lay in
their
having
too
many
items
to
directly
oversee
effectively.

In a
meeting
of the
whole
church,
the
apostles
say
(vss.
2b-
4):

It
is
not
right
that
we
should
give
up
preaching
the
word
of
God
to
serve
tables.
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.
But
we
will
devote
ourselves
to
prayer
and
to
the
ministry
of
the
word.

The
Greek
word
translated
“serve”
in
verse
2 is
the
verb
form
of the
word
διάκονος
(*diakonos*),
from
which
we
get
our
word
“deacon.”
It is
the
same
word
that
is
used
elsewhere
to
describe
a
minister
of the

gospel
as a
“servant
of
Christ
Jesus”
(1
Timothy
4:6).
It is
also a
word
that
Jesus
used
to
describe
his
own
kind
of
ministry:
“The
Son
of
Man
came
not to
be
served,
but to
serve.”
(Mark
10:45).
However,
ever
since
the
apostles
in
Acts
called
for
men
to
relieve
them
of the
responsibility
of
“serving
tables”
(a
reference
to
money
tables,
most
likely:
the
mechanism
for
receiving
and

distributing
funds
for
the
poor),
the
word
“deacon”
(servant)
has
come
to
have
a
more
specialized
reference
to a
certain
officer
in the
church.
The
apostle
Paul
uses
it that
way
in
Philippians
1:1:

Paul
and
Timothy,
servants
of
Christ
Jesus,
To
all
the
saints
in
Christ
Jesus
who
are
at
Philippi,
with
the
overseers
(or
elders)
and
deacons
(διακόνους,
diakonois):
Grace
to
you
and
peace

from
God
our
Father
and
the
Lord
Jesus
Christ.

All
members
of the
church
are
“servants”
in a
broader
sense,
but
there
are
certain
“servants”
who
are
elected
by
the
congregation
and
ordained
by
the
apostles
(or
elders)
to
serve
with
authority.

Because
the
responsibilities
of the
new
office
would
entail
difficult
decisions,
interactions
with
members
in
delicate
situations,
and
even
the
resolution
of
serious
conflicts,

the
right
men
for
this
job
needed
to be
“of
good
repute,
full of
the
Spirit
and
of
wisdom”
(v. 3).
In
that
first
deacon
nomination
and
election
process,
seven
such
men
were
identified
by
the
congregation,
and
the
first
deacon
ordination
in
Christ’s
church
was
held:
“These
they
set
before
the
apostles,
and
they
prayed
and
laid
their
hands
on
them”
(v. 6).
The
office
of
deacon

was
now
in
place.

The Reason for Your Office (Broadly)

If you
are a
deacon,
you
also
need
to
recognize
what
is the
most
basic
reason
for
your
office.
Acts 6
makes
clear
that
the
broadest
reason
for
the
existence
of
deacons
in the
church
is to
preserve
and
protect
the
church's
primary
calling
of the
ministry
of the
Word
and
prayer.

Recall
that,
before
the
first
deacons
were

installed into office, the apostles were carrying the full burden of leadership in the church, including the administration of mercy ministry funds. In Presbyterianism the calling and office of apostle is viewed as having ceased, and it is now elders along with the minister who have the highest authority in the local church and the final responsibility for all the ministries therein. Thus, the same partnership in ministry

that
was
created
in
Acts 6
between
the
apostles
and
deacons
should
continue
today
between
elders
and
deacons.
Though
all of
the
affairs
of the
local
church
are
under
the
ultimate
oversight
of the
elders
(the
word
“overseer”
is
interchangeable
in the
New
Testament
with
elder),
there
are
many
important
concerns
of
leadership
that,
in a
congregation
of
any
size,
would
inevitably
divert
them
from
what
are
their
two
most

crucial
tasks:
ministering
the
Word
both
publically
and
privately,
and
interceding
in
prayer
with
and
for
the
members
of the
church.
Thus,
potentially
any
leadership
concerns
that
go
beyond
these
two
most
vital
ones
may,
and
often
should
be,
delegated
to
deacons
for
their
oversight.

It is
for
this
reason
that
the
scope
of
diaconal
duties
is
quite
rightly
very
broad
in our
churches.
This
is in

keeping with the broader principle of delegation established in Acts 6, in which a specific task was given to the deacons to preserve certain priorities in the apostles (elders today). Thus, not only the church's funds designated for the relief of the poor, but the funds of the church as a whole may be delegated to the diaconate for oversight. The many decisions that arise in connection with property ownership and

maintenance,
the
logistics
of
facility
use,
and
so on
can
be
referred
by
the
elders
to the
deacons.
Elders
may
certainly
retain
direct
oversight
of
these
areas
if
necessary,
and
they
always
are
subject
to the
review
of
elders.
However,
it will
often
be
wise,
where
qualified
men
may
be
found,
for
the
elders
to
delegate
many
of
these
responsibilities
of
leadership
to
deacons.
As
assistants
to the
elders,

the
deacons
serve
an
indispensable
role:
that
of
enabling
the
focus
of the
elders
to
remain
on
the
spiritual
lives
of the
saints.

Of
course,
there
are
many
forms
of
service
in the
life of
the
church
that
should
be
shared
by all
the
members
of the
church,
ordained
and
not.
Deacons
are
not to
be
“the
servants”
of the
church
in the
sense
that
they
personally
do
anything
and
everything
that

needs
doing.
They
are
servant-
leaders
in the
church,
who
on
the
one
hand
have
hearts
willing
to do
the
most
menial
of
tasks
for
the
sake
of the
body,
yet
who
also
have
the
authority
to
direct
and
oversee
the
involvement
of the
whole
church
in
such
tasks.
The
“deacon
as
church
custodian”
stereotype
is
shown
for its
folly
by
the
high
spiritual
qualifications
required
by
Scripture
for

deacons. With the exception of being “able to teach” (the ministry of the Word), the personal qualities prerequisite for the office of deacon are essentially the same as those required for elders (see 1 Timothy 3:1–13). The reason for this is that the office of deacon is one of leadership and authority in the church. Their service, then, should include enlisting the involvement of the broader congregation in the fulfillment

of
tasks
fitting
for
every
Christian
to be
involved
with.

The Reason for Your Office (Particularly)

But if
you
are a
deacon,
you
also
need
to be
aware
of
what
is the
more
particular
reason
for
your
office:
one
that
most
exhibits
the
glory
of
your
office
and
the
goodness
of the
one
who
ordained
it.
Acts 6
also
attaches
to the
office
of
deacon
in a
special
way
the
calling

of the church to minister to the physical and temporal needs of the poor: what is often called "mercy ministry."

The impulse of the early Christians to give to meet each other's material needs grew out of a profound awareness of one of the implications of the gospel: it is an expression of a holistic love on the part of God; it aims at the ultimate well-being of the whole person, body and

soul.
This
is
part
of the
reason
that
Jesus's
earthly
ministry
consisted
not
only
in a
ministry
of
teaching,
but
also a
ministry
of
healing.
The
latter,
in
addition
to
providing
attestation
of his
true
identity
as the
Son
of
God,
was
also
an
expression
of his
compassion
for
sinners
who
were
suffering
the
physical
consequences
of sin.
It also
pointed
to the
kind
of
ultimate
restoration
that
his
kingdom
would
bring:
the

end
of all
human
deprivation,
spiritual
and
material,
for
those
who
put
their
faith
in
Christ.
The
king
was
revealed
as
one
who
had
compassion
and
brought
relief
to
sinners,
both
body
and
soul.
And
those
who
were
made
conformed
to his
image
by
the
Spirit
had
an
instinctive
urge
to
meet
both
kinds
of
needs
in
others.
As
the
widows
in the
church
at
Jerusalem
found,

life within the redeemed community was one in which relief from both spiritual and temporal woes could be found.

This mercy ministry itself has a very broad application.

The form of mercy ministry found in the book of Acts was focused upon widows, those in the congregation who typically would have faced the most pressing needs. But the legitimate objects of such ministry, by extension, would

include those within the church who, by reasons of health, disability, old age, or other providential circumstances, find themselves lacking basic necessities of life. Likewise, the needs felt by the widows of the early church were met primarily by means of the monetary gifts of the church. Yet there are many temporal needs within the body of Christ that are best or only met by gifts of

time and effort. From this we can deduce that the mercy ministry labors of the deacons should go far beyond mere check-writing and fund management.

The temporal and material needs of the body are the special concern of their office, and their calling extends to all manner of service on behalf of the needy that addresses those concerns. Whereas one member, through financial hardship, may find himself in

need
of
help
purchasing
a
vehicle,
another
member,
through
age
or
disability,
may
find
himself
in
need
of
transportation
itself
by
others
with
vehicles.

Both
are
the
proper
concern
of the
diaconate.

Again,
one
may
need
help
with a
mortgage
payment;
another
may
need
help
drafting

a
family
budget:
both
are
the
proper
concern
of the
diaconate.

And
again,
the
deacon
serves
the
church
best
when
he

seeks
to
facilitate
and
coordinate
the
efforts
of the
whole
congregation
to
minister
to the
needy
in
their
midst.

Thus,
the
office
of
deacon
represents
a
most
fitting
and
essential
complement
to the
office
of
elder
in the
church:
together
they
represent
the
“two
hands”
of the
church’s
ministry.
Whereas
one
has
its
primary
expression
in a
ministry
of
Word,
the
other
has
its
primary
expression
in a
ministry
of

deed.
According
to 1
Peter
4:10–
11,
these
are
the
two
broad
categories
of
gifts
that
the
whole
church
partakes
of—
speaking
gifts
and
serving
gifts:

As
each
has
received
a
gift,
use
it
to
serve
one
another,
as
good
stewards
of
God's
varied
grace:
whoever
speaks,
as
one
who
speaks
oracles
of
God;
whoever
serves,
as
one
who
serves
by
the
strength
that

God
supplies.

It is
thus
very
natural
and
fitting
that
these
two
kinds
of
gifts
be
epitomized
in the
men
that
serve
in the
two
offices
of
elder
and
deacon.
And it
becomes
clearer
why
the
mercy
ministry
of the
church
is a
necessary
complement
to the
gospel
ministry.
Without
genuine
compassion
for
the
material
needs
of our
brothers,
our
assurances
of
love
for
them
will
sound
hollow
(James
2:15–
16).

The calling of the deacons is to lead the church in such a way as to ensure that its love is not in word or talk only, but in deed and in truth (1 John 3:17–18). This is not to displace the ministry of the Word as the primary calling of the church. It is rather to strengthen it, and to render it more credible and effective.

The Significance of Your Office

If you are a deacon, therefore, the special calling of your office happens to be a reflection of one of the major themes of the Bible: our God has a special concern for the poor. This is not something revealed for the first time in New Testament church polity. Rather, the institution of the diaconate is the fulfillment of a long-standing record of God's heart for the poor.

For example, the call

for
compassion
for
the
poor
is
written
large
in the
instructions
given
to
Israel
by
Moses.
The
Israelites'
own
deliverance
by
Yahweh
from
poverty
in
Egypt
was
to
shape
their
responses
to the
poor
within
their
own
communities.
Since
they
themselves
as a
people
had
been
redeemed
from
poverty,
they
were
told
by
God
in
Deuteronomy
15:11,
"You
shall
open
wide
your
hand
to
your
brother,
to the

needy
and
to the
poor,
in
your
land.”
Just
as
God
had
demonstrated
a
heart
for
the
poor
in
singling
out
Israel
among
all
the
greater
nations
of the
world,
so his
people
were
to
have
their
own
heart
for
the
poor
in
their
midst.
And
legislation
within
the
Mosaic
law
included
provisions
and
protections
for
the
poor,
the
enforcement
of
which
was a
precursor
to the
diaconal
ministry

of the
new
covenant
community
(Exodus
22–
23;
Leviticus
19,
25;
Deuteronomy
15,
24).
When
the
apostle
Paul
committed
himself
so
zealously
to an
offering
for
the
poor
in
Jerusalem
(2
Corinthians
8–9),
he
was
acting
on an
ancient
impulse
within
the
law
itself.

Likewise,
warnings
are
given
against
taking
advantage
of the
weakness
of the
poor
in the
wisdom
literature
of
Israel.
The
reason?
God
identifies
with
the

poor
in a
special
way:
what
is
done
to the
poor
he
counts
as
done
to
him:
"Whoever
oppresses
a
poor
man
insults
his
Maker,
but
he
who
is
generous
to the
needy
honors
him"
(Prov.
14:31).
Likewise,
the
poor
who
are
abused
will
find a
dreadful
defender
in
God
himself:
"Do
not
rob
the
poor,
because
he is
poor,
or
crush
the
afflicted
at the
gate,
for
the
LORD

will
plead
their
cause
and
rob
of life
those
who
rob
them”
(Prov.
22:
22).
God’s
people
were
to
recognize
that
their
treatment
of the
poor
had a
direct
correspondence
to
their
own
relationship
with
God:
a
theme
which
would
be
reinforced
in the
New
Testament
by
our
Lord.
Jesus
made
this
clear
when
he
said
of
ministry
to the
poor
among
his
disciples:
“Truly,
I say
to
you,
as

you
did it
to
one
of the
least
of
these
my
brothers,
you
did it
to
me”
(Matt.
25:
40).
God’s
jealousy
for
the
poor
is
further
underscored
in a
grim
way
as it
forms
a
major
rationale
for
his
wrath
against
his
people
in the
days
of the
prophets.
Isaiah’s
opening
words
of
rebuke
for
the
guilty
nation
single
out
its
crimes
against
the
poor:
“Wash
yourselves;
make
yourselves
clean;

remove
the
evil of
your
deeds
from
before
my
eyes;
cease
to do
evil,
learn
to do
good;
seek
justice,
correct
oppression;
bring
justice
to the
fatherless,
plead
the
widow's
cause"
(1:16-
17).

This
is a
message
brought
by
many
of the
prophets
of
old;
God's
anger
against
his
people
is
stirred
by
their
neglect
of the
needs
of the
poor,
and
their
actual
abuse
of
that
portion
of the
covenant
community

that
God
was
so
mindful
of.
The
repentance
and
reformation
that
God
calls
for is
repeatedly
put in
terms
of
mercy
and
justice
toward
the
poor:

Is
not
this
the
fast
that
I
choose:
to
loose
the
bonds
of
wickedness,
to
undo
the
straps
of
the
yoke,
to
let
the
oppressed
go
free,
and
to
break
every
yoke?
Is
it
not
to
share
your
bread

with
the
hungry
and
bring
the
homeless
poor
into
your
house;
when
you
see
the
naked,
to
cover
him,
and
not
to
hide
yourself
from
your
own
flesh?
(Isa.
58:6–
7)

This
emphasis
on
mercy
ministry
as at
the
heart
of
true
religion
finds
its
echo
in
various
places
in the
New
Testament,
particularly
in the
well-
known
words
of
James
the
brother
of
Jesus:
“Religion

that
is
pure
and
undefiled
before
God,
the
Father,
is
this:
to
visit
orphans
and
widows
in
their
affliction,
and
to
keep
oneself
unstained
from
the
world”
(James
1: 27).
The
prophets
and
the
apostles
are
one
in
underscoring
—for
all
God’s
people
—
how a
heart
for
the
poor
is
indispensable
to a
heart
after
God’s
own
heart.

Certainly
the
most
spectacular
way
that
the

whole
of
Scripture
underscores
the
significance
of the
work
of
deacons
is in
its
casting
of the
work
of the
Messiah
in
“diaconal”
terms.
What
will
be
the
nature
of the
Messiah’s
rule?
Isaiah
writes:

But
with
righteousness
he
shall
judge
the
poor,
and
decide
with
equity
for
the
meek
of
the
earth;
and
he
shall
strike
the
earth
with
the
rod
of
his
mouth,
and
with
the

breath
of
his
lips
he
shall
kill
the
wicked.
(11:4)

Who,
consequently,
will
find
the
coming
of the
kingdom
of the
Messiah
“good
news”?
We
are
told
in
Isaiah
29:19,
“The
meek
shall
obtain
fresh
joy in
the
LORD,
and
the
poor
among
mankind
shall
exult
in the
Holy
One
of
Israel.”
What
will
be
this
Messiah’s
sense
of
mission?
Isaiah
depicts
the
coming
anointed
one
as

saying:
“The
Spirit
of the
Lord
GOD
is
upon
me,
because
the
LORD
has
anointed
me to
bring
good
news
to the
poor”
(61:1).
This
is a
text
which
Jesus
himself
claimed
to be
fulfilling
in his
life
and
ministry
(Luke
4:18).
All of
this
emphasis
upon
the
coming
of
Christ
as a
ministry
to the
poor
explains
those
opening
words
of our
Lord’s
most
famous
sermon:
“Blessed
are
the
poor
in
spirit,
for

theirs
is the
kingdom
of
heaven”
(Matt.
5:3,
compare
with
Luke
6:20).
It also
further
illuminates
the
reason
Jesus
devoted
the
larger
part
of his
public
ministry
to the
relatively
poorer
region
of
Galilee
rather
than
Judea.

Of
course,
none
of
this
biblical
data
suggests
that
God’s
favor
lies in
an
unqualified
way
upon
men
of
material
neediness.
The
blessings
of the
gospel
come
to
those
who
have
suffered

deprivation
and
oppression
in this
life
and
who
in
their
need
look
to the
Lord
for
help.
It is
those
who
embrace
the
gospel
by
faith
who
will
inherit
the
kingdom
of
heaven.
But
our
Lord's
prioritizing
of
ministry
to the
poor
and
his
relative
pessimism
about
the
prospects
of
gospel
success
with
the
rich
(Matt.
19:23–
24;
Luke
6: 24),
highlight
the
important
place
that
ministry
to the
poor

should have in the New Testament church. And it underscores the significance of that office which has a particular concern for this kind of ministry.

The Opportunity of Your Office

Finally, then, if you are a deacon, you should be keenly aware of the opportunity that comes with your office: the opportunity to adorn the gospel that the church offers to the world. It is only through the ministry of the

gospel
that
any
sinner
can
find
relief
from
the
eternal
consequences
of sin,
and
this
must
remain
the
central
and
primary
work
of the
church.
But
deacons
are in
a
position
to
make
that
message
of
divine
love
more
winsome
and
credible
to the
world
by
leading
the
church
in
deeds
of
mercy.

This,
of
course,
reflects
a
certain
perspective
on
the
question
of
whether
or
not

the
diaconal
ministry
of the
church
should
extend
to the
world.
Should
diaconal
ministry
work
only
in
concert
with
the
ministry
of the
Word
within
the
congregation
(edification),
or
does
it
have
a
place
as
well
complementing
the
ministry
of the
Word
to the
world
(evangelism)?
It is
certainly
true
that
the
primary
focus
of
diaconal
ministry
within
the
biblical
record
is on
the
covenant
community.
A
special
priority
is
given

to
providing
aid to
poor
“brothers,”
or
fellow
Hebrews,
in the
Old
Testament
legislation
(Deut.
15:11–
12).
The
widows
that
Paul
refers
to as
being
eligible
for
ongoing
diaconal
support
are
obviously
members
of the
church
(1
Tim.
5:3–
16),
as
were
the
widows
in
Acts
6.
And
the
special
offering
for
the
poor
that
Paul
takes
among
the
churches
is for
the
“saints
in
Jerusalem”
(Acts
11:
29,

Rom.
15:
26, 2
Cor.
8). All
this is
to be
expected
in the
light
of the
fact
that
diaconal
ministry
is a
vital
component
of the
communion
of the
saints:
it is a
benefit
of the
unique
bond
of
love
that
Christ
has
formed
by his
saving
union
with
his
church.
Serving
one
another
in
love
(Gal.
5:13),
as
well
as
speaking
the
truth
to
one
another
in
love
(Eph.
4:15),
are
both
vital
expressions
of the

unity
of the
Spirit.
Just
as the
priority
of the
ministry
of the
Word
each
Lord's
Day is
for
the
assembled
people
of
God,
so
also
the
priority
of the
diaconal
funds
is for
the
needs
of
that
covenant
community.

The
church
is the
primary
object
of
attention
for
both
elders
and
deacons.

But it
is
precisely
this
parallel
to the
ministry
of the
Word
that
points
to the
propriety,
and
indeed
the
vital
importance,

of a
diaconal
ministry
to the
world.
If the
ministry
of the
Word
is not
intended
by
Christ
to be
exclusively
for
the
benefit
of the
church,
it
would
be
surprising
to
find
the
ministry
of
deed
restricted
by
Scripture
for
the
sole
benefit
of the
church.
Even
in the
Mosaic
law
the
resources
of the
covenant
community
were
to be
shared
with
the
sojourner
and
stranger
(Lev.
19:10;
23:22;
Deut.
24:19–
21;
26:11–
13).

This was because the Israelites themselves knew what it was like to be sojourners, and knew that God had a special concern for sojourners along with the fatherless and widows (Deut. 10:18–19). Likewise, we do not find the apostles limiting the ministry of deed to the church, but rather we find the apostle Paul exhorting the churches in this way: “So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good

to
everyone,
and
especially
to
those
who
are of
the
household
of
faith”
(Gal.
6:10).

This
principle
seems
to
embody
perfectly
both
the
scope
and
priority
of all
the
church’s
ministry:
it is
first
for
the
household
of
faith,
but it
is
also
to
overflow
intentionally
into
the
lives
of all
that
we
meet
as we
go
into
the
world.
Indeed,
is this
not
the
broad
trajectory
of
Jesus’s
own

ministry?

He came with a ministry of Word and deed to the covenant community of Israel, prioritizing a ministry to them (though even then not excluding entirely those outside; see for example Mark 7:24–30). However, by the time of his “Resurrection Proclamation” (also known as the Great Commission, Matt. 28:18–20), we find him calling for this ministry to be carried by his disciples to all the nations. And again,

what
was
the
template
of
ministry
that
he
himself
had
provided
and
that
was
now
to go
to all
the
world?
It was
a
ministry
of
Word
and
deed.
The
ministry
of the
Word
had
the
clear
priority,
but
his
labors
to
meet
material
needs
also
clearly
“adorned”
the
gospel
of the
kingdom
that
he
preached.
This
is
how
deacons
today
can
see
their
own
opportunity
in the
church’s
outward

mission:
to
adorn
the
church's
proclamation
of the
gospel.

Diaconal
ministry
"adorns
the
gospel"
by
providing
the
tangible
evidence
of our
true
motives
in
preaching
the
gospel:
love
for
the
lost. If
verbal
expressions
of
love
apart
from
material
assistance
can
sometimes
sound
hollow
to our
own
brothers
and
sisters
in the
church
(James
2:15–
16),
surely
this is
just
as
possible
—if
not
more
so—
in our
ministry
to the

world.
The
forgiveness
of
sins
and a
new
life in
Christ
is
what
men
fundamentally
need,
and
all
temporal
needs
are
trivial
in
comparison.
Yet a
compassionate
response
to
men's
temporal
needs
can
encourage
an
openness
of
heart
to the
gospel's
provision
for
their
deeper
needs.
Indeed,
this
seems
to be
our
Lord's
perspective
on
ministry
as he
provided
food
for
both
body
and
soul
to the
multitudes,
all
the
while

aware that many would be initially drawn more to one than the other (John 6:26–27). It is for this reason that in the OPC we send to the mission field both missionaries and missionary deacons, theological instructors as well as medical doctors. Indeed, in certain circumstances the ministry of the Word is virtually unintelligible apart from a ministry of deed, which is why the OPC also has a mechanism

for providing disaster response. The work of diaconal ministry alongside gospel ministry keeps the holistic nature of God's love for man in clear view, and the former often opens doors of opportunity for the latter. Men are more inclined to listen to those who are undeniably and tangibly loving them.

So all this is to say that there is a kingdom-building component to the work of the diaconate,

along
with a
covenant-
nurturing
component.
Deacons
have
an
opportunity
to
provide
leadership
to the
church
in her
mercy
ministry
to
those
outside
her
doors,
always
with a
view
to
creating
avenues
of
access
for
the
gospel
itself.
Just
as
elders
should
see
themselves
as
having
an
opportunity
unique
to
their
office
to
lead
the
church
in
evangelism
and
discipleship
of the
lost,
deacons
should
see
themselves
as
having

a
similar
opportunity
in
ministries
of
mercy.
Not
only
can
they
themselves
explore
and
pursue
ministries
in the
community
and
beyond
that
wisely
and
compassionately
address
material
needs
in a
Christian
context,
but
they
can
promote
involvement
in
such
ministries
within
the
congregation.
Ministries
of
service
are,
in
fact,
accessible
to
many
in a
typical
congregation
who
would
be
otherwise
intimidated
by
pure
evangelistic
work.
And it
is

often
in the
context
of
ordinary
servanthood,
and
the
human
connection
that it
provides,
that
ordinary
Christians
find
the
courage
to
give a
clear
testimony
to
Christ
and
the
gospel.
Deed
ministry
opens
doors
for
Word
ministry
in the
heart
of the
giver
as
well
as the
receiver.
Deacons
have
a
unique
opportunity,
therefore,
to
lead
the
congregation
in an
outward
orientation
toward
the
needs
of the
lost.
And
few
things
are

more
needful
for us
as
leaders
in the
Presbyterian
tradition
today.

**You,
a
Deacon!**

So if
you
are a
deacon,
you
have
a
calling
that
is
utterly
essential
to the
church's
mission
to be
a
Christ-
like
community.
Without
your
service
in
support
of the
elders,
the
primary
calling
of the
church
—the
ministry
of the
Word
and
prayer
—is
threatened.
And
without
your
service
alongside
the
elders,
the
ministry
of the

Word,
both
within
and
without
the
church,
is left
unadorned
with
the
compassion
of
Christ.
If you
are a
deacon,
may a
heightened
sense
of the
tremendous
importance
of
your
office
lead
you
to a
fuller
commitment
to the
responsibilities
and
opportunities
that it
entails.
For it
is
specifically
to
deacons
that
the
apostle
Paul
issues
this
promise
of
reward:
“For
those
who
serve
well
as
deacons
gain a
good
standing
for
themselves
and

also
great
confidence
in the
faith
that
is in
Christ
Jesus”
(1
Tim.
3:13).

**Nathan
Trice**

*is the
pastor
of
Matthews
Orthodox
Presbyterian
Church
in
Matthews,
North
Carolina.
Ordained
Servant
Online,
March
2014.*

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