

# **Summit View Church**

## **Deacon Guidelines**

From the beginning, Summit View Church has sought to be a redeemed people who worship and serve God in the world as a gospel-centered community on mission with Jesus. Our aim has been and always will be for the Bible to be our final authority for faith and practice. The Bible is not only our guide, but it is the final authority. What it says, we seek to do. Where it directs, we seek to follow. Because we are a people purchased by Jesus, we want to defer to what He has said in determining how we live out His mission.

A biblical form of church government calls for godly elders to shepherd the flock (1 Peter 5:1-4, Acts 20:28-32). These servant-leaders devote themselves to prayer and to the ministry of the Word (Acts 6:4 ) which John Owen identifies as “their principle work and duty; from which those who understand it aright can spare but little of their time and strength.” Therefore, elders need deacons to help them shoulder the load of shepherding. A biblically faithful church will be moving toward a leadership structure that reflects both of these roles.

### **Foundation**

The word deacon, from the Greek diakonos, means “servant” or “minister.” The term is used 29 times in the New Testament. Of those 29 occurrences, the reader concludes from the context that three or four refer to an official title. Paul opens his letter to the Philippians addressing the saints with the overseers and deacons (Philippians 1:1). In 1 Timothy 3:8 and 12, Paul lists several requirements for deacons, separating them from elders, in that they do not necessarily need to be able to teach. The possible fourth occurrence is found in Romans 16:1 when Paul refers to Phoebe as a diakonos of the church at Cenchreae. Some translators use the more general term “servant,” while others prefer the more official “deacon.” What the Scriptures make clear is that the church’s servant-leaders (the Apostles according to Acts 6:4, and subsequent church leaders according to 1 Timothy 3) need deacons to help with the work and—because qualifications are required—to hold an office.

### **What Do Deacons Do?**

The deacon’s role, as with all Christians, is to serve the Body of Christ. The principle difference is that in their service, deacons specifically assist the elders in carrying out an individual church’s vision and mission. While the elders of the church are given the role of oversight and leadership, deacons are given certain ministry roles under the elder’s direction. These ministry roles can vary widely from church to church, but ultimately they all contribute to freeing up the elders for prayer, shepherding, teaching and vision-setting leadership. In keeping with the Acts 6 pattern, deacons free church elders to faithfully exercise their God-given tasks. In effect, deacons are uniquely dedicated servants in the church because they specifically assist the elders so that the work of the church can expand and grow.

Practically speaking, at Summit View Church deacons will:

- Serve the body by using their leadership skills to serve and organize the church for effectively carrying out Jesus' mission;
- Assist the elders, enabling them to devote time to prayer and the ministry of the Word (Acts 6);
- Carry out the particular vision and mission of our church, following and assisting the elders.
- Work to organize, delegate, and accomplish the varied practical affairs and tasks that are involved in living out the gospel specifically at Summit View.

Considering the size of the campuses at Summit View, the deacons also will strive to equip the body at each campus to meet the needs of the body rather than being themselves at the front line of the ministry. While the deacons at Summit View will serve the body by assisting the elders, all of those that call Summit View their home church will be encouraged and expected to serve the body in accordance with their abilities and gifting as taught in the Scriptures.

### **Purpose**

Elders/overseers keep watch over souls (Hebrews 13:17), manage the church of God (1 Timothy 3:4-5), teach the Word (1 Timothy 3:2), preach the gospel (2 Timothy 4:1-2), rule the body (1 Timothy 5:17), protect from wolves (Acts 20:28-29), pray for healing (James 5:14), contend for the faith (Jude 3), rebuke false doctrine (Titus 1:9), equip the saints (Ephesians 4:12) and set an example to the believers (1 Peter 5:3)—for which they are held to account by God (Hebrews 13:17). While these functions are primarily the responsibility of the elders, the deacons operate in close connection with the elders in a complimentary role. The deacon is not merely a helper but a servant-officer.

A deacon is a man or woman who is a faithful part of the body at Summit View Church and set apart by its elders to assist the elders and pastors in the shepherding, caring and equipping the body of Summit View at a particular campus. As a result, the elders will be free to be dedicated to prayer, oversight and the ministry of the Word.

### **Process and Qualifications**

Candidates will be tested (1 Timothy 3:10) and appointed by the elders to serve at a specific campus. The deacon will serve a specified term in which they perform duties designated by Summit View Church elders and the campus pastor. The deacons will operate under the oversight of the elders and the campus pastor.

As with the office of elder, in 1 Timothy 3, Paul lists the various qualifications for the office of deacon as follows. They must:

- **Be dignified** – deacons should live lives that are worthy of imitation.
- **Not be double-tongued** – deacons should be honest, truthful and careful in speech.

- **Not be addicted to much wine** – deacons should be self-controlled in their lifestyle choices. As with elders, this does not mean that deacons must abstain from alcohol. Rather, it means that they are not to be addicted to it.
- **Not be greedy for dishonest gain** – deacons should serve without the thought of getting reimbursed. They must not be stingy, greedy, out for sordid gain, or preoccupied with amassing material things.
- **Hold the truths of the faith** – deacons must have sound theology. At times and in certain contexts they may teach, but to be a deacon they are not required to have this spiritual gift.
- **Be tested** – deacons should have shown themselves to be faithful to Jesus and His Church.

## **Practice**

Deacons will assist elders contextually according to the specific physical and spiritual needs at their designated campus. Deacon responsibilities include but are not limited to:

- Assisting the elders and pastors in shepherding people through biblical counseling.
- Helping the elders and pastors lead and organize specific ministry initiatives.
- Helping strengthen ongoing ministries.
- Being available at the stage or near the back at the end of Sunday services to pray with people.

## **Practical Matters**

We expect those who would serve as Deacons at Summit View Church to:

- **Meet the qualifications listed above.** Deacons must meet the biblical qualifications in order to serve at Summit View Church.
- **Attend faithfully and have good standing with Summit View.** They are giving, participating, serving and seeking to live as a missionary where they live.
- **Be available to serve at this time.** Each deacon will commit to a two-year term at which time they may become inactive for a season. Deacons must have space in their lives for something more. It may be that someone is qualified and faithful, but not available. This would include various meetings and other responsibilities.
- **Be faithful tithers to the life and ministry of Summit View.**

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What is the difference between a deacon and an elder at Summit View?**

Deacons are distinguished from the elders in that they are not the governing body of Summit View Church nor are they charged with the duty of authoritative teaching or setting direction. The deacons' ministry is campus-specific and is under the oversight and authority of the elders. Additionally, there is one unified body of elders, all of which are male.

### **If a woman can be a deacon can she be an elder? No.**

As you look into I Timothy and Titus it is essential that we understand a few things:

- **Grammar**
  - o **“Their wives...”** - In 1 Timothy 3:11, the verse literally reads “Women [γυναῖκας], likewise must be dignified.” Also, there is no possessive pronoun (their) referring to these women. Additionally, there is a specific Greek word for wives, but this word is not used. The females mentioned are simply “women”. Though not its principal meaning, at times this word γυναῖκας can also mean or imply “wives”. However, there really is no justification for it in this context, which may be why scholars felt they had to insert the word “their” to achieve that meaning.
  - o **The absence of requirements for elder’s wives** - We are also persuaded that this cannot logically refer to deacon’s wives because there is no parallel mention of requirements for elder’s wives. It would seem that if there were requirements for the wives of those deacons actually serving the elders, then there would also be requirements for the wives of those who would lead the deacons- the elders themselves. We realize that this is an argument from silence, but it is a strong one.
  - o **“Likewise...”** – In v. 8, this word is used to begin the section on deacons following the passage about elders. Paul is setting aside a group called to a particular role. The same construction is used in v. 11 to refer to the women mentioned in the verse. At the very least, Paul is setting up some role for women in the church regardless of whether or not it is specifically for female deacons.
- **Authority** – 1 Timothy 2:8-15 are quite clear that women are not to exercise final authority over men in the church. So then, how can women serve as deacons? Our understanding of this passage is that the particular authority to which this passage alludes lies specifically with the church elders as they submit to Jesus. The deacons serve under this elder authority, but they do not themselves possess that same authority referenced in 1 Timothy 2:8-15. As such there is no conflict between 1 Timothy 2:8-15 and 1 Timothy 3:8-12. Female deacons (and

male deacons for that matter) simply do not possess elder authority. Deacons serve and execute their assigned roles (including delegated leadership) under elder authority.

To be very clear, we would affirm that biblically qualified women can serve Jesus in many ways at Summit View. Some of those would include serving as deacon, praying or reading Scripture during a worship gathering, sharing testimony, teaching other women in gender-specific studies, teaching mixed gender studies in a way that does not usurp the headship of their husbands or be in conflict with 1 Timothy 2, providing counsel to women (Titus 2) and serving in other ways that are not in conflict with 1 Timothy 2.

At Summit View we always seek to structure leadership in a way that reflects what the Bible teaches. Since our desire is to be a biblically faithful church, we want to submit to the Bible more and more fully as we grow in Christ's likeness. To that end, it is the conviction of your elders that qualified women can serve Jesus as deacons but not as elders at Summit View Church.

**Are there any aspects of shepherding, care or equipping that the deacons will not carry out at their designated campus and will leave to the elders?**

Yes. The deacons will not carry out the authoritative teaching or the final step of formal church discipline. The deacons will not set the direction of the shepherding, care and equipping at each campus. Although their input is invaluable and necessary, it will ultimately fall on the elders to decide the direction for shepherding, care and equipping at each campus.

**Is the office of deacon considered a stepping stone to the office of elder?**

No, there are distinct qualifications for deacons that do not include the "ability to teach" or being a male. Although a male deacon may eventually be appointed to the elder body, the office of deacon should not be considered a stepping stone to the office of elder.

**Do the deacons focus only on ministry within the church?**

We are inclined to believe that the office of deacon is focused on serving within the church. In Acts 6, the office was created to solve a problem that arose within the church.

**Will women deacons be called deaconesses?**

No. Although we see no problem using the term "deaconess," all men and women appointed to this office at Summit View Church will be called "deacons." If the need arises to clarify that a deacon is a woman we will use the phrase "female deacon."

## **Do divorce and remarriage disqualify a person from the office of deacon?**

Since the qualifications for elders and deacons regarding marriage are identical, Summit View practices the same policy for each office. In short, we do not believe that divorce and remarriage automatically disqualifies an individual from serving in either office. The qualification given for both elders and deacons regarding their marriages is that the candidate is “the husband of one wife” (1 Timothy 3:2, 12, Titus 1:6). Directly rendered, the Greek phrase reads “a one-woman man.” The text is teaching that if one is married, the elder or deacon must be absolutely committed to their spouse. These texts speak to the subject of fidelity in marriage, not marital status. This phrase addresses the issues of polygamy or fidelity in marriage, not divorce. This does not mean divorce is minor or of no consequence when considering someone for the office of elder or deacon. Because marriage was designed to portray God’s goodness and fidelity, marital discord, division and divorce obscure and corrupts the image of God painted within the world. When appointing an elder or deacon, a past divorce in that person’s life should always be taken into account and investigated thoroughly. A divorce in one’s past could leave one reproachable in some way and thus be disqualified for the office of elder or deacon; however, this is not always the case. If a person who is being considered for the office of elder or deacon has been divorced, the elders will investigate the candidate’s past divorce and determine whether the person is qualified to serve in the office for which they are being considered.