

Clearwater Bay International Baptist Church

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Series: Basics of the Church

Sermon title: Church Roles

Scripture reading: Acts 6:1-7

Churches have all kinds of leadership structures today. There are church staff, Senior Pastors, Lead pastor, executive pastors, bishops, Popes, cardinals, Elders, Apostles, Presbytery, Synod, Lead strategists and even some churches have a leadership committee.

All churches have some kind of leadership and leadership structure.

But where do we turn to find out how to organized our church and how do we determine what leadership roles we have in place?

We turn to the Bible.

Let's pray.

There are 2 types of leadership roles established by the Apostles in the churches in the New Testament, Overseers/Elders/Pastors.... and Deacons.

Today we will look at Deacons.
Next week we will look at Elders.

Surely many of us have all kinds of ideas and images of Deacons.

When I grew up in a church of over a thousand people and remember our Deacons.

They all wore suits and marched in on Sunday mornings to sit on the front row.

They were all business leaders in the community.

One of those Deacons disciplined me.

What are Deacons?

What are they to do?

Where does the ministry of Deacons come from?

The Problem- A Complaint.

1 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.

So, in this passage the church is growing and experiencing growing pains.

The issue that arises is due to an ethnolinguistic divide.

There are Jews who have come to faith from both Greek-speakers and Hebrew-speakers.

These 'Hellenists' are Jews who have not grown up in Israel but in other cities around the Mediterranean. For example, Paul was a Jew from Cilicia, in modern day Turkey. Barnabas was from Cyprus.

Well, some of these Jews didn't speak Hebrew and culturally lived a little more like the Greeks.

Might be a little like overseas Chinese who are ethnically Chinese but don't speak the local language well or adhere closely to many Chinese traditions. Make sense?

But people have come to faith from both groups.

What happens is that the people who are in charge of making sure that widows get taken care of, (whether it's food or money or both) are only taking care of their own. It seems that those who are in charge of this ministry are Hebrew speakers themselves and are only taking care of the Hebrew speakers.

The Greek-speaking Jewish widows are being overlooked.

It is causing disunity in the body of Christ.

There's a complaint from one group against another. This isn't good and can get out of hand, so it needs to be fixed.

The Solution- Some men to serve.

Word comes to the Apostles and they say, *'Choose 7 men to serve to make sure that this doesn't happen anymore and we will give them our blessing.'*

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.

The complaint seems to come to the Apostles as if they need to solve it.

They solve it, but not by doing it themselves.

They actually say, 'It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to *deacon* tables.'
But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the *deaconing* of the word."

This is the beginning or root in the Scriptures of the two offices of the church; a prototype of sorts;
A division between 'serving the church in preaching & teaching the word and prayer' and a 'serving the church in practical hands-on ways'.
Both are needed.

Here we have the Apostles (the 12) and these (7) men. Later in the local churches that they plant, the offices will become Elders and Deacons.... as the Apostles die.

For example, **Philippians 1:1**, Paul and Timothy, servants [slaves] of Christ Jesus. To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons.

We also see the qualifications for these 2 offices, Elders and Deacons laid out side by side in **1 Timothy 3:1-7 & 3:8-13**.

Titus 1:5-9 & **1 Peter 5:1-4** also give qualifications and instructions for Elders.

The qualifications for Elders and Deacons are similar except for Elders must be able to teach the word.

And most of the qualifications for both are commanded to all believers in scripture.

So, there's a need for people to serve in practical ways. The Apostles can't do it because they have another way to serve.

So the people choose 7 of their own to this Deacon like role and everyone says that's a great idea.

3 ways the ministry of Deacons benefits the church.

I. Serving in Practical ways.

The word, 'deacon' means to serve in Greek. It is used for many different types of serving but originally was used as waiting tables or running errands.

Deacon or Deaconing is used in many ways in the Bible.

Rulers are called deacons/servants. [Romans 13:4](#)

Caring for physical needs. [Matthew 25:44](#), [Acts 11:29](#), [12:25](#), [Romans 15:25](#)

Women 'Deacon'/ serve in the gospels. [Matthew 8:15](#), [Matthew 27:55](#)

In [Romans 16:1](#) sister Phoebe is called a Deacon.

Angels do deaconing [Hebrews 1:14](#)

Jesus is called a deacon. [Romans 15:8](#)

Paul and his workers are deaconing.

Old Testament prophets deacon/serve the church.

And even Satan has his 'deacons'. [2 Corinthians 11:15](#)

These 7 in [Acts 6](#) are not called Deacons but what they do is called Deaconing or serving.

So, though they are not called Deacons in the formal sense, they are the beginnings of an official role in the church called, 'Deacon'.

These Deacons are serving the church by making sure all of the widows are not overlooked.

It's very practical.

They aren't necessarily '*doing*' all the work but they are charged with making sure it's done.

There are a thousand different ways someone can serve as a deacon. I'll give you some ways later.

This then is the fundamental purpose of deacons; serving in a practical way in the body.

But there is a second purpose that deacons have in the body:

II. Serving to Unify.

These 7 men are not just serving to make sure widows are fed and taken care of. There's something deeper going on here.

Ethnic disunity is happening and they are to solve the problem by serving.

All 7 are Greek names and they are chosen from amongst the Greek speakers to ensure the Hellenists are taken care of.

Seems they will work along side of those who are already serving in this way....but were only caring for their own/ Hebrews.

So, deacons are to serve in practical ways in the body and they are to act as unifiers in the body, by making sure that everyone is cared for.

They are strengthening the church by their serving. They are building it up with their gifts.

So, these 7 build up the church by (1) Serving in a practical way. (2) Serving in a way that unifies the church and....

III. Serving to Support the ministry of the word.

The Apostles make it very clear that they have a ministry, they have a 'deaconing'...a serving to do..and it is to '*deacon* the word'.

They are not able to teach, preach and pray if they are making sure the widows have the food they need.

The 7 deacons if you will, come along side of them and take up this ministry so that.....the ministry of the word is not hindered and it would be hindered if the Apostles had to serve in the other way.

But since the 7 serve in this practical way, the Apostles are freed up to serve in the ministry of the word.

What was the effect of this division of duties?

Notice that at the beginning and end of this passage that the church increases.

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.

How?

By the word of God going out as people being cared for within.

Application

God has designed the church in such a way that every believer has a spiritual gift and every believer has a way they can 'serve'.

Some, who meet the qualifications of **1 Timothy 3**, serve as Deacons and Deaconesses.

They serve in practical ways, serve in unifying and strengthening the body and serve in supporting the ministry of the word.

You might say, deacons lead and mobilize the congregation in serving..... so that the Pastors/Elders can serve the church in the teaching & preaching the word of God and devote themselves to prayer...and equipping the saints for the work of ministry.

We need more people to serve CBIBC in practical ways and we need to expand the number of biblical deacons and deaconesses....even as we seek to have Elders.

Let me give you some ministry areas right now that we need people to serve.

Some are already doing these but they need help and some of these areas need a Deacon or Deaconess to head these things up.

Welcome ministry
Children's Ministry
Youth Ministry

Putonghua Outreach

Music and Media Team

Sound board & recording

Computer & slides

Editing and uploading the sermons

Missions

Evangelism

Sunday Set Up

Ordinances/ Lord Supper/ Baptism

Offering counters

Benevolence/Mercy ministry

Member Care

Website helpers

Fellowship meals

Special Events/retreat/day away

Bulletin

And a lot of other areas where you might be gifted to help or lead.

Did you notice that 5 of the 7 men in [Acts 6:1-7](#) are unknown? We know nothing about them.

Yet, here they are, chosen and serving.

No one may never know what you do, but it matters if it is serving the church practically, serving the church by unifying the church and serving the church by supporting the ministry of the word.

Everyone should serve/deacon somewhere!
Where should you be serving Christ's church?