The History and Biblical Foundation of the Diaconate in Lutheran Church–Canada

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Introduction

  In 1999 Lutheran Church–Canada (LCC) established something that we call the "office of deacon." There was a lot of study and thought that went into its establishment and no doubt it was a topic that both pastors and lay-people in our districts had at least heard of during the 1993–1999 convention cycles. Though the topic of the diaconate has been present in some way in each convention since then, what we have not done is continued to educate and inform ourselves of what the deacons of our church are doing nor remind new pastors, delegates and lay-people of the history and care with which this office was established. My goal for today is that each of you would go away from this presentation with an appreciation for where this position came from and understand its biblical soundness and importance for our church and its future.

Part 1: Lutheran Church Canada's History

  Lutheran Church–Canada's diaconate did not come about by a simple process nor by a short one. It was one hundred twenty-five years after the first Lutheran Teachers[1] and fifty years after the first congregational workers[2] began serving in Canada that the official diaconate was formed. This history shows that long before a convention created the LCC diaconate, it existed in an unofficial way. In order to fully understand the LCC diaconate, this history must be known.

  Along with this history, it is also necessary to understand the actual administrative process which made the LCC diaconate official. An important part of this administrative process was the study of scripture, church history and the Lutheran Confessions.

Early Beginnings of Lutheran Teachers and Congregational Workers

  The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), which would eventually become LCC in our country, first appeared in Canada in 1854[3] in Fisherville and Delhi, Ontario.[4] From these two initial contacts, more congregations were formed throughout Ontario. In 1879 a Canada District of the Missouri Synod was formed which had fourteen pastors serving in Ontario.[5] As the west opened, the Missouri Synod also spread to that part of the country, and by 1914 the Missouri Synod was the second largest Lutheran church body in western Canada.[6]

  While the earliest church professionals in Canada were pastors, the Missouri Synod's strong emphasis on parochial schools meant that Lutheran Teachers were not long in joining them. The first Lutheran Teachers arrived in Canada in 1874.[7] Although most early teachers were men, women also had a role to play which grew as time went on. In the early days, women sometimes assisted the pastor (who often doubled as the school teacher) with classroom duties or acted as a substitute teacher.[8] By the 1950s and 1960s, female teachers were quite common in Canada.

  Prior to about 1950, it appears that the only professional church workers in the Missouri Synod within Canada were pastors and teachers. In the 1950s, this began to change. With the

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[1] Note that the term "Lutheran Teacher" is meant to denote those individuals who have been trained and certified by the LCMS (or LCC) to serve in their Lutheran schools.

[2] This term refers to those who serve congregations, rather than schools, but who are also not members of the clergy.

[3] Although Lutherans had a presence in Canada prior to this, it is in 1854 that the first Missouri Synod missionary arrived in Canada. Threinen, *Mosaic*, 46.

[4] Threinen, *Mustard Seed*, 7.

[5] Threinen, *Mosaic*, 65.

[6] Threinen, *Mosaic*, 94.

[7] Ontario District LCMS, *Grace and Blessing*, 52. Threinen, *Mustard Seed*, 18.

[8] Cf. Threinen, *Leaven*, 31–32 and Ontario District LCMS, *Grace and Blessing*, 54, 63.

baby boom came a growing population of children and youth who needed to be taught the Gospel and mentored in their faith. Churches responded by hiring both male and female congregational workers of various kinds to assist them and their pastors in this task.[9] These workers included Deaconesses, Parish Workers, Lay Workers, Youth Staffers, Lay Practitioners[10] and eventually the first Director of Christian Education (DCE) in 1973.[11] In the 1980s even more "kinds" of congregational workers arrived in Canada. These included the Parish Assistant and the Director of Christian Outreach (DCO). With the exception of Lay Practitioners, each of these titles represents a certification available through either the LCMS, one of its post-secondary schools, or a post-secondary school of another Lutheran church body. Although the Synod may have kept records of those who had completed these various training programs, none of these congregational workers were rostered[12] or members of Synod[13] prior to 1983.[14] The fact that, across Canada, churches were using men and women of various training in addition to their pastors to carry on the work of the congregations speaks to the need for these kinds of workers within the church body.

The Church Identifies a Growing Need

To this point, all those who received official training to become either Lutheran Teachers or one of the various designations of congregational workers had to obtain their training in the United States. At its 1980 convention, the Alberta British Columbia (ABC) District of the Missouri Synod passed a resolution entitled "To develop training programs for creative roles of ministry" which identified the need for both Lutheran Teachers and congregational workers within the Canadian church and also expressed the need for training in these positions to be available in Canada.[15] This resolution shows that there was both a desire to provide the church with more congregational workers and a desire to make training accessible in a Canadian context.

The vehicle through which Canadian training programs could be provided was Concordia University College of Alberta (Concordia) in Edmonton.[16] At the individual conventions of the ABC and ManSask Districts in 1982, Concordia made the following statement in its report:

> During the next two years it is hoped that Concordia will begin to offer additional church-work programs, possibly including areas such as parish assistant, director of Christian education, and Christian elementary education. A major emphasis of all such programs, including the current pre-ministerial program will be

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[9] Griffin makes the connection between the baby boom and the increasing popularity of the DCE in the American LCMS churches. Griffin, "Profession," 135.

[10] This term is used to refer to lay people, without formal theological training, who functioned as congregational workers.

[11] Threinen, *Leaven*, 163.

[12] To be "rostered" is to be added to the official list of trained and certified workers maintained by the Synod. Initially this roster only included pastors and teachers. In 1983, the LCMS added those DCEs who were not teacher-certified to the roster as well. Griffin, "Profession," 142.

[13] Members of Synod are those who have signed the constitution of the Synod to which they wish to belong (either LCMS or later, LCC) and by doing so declare themselves to be in agreement with this document and related bylaws and willing to adhere to them. Initially, congregations, pastors and teachers were the only members of Synod.

[14] The one exception was any DCE who was also certified as a Lutheran Teacher, since the Lutheran Teacher was a rostered position. Initially, in order to train as a DCE, students also had to train as teachers.

[15] Resolution R-80-03-02 in LCMS, *ABC 38th Convention Proceedings*, 8–9.

[16] This was known as Concordia College until 1995. Schwabe, "Seventy-Five," 8.

> preparing young men and women for service on a full-time or part-time basis for our church's congregations here in Canada.[17]

That the convention delegates were also in favour of this is evident from a resolution entitled, "To Encourage the Training of Church Workers for a Variety of Ministries at Concordia College, Edmonton" which was adopted by the ManSask District Convention in the same year.[18] That there was a need for the training of congregational workers in the first place is evident not only from these reports and resolutions[19] but also from the increasing number of congregations which employed people to serve them in these capacities with or without any kind of certification.

In the years immediately following the 1982 conventions, Concordia worked to develop both a congregational worker and a Lutheran Teacher certification program, but neither was immediately implemented.[20] It was not until 1989 that the Board for Professional Education Services of the newly formed LCC approved a certification program for Lutheran Teachers at Concordia.[21]

In the same year (1989), Concordia hired Jeannette Lietzau to be its first Director of Church Work Programs.[22] After much work, Concordia began offering its Director of Parish Services (DPS) program in the 1993–1994 academic year. This program was similar in scope to that of DCE training programs in the United States. It is important to note that although this program was endorsed by the church, its graduates would not be rostered and were not eligible to become members of Synod until after the formation of the diaconate in 1999.

Official Beginnings of a Canadian Diaconate

As the first DPS interns and candidates were being placed, LCC was making significant changes in its understanding of congregational workers. In late 1993, then LCC President Edwin Lehman appointed a task force to study diaconal ministry. This task force was to be responsible to the president of Synod who would bring its findings to both the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) and the Council of Presidents. The report and recommendations of this task force were to be finalized by September 1, 1995, presumably so that the findings would be ready to present at the LCC Convention in the spring of 1996.[23]

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[17] LCMS, *ABC 39th Convention Workbook*, 64. The Report to the ManSask District was identical. LCMS, *ManSask 38th Convention Workbook*, 93–96.

[18] Resolution 82-09-03 in LCMS, *ManSask 38th Convention Proceedings*, 55–56. The ABC District had a nearly identical resolution ready to present but it was not brought to the floor. Resolution 82-04-04 in LCMS, *ABC 39th Convention Proceedings*, R-27.

[19] Especially interesting is the following in the 1982 convention report of the Department of Youth Ministry of the ABC District: "Several congregations employ full-time staff in youth ministry or Christian education." LCMS, *ABC 39th Convention Workbook*, 54.

[20] In 1982 Concordia struck a committee "to study the needs of the church for professional workers and to propose a program which Concordia College, Edmonton, could offer in response to the church." Bauer et al., "Proposal," 1. While it gave a report recommending the implementation of a "Coordinator of Parish Ministries" program, it was not implemented at that time due to budgetary constraints. Orville Walz, letter to Rudy Block, 10 June 1985 (private collection).

[21] Walz, "Teacher Education," 4.

[22] LCC, *2nd Convention Workbook*, F.66.

[23] Lehman, "Mandate," G.61.

The task force was made up of six people: one district president, one parish pastor, one "other" church worker, one "CTCR/seminary representative,"[24] and two lay people.[25] The group had five mandates which it was to fulfil on behalf of the church:

- To study the desirability of establishing a diaconate within Lutheran Church—Canada, in the light of the Synod's present and future needs.
- *To determine the scriptural/confessional implications of a diaconate,*[26] with special attention to the relationship of the diaconate both to the ordained public ministry and to the laity of the church.
- *To define the office of diaconate in a manner consistent with Scripture* and the confessions, as well as the historical and ecumenical understanding of the office.
- To determine the feasibility of establishing such an office, and to set forth the steps that would need to be taken to do so.
- If deemed feasible, to determine, in preliminary form only:
  - The criteria and qualifications for the diaconate
  - The status of the diaconate within the structure of LCC (roster/how ordered, etc.)
  - Requirements and standards for admission to the diaconate.[27]

In the process of fulfilling its mandates, this group was also to consult with personnel of the LCMS, representatives of other Lutheran church bodies, and representatives from Concordia.[28]

At its first meeting in February of 1994, the group determined, based on its mandates, three areas which it would need to study. These were: "An historical review of the diaconate; the scriptural/confessional implications of a diaconate (Lutheran dogmatics), with an emphasis on the role of the diaconate relative to both clergy and laity; and how this relates to Lutheran Church—Canada in terms of ecclesiastical administration."[29] In keeping with these goals, two study papers were prepared by individual members of the task force and discussed, revised and adopted by the task force as a whole. They are entitled: "Scriptural, Dogmatic, and Historical Perspectives on the [Re]Establishment of the Diaconate in Lutheran Church—Canada" and "A Proposal for the Ecclesiastical Administration of a Diaconal Ministry in Lutheran Church—Canada."[30] Based on the findings of these two documents, the task force concluded that LCC should officially establish a diaconate and give its members rostered status. By being rostered, these people would come under the administration of the Synod.[31] It was further recommended that the matter of voting rights at conventions be examined in more detail with the hope that deacons could also be granted the right to vote.[32] The task force also recommended that those

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[24] Lehman, "Mandate," G.61. From this wording, it is unclear whether the representative was to be from either of these two entities or an individual who could represent both. In the end, the person chosen to fill this role was a member of both groups. Winger et al., "Report," G.58.

[25] Lehman, "Mandate," G.61.

[26] The meaning of "scriptural/confessional" will be explained below.

[27] Lehman, "Mandate," G.61. Emphasis mine.

[28] Lehman, "Mandate," G.61.

[29] Winger et al., "Report," G.58.

[30] Winger et al., "Report," G.59. These two documents outline how LCC ultimately would understand the diaconate and will be discussed in the next section. Note that "[Re]Establishment" is the way the title appears in the report. Hereafter these two documents will be referred to as "Scriptural, Dogmatic and Historical Perspectives" and "Ecclesiastical Administration" respectively.

[31] This rostering also carried with it the implication that deacons held an office of leadership with a certain amount of authority. It also carried an implied distinction from the laity, although deacons were not considered to be part of the clergy.

[32] Winger et al., "Report," G.59.

already serving as "non-ordained professional church workers"[33] should be added to the diaconate based on years of experience and previous training. The task of delineating specific educational requirements for new members to the diaconate was delegated to "appropriate synodical entities."[34]

The 1996 LCC convention delegates commended the report and recommendations for "further study and response."[35] Over the three years which followed, the circuits of LCC examined the documents and recommendations of the task force in preparation to take further action at the 1999 convention. Based on this discussion, LCC's Board of Directors submitted an overture to the 1999 convention which resulted in a convention resolution to establish a diaconate in LCC.[36] Delegates passed the resolution and LCC's diaconate was born. This new office would include all professional church workers, with the exception of pastors, who had been officially trained for their tasks such as Lutheran Teachers, DCEs, DPSs, Parish Assistants, and DCOs, among others. Notably, it did not include Lay Practitioners, as these individuals had not received any official training. At the same convention, delegates defeated a separate resolution which would have given deacons rostered status.[37] Deacons were both rostered and made members of Synod at the 2002 convention;[38] however, the role of deacon still does not bring voting privileges. Interestingly, the issue of diaconal voting has been raised at every synodical convention since, including Resolution 14.3.14 at this convention.

Admission to the Diaconate

In order to serve as a deacon in LCC, individuals must undergo proper training. Although the task force did not outline the specifics of that training, they offered several suggestions which have been implemented by the church.[39] For those who train in Canada for the office of deacon, the normal course of study includes a Bachelor of Arts degree in Religious Studies from Concordia. In addition to the Religion Major, there are certain courses in certification which must be taken, but the required courses and the length of degree vary depending on whether the student intends to become a Lutheran Teacher or a DPS.[40] Director of Parish Services students are also expected to complete a year-long internship once their degree is concluded.[41] Colloquy programs are available in both professions for those who have previously completed degrees. These programs include a core of theological and certification courses as well as oral examinations and, for DPS students, a possible internship placement.[42] Education, however, is not the only requirement for certification, and completion of the necessary education does not always mean that individuals are received as deacons. Candidates must also be deemed suitable

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[33] This is the task force's phrase to describe the various congregational workers who had official certifications and training. It notably excluded Lay Practitioners.

[34] Winger et al., "Report," G.59.

[35] Resolution 96.2.03A in LCC, *4th Convention Proceedings*, 57–58.

[36] Resolution 99.2.01 in LCC, *5th Convention Proceedings*, 46–47.

[37] Resolution 99.3.06 in LCC, *5th Convention Proceedings*, 52.

[38] Resolution 02.3.02 in LCC, *6th Convention Proceedings*, 54.

[39] Winger et al., "Ecclesiastical Administration," G.80.

[40] Those students wishing to become Lutheran Teachers are required to earn a three-year Bachelor of Arts, plus the usual education after-degree while those studying to be DPSs are required to earn a four-year Bachelor of Arts with an applied emphasis. See: CUCA, *Calendar*, 77–78.

[41] CUCA, *Calendar*, 77.

[42] CUCA, *Calendar*, 77–78.

for the office and be recommended to it by either the educational institution from which they have graduated or by the Diaconal Colloquy Committee which evaluated them.[43]

Upon the successful completion of the program of their choice, and receiving a recommendation to the office, candidates for the office of deacon are assigned a congregation or school in which to begin their service. This placement is made by the Council of Presidents, acting as the Board of Assignments, in consultation with the placement officer of the student's educational institution.[44] Once a student accepts this position and makes the necessary applications, he or she will be consecrated and added to the deacon's roster.[45] New deacons are normally officially received into membership through the signing of the synodical constitution the next time either their district or the Synod meets for convention.[46]

Understanding the Relationship between Office of Pastor and Office of Deacon

The Task Force for the Study of Diaconal Ministry also outlined the way in which the offices of pastor and deacon should be understood in relation to one another. This was primarily done through the study of scripture and while I will briefly summarize their findings in this section, I will delve into the topic more deeply in the next section.

The offices of pastor and deacon are by no means synonymous offices. LCC holds that the office of pastor was instituted by Jesus when he called the twelve apostles. It is suggested that the office of overseer-elder[47] was an extension of the office of apostle. This connection is made because Peter (1 Pet 5:1) and the apostle John (2 John 1; 3 John 1) are explicitly linked with both offices and Paul implies that he also held both (a combination of 1 Tim 1:18 and 4:14).[48] On the same topic Walther states, "the divine institution of the holy ministry is evident from the fact that the holy apostles place themselves on an equal footing with the servants of the church who were called mediately as their co-laborers in the ministry."[49] This interpretation is also supported by information in *The Book of Concord*.[50]

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[43] LCC Bylaws Section V A 5.25 a.2 in LCC, *2008 Handbook*, 48.

[44] LCC Bylaws Section V A 5.11 in LCC, *2008 Handbook*, 47.

[45] LCC Bylaws Section V B 5.25 in LCC, *2008 Handbook*, 48.

[46] LCC Bylaws Section I B 1.11 and 1.13 in LCC, *2008 Handbook*, 16.

[47] The study document often uses the term "presbyter-bishop" to denote the same position. The terms ἐπίσκοπος, πρεσβύτερος and διάκονος are ecclesiastically "loaded" terms. Given that I have studied διάκονος in detail, I am convinced that using a translation of "deacon" in certain places is appropriate in this study. Where I do not think it is the best translation, I have chosen another term. I consciously choose not to use a translation of "bishop" for ἐπίσκοπος in this study because the word "bishop" may bring things to mind which this study does not intend. The English word "bishop" often means a kind of overarching supervisory position encompassing multiple locations and it seems clear that in the context of the passages studied here that ἐπίσκοπος, like διάκονος, is referring to a local leader. In order to avoid confusion with later ecclesiological meanings, the word ἐπίσκοπος in this study will always be translated "overseer." Likewise, the term "presbyter" for the Greek πρεσβύτερος may bring to mind a later ecclesiastical office which is not necessarily intended here. Therefore, the Greek word "πρεσβύτερος" will always be translated "elder."

[48] Winger et al., "Scriptural, Dogmatic, and Historical Perspectives," G.66.

[49] Walther, *Church and Ministry*, 178. In addition to the texts concerning Peter and John, Walther cites Col 4:7, Phil 2:25 and the combined testimony of 1 Cor 1:1 and 4:1. Walther's *Theses on the Holy Ministry* were accepted by the Missouri Synod in 1851 and are considered to be a correct interpretation of both Holy Scripture and the Confessions although they are not in themselves normative. CTCR of LCMS, *Ministry*, 45. That they were also accepted by LCC is confirmed by resolutions passed at LCC conventions in both 1990 and 1999. See: Resolution 90:1.02 in LCC, *2nd Convention Proceedings*, 37–38; Resolution 99.1.03A in LCC, *5th Convention Proceedings*, 42; and Overture 1.03 in LCC, *5th Convention Workbook*, F2.

[50] "Scriptural, Dogmatic, and Historical Perspectives" cites several references to *The Book of Concord*. The most significant one concerning the office of pastor being related to the call of the apostles is found in *The Treatise on the*

The office of deacon, in contrast, is not viewed as being directly instituted by Jesus while he was on earth, but rather something that he did through the church, by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, after his ascension into heaven.[51] The document "Scriptural, Dogmatic, and Historical Perspectives" cites Acts 6:1–7, Phil 1:1 and 1 Tim 3:8–13 as support for the office of deacon being established by the New Testament church. Although the document discusses and acknowledges that opinions are divided as to whether the Seven in Acts 6 represent the first deacons, it notes, "The call of the Seven in all likelihood supplied if not the actual source, at any rate the model for the creation of the diaconate."[52] The document then points to the evidence presented in Philippians and 1 Timothy as suggesting that the offices of overseer-elder and deacon were closely related, with the office of deacon being linked to overseer-elder in some kind of subordinate way.[53] For this reason, LCC accepts that the office of deacon flows out of the office of pastor.[54] This in no way demeans the importance of this secondary office. Walther states,

> Every other public office in the church [such as the deacon] is part of the ministry of the Word or an auxiliary office that supports the ministry…Therefore, the offices of Christian day school teachers, almoners, sextons, precentors at pubic worship, and others are all to be regarded as ecclesiastical and sacred, for they take over a part of the one ministry of the Word and support the pastoral office.[55]

Those who suggest that the office of deacon is not important or is somehow less worthy than that of the office of pastor do not properly understand LCC's position on this.

Although the office of deacon is a dignified office, it is still under the supervision of the office of pastor. The document *The Ministry: Offices, Procedures and Nomenclature*, written by the CTCR of the LCMS notes the following, "Functions of the office of the public ministry [pastor] that are performed by others remain the responsibility of the office of public ministry and must be supervised by it."[56] It is for this reason that the Task Force for the Study of Diaconal Ministry noted that deacons serving in a local parish fall under the spiritual oversight of the local called pastor. In effect, these deacons are doing some of the work for which that pastor is normally responsible (whether or not he has the necessary gifts to carry it out) and thus he supervises them accordingly.[57]

As the document moves from the evidence of the New Testament to that of church history, it makes two additional points which are worth noting. First, although no specific "office

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Power and Primacy of the Pope, section 10. It states, "...the office of the ministry [pastor] proceeds from the general call of the apostles..." McCain et al., eds., *Lutheran Confessions*, 295. Cf. Winger et al., "Scriptural, Dogmatic, and Historical Perspectives," G.67; Tappert, ed. *Book of Concord*, 321; Kolb and Wengert, eds., *Book of Concord*, 331.

[51] Winger et al., "Scriptural, Dogmatic, and Historical Perspectives," G.72.

[52] Winger et al., "Scriptural, Dogmatic, and Historical Perspectives," G.72.

[53] Winger et al., "Scriptural, Dogmatic, and Historical Perspectives," G.72.

[54] Walther, *Church and Ministry*, 177, 289–90. It is important to note that this was not a perspective developed while LCC was studying the office of deacon in the 1990s. The idea that auxiliary offices flow from the office of pastor and are subordinate to it has long been held in the LCMS and LCC. Since the diaconate was comprised of these "auxiliary roles," it fit into their previous model nicely.

[55] Walther, *Church and Ministry*, 289–90. An almoner is one who is in charge of dispensing money or food given for the aid of the poor. Sextons are those who assisted in a congregation by performing such duties as ringing the bells, digging graves and cleaning altar linens. Precentors are responsible for choral music within the congregation. See related entries in: Cross and Livingstone, eds., *Christian Church*, 44, 1492, 318 respectively.

[56] CTCR of LCMS, *Ministry*, 41.

[57] Winger et al., "Ecclesiastical Administration," G.80. This also includes those deacons who serve as Lutheran Teachers at a Lutheran school since these schools are normally run by individual congregations which are served by pastors.

of deacon" was in existence in LCC at the time of the study, there was already "a *de facto* diaconate…alive and at work"[58] within the church. It also stated,

> In acting to revive the official diaconate, the pastors and people of Lutheran Church—Canada would signify their esteem for those now working in auxiliary offices; they would make provision for the trans-parochial pastoral care and supervision of these workers; and they would make it possible for these men and women to participate in the decision-making and governance of the Synod.[59]

These statements point out that the diaconate was essentially already in place within the church and that by making this office official, both the church and those who were serving it would benefit.

The second point which the document is careful to make is that the office of deacon is one which is open to women. Both when the document was written and currently, LCC holds that the office of pastor is one which should only be filled by men; however, women are able to be part of auxiliary offices in various ways and have been in these roles from very early in LCC's history. In order to maintain its stance that scripture is the highest authority, LCC needed to show that the New Testament allows for the possibility of female deacons and that their presence in an LCC diaconate would not be only a matter of tradition. Two pieces of evidence are important in this discussion. First, Rom 16:1 uses the word deacon (διάκονος) to describe a woman, Phoebe. Second, there is reason to believe that female deacons may also be in mind in 1 Tim 3:11. Both of these texts will be discussed in more detail below. Keeping these two possible references in mind, the document notes:

> Mindfulness of the widespread seclusion of women in the first century (which would render female deacons indispensable agents of male pastors) and of the unlikelihood of deacons' wives being singled out for apostolic scrutiny while bishops' wives are overlooked tips the balance in favour of supposing that in these verses [1 Tim 3] St. Paul addresses the desired personal qualities of women deacons.[60]

This, coupled with the fact that the early church appears to have had female deacons, shows that there is no evidence to suggest that women should be excluded from serving in this capacity.[61]

Part 2: The Biblical Foundation of LCC's Diaconate

Due to our high regard for scripture, it is important that the LCC diaconate be in keeping with the teachings of scripture. As noted above, one of the documents which the Task Force compiled dealt with this subject—though not in as much detail as it could have. This is not to slight the work of this committee; they had an enormous mandate to fulfil and they did it well. I seek to bolster their conclusions with further study of the New Testament.

Before the Task Force could proceed with their work they identified the sort of biblical evidence which would be helpful to discussion a biblical model of the diaconate. They studied models of ministry in the New Testament which were both geographically centered (similar to a congregation or parish) and on-going. Ministry positions which were itinerant or which disappeared with the apostolic age were not applicable to the discussion. Accordingly, the study document which the task force complied begins by listing nine potential New Testament offices, based on several passages of scripture,[62] and then pares the list down until only two offices are left: the deacon and the "presbyter-bishop" (overseer-elder). The following chart illustrates the

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[58] Winger et al., "Scriptural, Dogmatic, and Historical Perspectives," G.73.
[59] Winger et al., "Scriptural, Dogmatic, and Historical Perspectives," G.73.
[60] Winger et al., "Scriptural, Dogmatic, and Historical Perspectives," G.73.
[61] Winger et al., "Scriptural, Dogmatic, and Historical Perspectives," G.73–74.
[62] These verses are 1 Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11; 1 Tim 3:1, 8–13; 5:9; Titus 1:5; and Phil 1:1.

verses used by the task force as well as others which I have added. It also lists the offices suggested by each verse.[63]

Chart of Potential New Testament Offices[64]

Passage:	Acts 6?	Acts 13:1	Acts 20:17–28	1 Cor 12:28	Eph 4:11	Phil 1:1	1 Tim 3:2	1 Tim 3:8, 12–13	1 Tim 5:9	2 Tim 1:11	Tit 1:5–7	1 Pet 5:1–4	2 John 1	3 John 1
Apostle ἀπόστολος		*		1	♦								*	*
Prophet προφήτης				2	♦									
Teacher διδάσκαλος				3	♦		Able to teach							
Evangelist εὐαγγελιστής	* Philip, Stephen				♦					Herald of gospel				
Pastor/shepherd ποιμήν					♦									
Bishop/overseer ἐπίσκοπος						♦								
Elder/presbyter πρεσβύτερος														
Deacon διάκονος						♦		♦						
Widow χήρα									♦					

This chart demonstrates that many of the positions mentioned in the New Testament are described in such a way that their roles and functions in some way overlap. For example, in this chart it is shown that the roles of apostles, prophets, teachers, evangelists, pastors/shepherds, bishops/oversees and elder/presbyters are at times described as the same thing, or as being done by the same people. Different from this is the role of deacon. Deacons may be linked to "evangelist" (if Philip and Stephen are considered to be deacons) but never to any of the other roles. Likewise, widows are something completely separate and are not to be understood as a distinct office in the New Testament church.[65] Thus we are left with a pastor/overseer/elder role and a deacon role.

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[63] See discussion Winger et al., "Scriptural, Dogmatic, and Historical Perspectives," G.64–G.65. I have added the Greek words for reference.

[64] Key: Like colours of shading indicate positions are equated in the verse. Numerical values indicate positions are distinctly ordered in the verse. ♦ indicates all positions marked were mentioned in the verse as separate roles. * indicates that the link to this position is made through an individual name who is called by this title/given this role elsewhere.

[65] Some do interpret 1 Tim 5:9 as describing an order of widows, but in my opinion, this cannot be sustained. The order of widows developed later in ecclesiastical history and there is no evidence for it in the New Testament documents.

Of these two remaining offices, the task force noted that the deacon is "fully distinct from all the foregoing offices…[and] is nowhere treated independently but always in relation to the office of presbyter-bishop [overseer-elder]."[66] By mentioning the deacon as "fully distinct" the study document is perhaps further asserting a link between all the other offices with the overseer-elder. The fact that the office of deacon is noted to always be mentioned in relation to that of overseer-elder is significant. This could indicate that the deacon cannot exist without the overseer-elder or at the least that the two offices are very closely linked.

The Task Force thus concluded that the offices of "overseer-elder" and deacon are the only ones which were "established for the ongoing governance, nurture and wellbeing of the Church."[67] The document also noted that the overseer-elder and deacons are called by God through the church to serve in a specific geographical area. This observation is mirrored in the practice of LCC: pastors and deacons serve congregations/schools (a "geographic area") who have extended them a call (invitation to serve) through the guidance of the Holy Spirit (God).

Digging Deeper: 1 Timothy, Philippians, Acts and Romans

The two clearest references to deacons as an office in the New Testament are found in 1 Tim 3:8–13 and Phil 1:1. Philippians includes only a passing reference to "ἐπισκόποις καὶ διακόνοις" ("overseers and deacons") in the letter's opening salutation. In contrast, 1 Tim 3:8–11 lists several qualifications for deacons and is preceded by a similar section on overseers. If we start with the most concrete references and move to the less-concrete ones, we can use the information in the clearer passage to illumine those which are foggy. Other significant passages include Acts 6:1–7 which may not explicitly name "deacons" but which describes the appointment of early apostle-assistants, and Rom 16:1 which explicitly describes Phoebe as a deacon in a specific geographic area.

An examination of the 1 Timothy passage and the Philippians passage will be the basis upon which a working definition of the role of "deacon" according to the New Testament is built. In order to create this definition, two key questions must be considered. The first of these questions is: Do these passages refer to an "office" of deacon or something else? Office can be defined as: "A position or place to which certain duties are attached, esp. one of a more or less public character" and "a position of trust, authority, or service under constituted authority." [68] In order to determine whether Phil 1:1 and 1 Tim 3:8–13 describe an office, the use of διάκονος in each passage will be considered in light of these two definitions.

The second question to be answered in this chapter is: What do these passages say about deacons in the New Testament? In order to answer this question, careful consideration of social and literary contexts of the passages is important. This includes trying to get at the heart of how the original audience would have understood the passage. A working definition of "deacon" based on these two questions will be useful in determining where else in the New Testament deacons are found.

Philippians 1:1:

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[66] Winger et al., "Scriptural, Dogmatic, and Historical Perspectives," G.65.

[67] Winger et al., "Scriptural, Dogmatic, and Historical Perspectives," G.65.

[68] Murray et al., eds., *English Dictionary*, 80.

Philippians 1:1 can be translated as: "Paul and Timothy, slaves of Christ Jesus. To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi with the overseers and deacons."[69] This verse, together with Phil 1:2, makes up the opening of the letter which consists of the names of its senders and recipients and a short greeting. The letter's opening describes the co-senders both as "slaves of Christ Jesus." This places Paul and Timothy on the same level and brings to mind their humility before Christ. Given that slavery was not an honourable position, an overall sense of humility is also felt. It brings across the sense that Paul and Timothy were "totally at the disposal of their Master"[70] (Christ) and that they owed their allegiance to him.[71]

The next three phrases introduce the letter's recipients. The first two phrases, "πᾶσιν τοῖς ἁγίοις ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ" ("To all the saints[72] in Christ Jesus") and "τοῖς οὖσιν ἐν Φιλίπποις" ("who are in Philippi"), show the location of the letter's recipients (the city of Philippi) and also that the whole community of believers were recipients of the letter. The third phrase of the letter's opening is the one which is the most interesting for this study: "σὺν ἐπισκόποις[73] καὶ διακόνοις" ("with the overseers and deacons").

Some have disputed the originality of this phrase in the text because they think that there is no evidence of local leadership in the Pauline churches during this time period.[74] On the contrary, it is to be expected that some kind of local leadership did exist in the Pauline churches at a very early time. Witherington suggests that when Paul or his representatives were away from a congregation for a long period, the local leadership was forced to develop itself. He notes, "It is not true to say that local leadership developed only after Paul died. More likely it developed, was nurtured, and became more and more fully functional the further the distance in time or space the apostle was from his converts."[75] Johnson also notes that this kind of leadership would not have required much time to develop, citing sociological studies which show that "without strong boundaries, mechanism for decision making, and social control, survival beyond a few years is unlikely."[76] It would not have been necessary, nor is it likely, that Christians waited long periods of time before developing local leadership and so this is not a convincing argument to support the later addition of "overseers and deacons" to the text of Phil 1.

Many agree that the terms themselves, apart from any ecclesiological meaning, were part of the language of the day.[77] If they were used to refer to positions which generally included oversight and service then it is not so surprising to find them here, in reference to the leadership

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[69] My translation of: Παῦλος καὶ Τιμόθεος δοῦλοι Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ πᾶσιν τοῖς ἁγίοις ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ τοῖς οὖσιν ἐν Φιλίπποις σὺν ἐπισκόποις καὶ διακόνοις.

[70] O'Brien, *Philippians*, 45.

[71] Witherington, *Friendship and Finances*, 30−31. Cf. Silva, *Philippians*, 40.

[72] The translation "saints" for the substantive "τοῖς ἁγίοις" is not in reference to those of particularly high morality, as if often thought of today in connection with the word, but rather, it refers to God's holy people. Cf. Fee, *Philippians*, 65 and Martin, *Philippians*, 57.

[73] A variant reading of "συνεπισκόποις," rather than "σὺν ἐπισκόποις" is found in verse 1 and can be translated "fellow-overseers." This reading appears to be theologically motivated, "reflecting the ecclesiology of a later time." Fee, *Philippians*, 60, footnote 8. Cf. O'Brien, *Philippians*, 43. The context of this letter and also Paul's other uses of this preposition in letter openings suggest that σύν should be read as a separate word.

[74] A question as to whether the text was included in a badly damaged section of the important P[46] manuscript is also raised, however, there is no specific reason to believe that this particular phrase was omitted. See: Skeat, "Bishops and Deacons?," 15.

[75] Witherington, *Friendship and Finances*, 33. Cf. Fee, *Philippians*, 67.

[76] Johnson, *1 and 2 Timothy*, 75. Cf. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, lxxxvii.

[77] Craddock, *Philippians*, 13.

of the Philippian Christian community. This fact further shows that it is unlikely that the phrase "ἐπισκόποις καὶ διακόνοις" was a later addition to the text.

How then should the above phrase be understood? Generally speaking, scholars agree that these two terms are in reference to church leaders who functioned as overseers and servants.[78] Fee goes as far as saying that the terms can be understood as titles.[79] Others are comfortable using the term "office" in connection with these words, but none intend to equate the offices described here with later ecclesiastical offices.[80]

Based on the definition of office cited earlier, it is possible that in Philippians the phrase "overseers and deacons" is meant to be understood as referring to specific offices. An office is something of "public character," and Paul alludes to the public character of this position when he greets these two groups of leaders. In some ways, a leader, by definition, has a public, or at least group-oriented, position. Leaders also tend to have a certain amount of authority, which is another descriptor of "office" previously mentioned. Finally, at times an "office" can be understood as a position of "service" and the word διάκονος/deacon has the idea of service bound up within it. What are missing from Phil 1:1 are the duties these deacons perform and information concerning under whose authority they fall. It can thus be said that Philippians neither completely affirms nor denies the possibility of an office of deacon in the New Testament.

Beyond the fact that Phil 1:1 depicts these deacons as leaders in the Philippian Christian community, possibly fulfilling an office, little else can be gleaned from the use of these words in this salutation. Whatever the reason for this mention, it is significant that these two groups of leaders are mentioned together as this may suggest a relationship between the two positions. While the exact role of these overseers and deacons is somewhat mysterious, the titles themselves imply that the overseers were the main leaders and the deacons were in some kind of subordinate position.[81] At the very least, the fact that there are two separate titles suggests that these positions were different in nature.[82] Philippians 1:1 has shown that even at this early stage in the development of Christianity, at least one group of Christians had created for themselves local leaders. What was done in one community may well have been present elsewhere.

1 Timothy 3:8–13:

First Timothy 3:8–13 is the second text which clearly uses the noun διάκονος (deacon) to refer to a specific group of people and very possibly to refer to an office in the early church. This text is half of a larger section which encompasses 1 Tim 3:1–13 and discusses the qualifications for both overseers and deacons. The section from verses 8–13 is of greatest interest for this study and so this is where the focus of the section will be; however, at times, it will be necessary to look back at previous verses for comparison and clarification.

The text of 1 Tim 3:8–13 reads:

> [8]Likewise, it is necessary for deacons to be dignified, not duplicitous, not in the habit of drinking too much wine, not greedy for money, [9]and to hold to the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. [10]First, they must be tested then let them serve if they are found to be blameless. [11]Likewise the women must be

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[78] Grayston, *Philippians and Thessalonians*, 13; Witherington, *Friendship and Finances*, 31 and Martin, *Philippians*, 57.

[79] Fee, *Philippians*, 68.

[80] Fowl, *Philippians*, 20; O'Brien, *Philippians*, 48; Silva, *Philippians*, 41 and, somewhat reluctantly, Marshall, *Philippians*, 4.

[81] Fee, *Philippians*, 69 and Witherington, *Friendship and Finances*, 33.

[82] Cf. Fee, *Philippians*, 69 and Witherington, *Friendship and Finances*, 33.

dignified, not slanderous, self controlled, and faithful in all things. [12]Deacons must be the husband of one wife, managing their children and own homes well, [13]for the ones who serve well earn a good standing and much confidence in their faith in Jesus Christ.[83]

First, a deacon is required to be σεμνούς, a person of "respect/honor" or who is "noble, dignified, serious."[84] According to Johnson, "in antiquity authority was positively correlated with dignity in bearing."[85] This might indicate that the deacon, as a leader in the Christian community, held a certain amount of authority. This is interesting to contemplate, but caution must be taken so that too much is not made of these words.[86] This requirement is similar to the requirement of κόσμιον which is made of the overseer in verse 2.[87]

The next qualification is listed in the negative: μὴ διλόγους. This is the only place in the New Testament where this word is used and it is also infrequent in Greek outside of the New Testament. Because of this, settling on an appropriate translation is somewhat difficult. Suggestions include: "insincere"[88] "double-tongued,"[89] "duplicitous,"[90] "'repetitious,' 'gossips,' 'saying one thing and meaning another' or 'saying one thing to one person but another thing to another person.'"[91] In order to take in as much of the "double-tongued" meaning as possible, the word "duplicitous" is perhaps the best choice.

A second prohibition is: μὴ οἴνῳ πολλῷ προσέχοντας ("not in the habit of drinking too much wine"). The verb προσέχω[92] suggests that it is the ongoing, continuous habit of consuming extensive amounts of wine which Paul is forbidding.[93] This is something that would certainly get in the way of a person's ability to be an effective leader. A similar requirement is made of the overseers when they are forbidden to be πάροινον, which means "addicted to much wine."[94]

The third and final prohibition in this verse is: μὴ αἰσχροκερδεῖς. In the New Testament this word is found only here and in Titus 1:7. It can be rendered as "shamelessly greedy for money, avaricious, fond of dishonest gain."[95] It is perhaps significant that in 1 Tim 6:9–10 Paul specifically speaks out against those who seek to be rich, and in the section from 6:5–10 he speaks of opponents and false teachers who would seek to use their leadership position for financial gain. While this is quite possibly the reason that Paul is careful to require that deacons do not seek after money, Towner notes, "The reference is general enough to encompass most kinds of financial misjudgment and abuse."[96] A general translation of "not greedy for money" is

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[83] My translation.

[84] BDAG, 919.

[85] Johnson, *1 and 2 Timothy*, 227.

[86] For example, Oden is going too far when he suggests from this single word that "Paul referred not merely to grave demeanor but to a thoughtful, realistic outlook, a bold and caring perspective on the actual needs and challenges at hand." Oden, *Timothy and Titus*, 147. While these are certainly good qualities for a leader to have, there is no evidence that Paul meant this one word to carry so much meaning.

[87] The word κόσμιος means "respectable, honourable." BDAG, 561. The words κόσμιος and σεμνός have similar semantic domains. L&N, 1:747.

[88] BDAG, 250 and Towner, *Timothy and Titus*, 262.

[89] But cf. BDAG, 250 and Towner, *Timothy and Titus*, 262.

[90] Towner, *Timothy and Titus*, 263 and Johnson, *1 and 2 Timothy*, 227.

[91] Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 199.

[92] Meaning "to continue in close attention to someth., occupy oneself with, devote or apply oneself to." BDAG, 880.

[93] This is due to its present tense and imperfective aspect. On imperfective aspect see Porter, *Idioms*, 20–21.

[94] BDAG, 780.

[95] BDAG, 29.

[96] Towner, *Timothy and Titus*, 263.

preferred as it keeps possibilities open. Again there is a similar requirement for the overseers who must be ἀφιλάργυρον, which in English is rendered "not loving money, not greedy."[97]

Verse 9 once again makes positive statements concerning a deacon's qualifications: ἔχοντας τὸ μυστήριον τῆς πίστεως ἐν καθαρᾷ συνειδήσει ("hold to the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience"). Again, this implies a continuous habit. This qualification is asserting the deacon's commitment to the faith. This is significant in light of the difficulties that the Christian community in Ephesus encountered with false teachers and it is not surprising that one of the things Paul highlights in a new leader is that their commitment to the faith is strong.

Verse 10 changes the dynamics of the passage slightly. The first phrase in the verse is a command to test potential deacons: καὶ οὗτοι δὲ δοκιμαζέσθωσαν πρῶτον ("first they must be tested"). Although it has been speculated that this test was a period of probation[98] or a comprehensive background check,[99] the text itself does not specify how this test was done.[100]

The second phrase, εἶτα διακονείτωσαν ἀνέγκλητοι ὄντες ("then let them serve if they are found to be blameless"), describes the results of the testing. The command to let these people serve has conditions. The context suggests that the initiation of a deacon into service can only happen if they are found "blameless"[101] and have successfully passed their test. A similar requirement of blamelessness is made of the overseers. The word used is ἀνεπίλημπτον and it means "above reproach."[102]

Verse 11 begins by shifting the subject from deacons to "women."[103] The word γυναῖκας is used, which can mean either women or wives, and this word causes the bulk of the debate surrounding this verse. Scholars are divided as to whether these women are the wives of the deacons or women who are themselves church leaders.

There is no question that coming to a conclusion on this issue is difficult. Neither a translation of "wives" nor "women" can be made with full assurance. Based on the evidence, however, a more general translation of "women" is better because it allows for possibilities to be left open.[104] These women, or some of them at least, may well also be the wives of deacons, and a translation of "women" allows for that possibility. It is, however, equally possible that that these women were leaders in the Christian community in a role parallel to that of the overseers and deacons.[105]

Following this introductory phrase is once again a series of requirements: σεμνάς, μὴ διαβόλους, νηφαλίους, πιστὰς ἐν πᾶσιν ("dignified, not slanderous, self controlled, and faithful in all things"). These are strikingly similar to previously mentioned requirements of the deacon. The requirement of σεμνάς is identical to deacons in verse 8: dignified. Likewise, the prohibition of "not slanderous" (μὴ διαβόλους) is very similar to the prohibition of "not duplicitous" (μὴ διλόγους) for the deacon in verse 8.

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[97] BDAG, 157.

[98] Oden, *Timothy and Titus*, 148.

[99] Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 201 and Witherington, *Letter and Homilies 1*, 241.

[100] Johnson, *1 and 2 Timothy*, 228.

[101] Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 202.

[102] BDAG, 77.

[103] Verse 11 begins as verse 8 did: accusative subject plus ὡσαύτως. Given this parallel construction, "δεῖ=… εἶναι" should be implied here as at verse 8.Witherington, *Letter and Homilies 1*, 241; Stiefel, "Women Deacons," 447–48 and Towner, *Timothy and Titus*, 266, footnote 28.

[104] A translation of "deaconess" is not advisable since this implies that the text is explicit.

[105] It is evident that in the second and third centuries deaconesses served Christian women in ways which men could not. This included anointing for baptism, visiting and baptismal instruction. See: Olson, *Deacons and Deaconesses*, 41−42. These practical considerations may also loosely support the idea of women as leaders in the New Testament.

The third qualification for the women is νηφαλίους. This means that she is moderate in her consumption of alcohol or that she is "self-controlled."[106] This is the exact qualification given to overseers in verse 2[107] and is parallel to the prohibition given to deacons in verse 8: "μὴ οἴνῳ πολλῷ προσέχοντας" ("not in the habit of drinking too much wine") and overseers in verse 3: "μὴ πάροινον" ("not a drunkard").[108] A translation of "self controlled" with the understanding that this encompasses both her alcohol consumption and the rest of her dealings, is best here.

The final requirement for the women is "πιστὰς ἐν πᾶσιν" ("faithful in all things"). While this could be referring to a general faithfulness and trustworthiness related to her tasks as a servant of the church,[109] it has also been suggested that this phrase is specifically referring to commitment to the Christian faith. This second idea would make the requirement somewhat parallel to the requirement that deacons "hold the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience."[110] Both of these possibilities remain open and one does not negate the other.

Verse 12 focuses back on the deacons and away from the women specifically.[111] The requirement that the deacon must be "the husband of one wife" (μιᾶς γυναικὸς ἄνδρες) sparks almost as much debate as the word "woman" does in verse 11. The exact implications of the phrase are unclear.[112] It has been suggested that this is a prohibition of polygamy, but given that polygamy was not practiced in either the Jewish or Greco-Roman cultures of the time, this is unlikely.[113] It is also possible that this is excluding unmarried men from office; however, elsewhere Paul promotes celibacy[114] and so it seems unlikely that he would forbid celibate men from serving here.[115] This phrase could also be prohibiting re-marriage either after the death of a spouse or in the event of divorce.[116] While this is possible, widowed women were not forbidden to remarry[117] and so it would seem strange if widowed men were required to remain single. The prohibition of re-marriage after a divorce may be in mind here[118] but the immediate context of this passage does not commend this particular interpretation over another. A simple solution, yet unsatisfying to those who prefer concrete conclusions, is that this verse simply requires deacons to be faithful in marriage which is "understood to be monogamous and acceptable in the eyes of

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[106] BDAG, 672; Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 204 and Stiefel, "Women Deacons," 444.

[107] In verse 2 it is perhaps used in the sense of "level-headedness" rather than a prohibition against overuse of alcohol since the overseers are explicitly forbidden from overindulge in alcohol in verse 3 with the words "μὴ πάροινον."

[108] BDAG, 780.

[109] Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 204. Towner suggests that this is a possibility that need not be seen as separate from the woman's faith. Towner, *Timothy and Titus*, 267.

[110] Stiefel, "Women Deacons," 444 and Towner, *Timothy and Titus*, 267.

[111] Curiously, this shift does not include another ὡσαύτως introduction as do verses 8 and 11, but simply begins with the command "διάκονοι ἔστωσαν" ("Deacons must be…"). Given the context of the passage, this lack of ὡσαύτως may in fact suggest that the topic has not completely changed. If the shift in verse 8 is to deacons and in verse 12 the topic is still deacons, it may be correct to say that the women of verse 11 are somehow part of these deacons, or a subcategory of them.

[112] A similar phrase with similar debate is found at 3:2 in relation to the overseers.

[113] Towner, *Timothy and Titus*, 250, footnote 42.

[114] 1 Cor 7:32–38.

[115] Towner, *Timothy and Titus*, 250, footnote 42.

[116] Towner, *Timothy and Titus*, 251, footnote 42.

[117] 1 Cor 7:8−9 and Rom 7:1−3.

[118] Cf. Matt 5:31−32.

the community."[119] While this is a fairly general conclusion, it is as specific an interpretation as possible without straying too far into speculation.

It is not just his marriage which the deacon must care for properly, but also his home and children: τέκνων καλῶς προϊστάμενοι καὶ τῶν ἰδίων οἴκων ("managing his children and his own home well"). In addition to his personal character, the deacon's home life, including his marriage, his children and any other members of the household must be well managed. A similar requirement is made of the ἐπίσκοπος in verse 4 with the implication in verse 5 that those who cannot manage their own homes will be unable to manage the church or "household" of God. These requirements that Paul sets out for the deacon's family life are similar to the expected norms of the society of that day. Fathers, as the heads of households, had ultimate authority over their wives, children and slaves. In turn, children, wives and slaves owed respect and obedience to the head of the household or *paterfamilias*.[120] The way in which a man managed his family affected the way in which society viewed him. Only the man who managed his home and family well was fit for public office because it was thought that the same set of skills were necessary for both roles.[121] It is certain that when Christian leaders managed their households well, they would be seen in a positive light not only by their fellow Christians, but also by the larger society. A man who managed his home well would earn honour in the eyes of society. If Christian leaders were men of high honour, this, in turn, would paint Christianity in a positive light.

Although this study has focused mostly on the portion of the text which discusses the deacon, there are some important pieces of information to be gleaned by a brief comparison with the preceding section on overseers (1 Tim 3:1–7) to see what, if any, connection exists between the two positions. As has been noted throughout, there are several similarities between the overseer's and the deacon's requirements. Having said this, there are also many differences. Words such as σώφρονα ("prudent, thoughtful, self-controlled");φιλόξενον ("hospitable"); διδακτικόν ("skilful in teaching"); μὴ πλήκτην (not a "pugnacious person, bully"); ἐπιεικῆ ("gentleness, graciousness, courtesy");ἄμαχον("peaceable"); and μὴ νεόφυτον (not "newly converted") are used to describe the overseer but are not used of the deacon.[122] Similarly, the overseer is never required to be tested and except for the prohibition of new converts, the state of his faith is never mentioned.[123] These differences show that these two positions are not interchangeable[124] and may suggest a greater amount of responsibility for the overseers. Whether or not the deacon is subordinate to the overseer is not explicitly discussed, although, as noted above in connection with Phil 1:1, subordination is implied by the titles of the positions themselves.[125] Beyond these brief points the text says nothing concerning the relationship between the two kinds of leaders.

Although the text says little concerning the relationship between these two positions, it does have significant evidence in relation to the question of office. The "more or less public

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[119] Towner, *Timothy and Titus*, 250−51, footnote 42. Cf. Johnson, *1 and 2 Timothy*, 229. By "community" it is not just the Christian community that is meant, but also the outside world.

[120] Keener, "Family and Household," 357–58 and Clarke, *Serve the Community*, 90–95.

[121] Keener, "Family and Household," 357.

[122] Bauer et al., *Bdag*, 987, 1058, 240, 286, 371, 52, 669 respectively.

[123] Verse 10 and verse 11 speak to the faith of the deacon and the woman respectively.

[124] Cf. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 196.

[125] Towner also suggests that the deacon is subordinate to the overseer but he makes this assertion based on word order and the fact that more attention is paid to the overseer. Towner, *Timothy and Titus*, 261. Most do not agree that the text supports the deacon as a subordinate position. Cf. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 196 and Witherington, *Letter and Homilies 1*, 240–41.

character"[126] of these positions, and that particular duties were associated with them, can be inferred from the detailed list of character requirements for the overseers and deacons. The care with which these requirements are laid out suggests that these positions were performed on behalf of a group. Also, the purpose of implementing character requirements for these positions is presumably so that only individuals who are well-suited to perform the associated duties are chosen to fill the positions.[127] The first two requirements of "office" are easily established.

The second two requirements (having authority and being under authority) are also readily apparent. As discussed under Phil 1:1, both overseers and deacons, due to the fact that they are leaders in the Christian community, hold a measure of authority. First Timothy also suggests that these leadership positions are under the direction or authority of another: Paul, and, by extension, his representatives. Paul had previously spent a significant amount of time in Ephesus and seems to have maintained close ties with the Christians there. At the time of the writing of this letter, Timothy is in Ephesus as Paul's representative and Paul is exercising his authority to teach and admonish the Ephesian Christians through Timothy. Although this chain of authority is not formalized, it nevertheless appears to be there in some form.

The combined evidence of this four-point analysis (public character, associated duties, holding authority and being under authority) shows that it is not unreasonable to consider the positions of overseer and deacon in 1 Timothy as early Christian offices. It is important to note, however, that as the church developed in the second and third centuries, these offices would become more developed as well. While we may be justified in referring to overseers and deacons as New Testament offices, we must be careful to differentiate these New Testament offices from later offices with the same titles. It may be wise to think of the New Testament overseer and deacons as "proto-deacons" and "proto-overseers" when comparing them with the ecclesiastical offices of the second and third centuries.

A Working Definition:

Now that this examination of Phil 1:1 and 1 Tim 3:8–13 is complete, a working definition of "deacon" can be determined. It has been established that the deacon, along with the overseer, is an example of an early Christian office, although one which is different from the offices of the second and third centuries with the same names. Also, based on the character requirements and the context in which these positions were mentioned, additional pieces of information can be asserted about the New Testament deacon.

First of all, based on 1 Tim 3:9, 11, it can be said that deacons are people of firm faith. The other character requirements of 1 Tim 3:8–12 also show that they are people of good character, who are positive role models in the way they run their families and households. Based on the fact that they are mentioned only in connection with specific Christian communities, it would seem that deacons serve the local congregation. No evidence suggests that the deacons described in these passages served in a wider capacity, although this may have been possible. The fact that the position of deacon is mentioned in conjunction with another position, the overseer, but yet has its own set of requirements, suggests that it is a unique and separate position. The title deacon itself implies that it is a subordinate position. Finally, evidence from

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[126] Murray et al., eds., *English Dictionary*, 80.

[127] Although it is not a very specific duty, 1 Tim 3:5 notes that the overseers needed to be fit to care for (ἐπιμελήσεται) God's church (ἐκκλησίας θεοῦ). Although it is only a shadow of a "duty" it alludes to more. Given that the deacons are described in a parallel way to these overseers and associated with them both here and in Phil 1:1 it is reasonable to assume that there were specific duties associated with them as well.

1 Tim 3:11 suggests that women are eligible to be included as part of the office of deacon or some subcategory of it.

Acts 6:

While Phil 1:1 and 1 Tim 3:8–13 use the noun διάκονος in their description of New Testament deacons, other passages may in fact describe deacons or diaconal activities without specifically using that noun. Acts 6:1–6 is one such passage. These verses are a short narrative outlining a problem in the Jerusalem church: Hellenist (Ἑλληνιστῶν) widows are being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. Seven men are therefore appointed to oversee this activity and ensure that no one is missed. Because Acts 6 only uses the verb διακονέω ("to serve") and the noun διακονία ("service"), some scholars are uncertain whether deacons are actually present here. Deacons or not, church leadership and the appointment of these assistants are central to this text.

At this time, the centre of Judaism, and also Christianity as far as can be discerned, was in Jerusalem. It is here that the events of Acts 6:1–6 take place. It is estimated that Jerusalem was a city of 60,000 or more inhabitants ranging from the very poor to the very rich.[128] The languages of Jerusalem were also varied and included Hebrew,[129] Aramaic[130] and Greek.[131] Based on the New Testament evidence, it is apparent that the earliest Christian community was entirely Jewish, although made up of those who spoke Aramaic (and Hebrew) and those who spoke Greek.[132] It would seem, however, that the Aramaic-speaking group, sometimes known as the "Hebrews" (Ἑβραίους), was in the majority.[133] Acts 6:1–6 brings the issue of "Hebrews" and "Hellenists" to the forefront and much has been written concerning the identity of these two groups.

Scholars have answered this identity question one of two ways: either both the Hebrews and Hellenists were Jews, with the major difference between them being either language[134] or culture;[135] or that the Hebrews were Jews while the Hellenists were Gentiles.[136] There are well-reasoned arguments for both sides; however, the context tips probability in favour of a language-cultural barrier.[137] Exactly how this cultural and language division manifested itself is hard to know based on the information provided by the text, so it is best to simply understand that both were factors in this division to some degree.

The text can be translated as follows:

> [1]Now in those days, when the number of disciples was increasing, the Greeks began grumbling about the Hebrews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily aid. [2]And the Twelve, after summoning

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[128] Fiensy, "Composition," 214, 26.

[129] Anderson presents a picture of Jewish education at this time which suggests that most male Jews educated within this system would also have known Hebrew. Anderson, "Jewish Education," 217–26.

[130] Fiensy, "Composition," 230.

[131] It is estimated that between 10–20% of the population of Jerusalem was Greek-speaking. Fiensy, "Composition," 231.

[132] Fiensy, "Composition," 214.

[133] Lenski, *Acts*, 241. This can also be inferred based on the number of people who spoke Greek in the city. Fiensy, "Composition," 231.

[134] Hengel, *Earliest Christianity*, 71; Smith, *Acts*, 110; Capper, "Cultural Context," 353; Krodel, *Acts*, 132; Lenski, *Acts*, 240–41; Munck, *Acts*, 57 and Ferguson, "Hellenists," 204.

[135] Capper, "Cultural Context," 353; Munck, *Acts*, 302 and Ferguson, "Hellenists," 177.

[136] Cadbury, "Hellenists," 69 and Tyson, "Dietary Regulations," 159..

[137] The strongest argument against the idea of a Jewish/Gentile division is that thus far, the church appears to have been composed of Jews only. Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 350 and Haenchen, *Acts*, 264, 66.

the crowd of disciples, said, "It is not pleasing for us to leave the word of God to serve tables. ³So, brothers, choose seven men from among you who have good reputations and who are full of the spirit and wisdom, and we will appoint them over this task. ⁴We, however, will continue in prayer and service of the word."

⁵And the whole group was pleased with this idea and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, Phillip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte from Antioch. ⁶These men stood before the apostles who, after praying, laid hands on them.[138]

The problem which is being recorded in this passage is laid out in the second half of verse 2: ἐγένετο γογγυσμὸς τῶν Ἑλληνιστῶν πρὸς τοὺς Ἑβραίους ("the Greeks began grumbling about the Hebrews"). The problem is further explained by the phrase: ὅτι παρεθεωροῦντο ἐν τῇ διακονίᾳ τῇ καθημερινῇ αἱ χῆραι αὐτῶν ("because their widows were being overlooked in the daily aid"). Tyson suggests the imperfect tense of παρεθεωροῦντο ("neglect") implies habitual neglect rather than a one-time problem.[139] The use of the word καθημερινῇ ("daily") also serves to show the ongoing problem: aid[140] was distributed daily and the Hellenist widows were overlooked. Context would suggest that this neglect occurred over more than one day, further supporting the concept of habitual neglect. This is a significant problem and it is no wonder that it was brought to the attention of the Twelve.

In a patriarchal society, women without husbands or other family would be at the mercy of handouts from the community. Both Spencer and Krodel note that many Jews moved to Jerusalem in their older years so that they could be buried there. When the men died, women were left far from their families who would have supported them.[141] These Hellenist widows may have been dependent on aid from the Christian community for their survival and if they were overlooked as the aid was being distributed, these women would have suffered.

After summoning the whole of the Christian community together, the Twelve explain that they cannot neglect their own special duties to handle this new problem. In verse 3, a solution is proposed: ἐπισκέψασθε δέ, ἀδελφοί ("so, brothers, choose"). The assembly was, by careful selection, to choose individuals to take over this new role of administering the daily aid for widows.

The verse goes on to describe the kind of men[142] that should be selected for this position: those with good reputations and who are full of the spirit and wisdom.[143] The requirement that they have good reputations could also be phrased as them being those "of whom people speak well."[144] The text is not specific as to who exactly was to speak well of these men. Certainly their fellow Christians would have been included, but there is a strong possibility, due to a lack of qualification, that these men were also to have a good reputation in the greater Jerusalem

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[138] My translation.

[139] Tyson, "Dietary Regulations," 158. This is in keeping with uses of the imperfect tense and the imperfective aspect which it carries. Cf. Porter, *Idioms*, 21, 29, 33–34. Wallace does not mention aspect, but brings out the same basic meaning of the imperfect. Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 546–47.

[140] This phrase also contains the first instance of the διακον– words in this passage. Based on the context in which the word is used here, it is most likely that it concerns the distribution of food. (Beyer, "διακονέω," 2:84. Cf. BDAG, 230.) It is also possible, however, that some other kind of assistance is meant and so, in order to preserve sense of the text as much as possible, a translation of "aid" is best.

[141] Spencer, "Neglected Widows," 728 and Krodel, *Acts*, 132.

[142] The word ἄνδρας refers to the male almost exclusively. At times it can refer to "humans" as opposed to "non-humans" (like animals or gods) but to say that this word easily refers to both men and women, and thus the Seven could theoretically have been women, is difficult to support.

[143] ἄνδρας ἐξ ὑμῶν μαρτυρουμένους ἑπτά, πλήρεις πνεύματος καὶ σοφίας.

[144] BDAG, 618.

community.[145] Those who had a positive reputation in the greater community would also have painted Christianity in a positive light in the eyes of the greater society. This qualification, along with the requirement that the men also be full of the spirit and wisdom, shows just how important this position was and how seriously it should be taken. Not just any men were to be appointed, but reputable, faithful individuals.

These are similar to the requirements which Paul lays out for deacons in 1 Timothy. Although having a good reputation, being full of the spirit, or being wise does not directly correspond to the 1 Timothy requirements, they contain the same spirit. For example, in 1 Timothy, requirements such as being dignified, being sincere in speech, refraining from too much wine and having an upstanding marriage and family would certainly produce a man of "good reputation." Also, one who "holds the mystery of the faith in pure conscience" is a similar religious requirement to "being full of the spirit and of wisdom." In both texts, a positive, faith-filled role model is sought to do the job.

Once appropriate men are chosen, they will be appointed over the task of assisting the widows. Given that the Greek word χρείας which is used in verse 3 can be translated as "office,"[146] it is appropriate to examine this text more closely to see if other evidence of a New Testament office can be found within it. When the previously noted definition of office is applied here, it is evident that a sort of office is in mind. This new position is certainly one performed on behalf of a group with duties attached (assisting the widows with the daily aid) and it can also be called a position of service under an authority (namely that of the Twelve). Both of these aspects were important in our previous discussions of "office" and when they are combined with the additional detail that the word χρείας can be translated as "office," they show that the position described in Acts 6 fits the definition of office even better than Phil 1 or 1 Tim 3.

Now that the Twelve have laid out their proposal, the Christian community can respond to it. The text shows that the community was pleased with the proposed solution and they name seven men for appointment to the task of serving the widows: "Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, Phillip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte from Antioch." The fact that all seven are named may indicate that they are well known or that their role was so important that the author wanted them to be remembered.

The final verse in this section outlines how these seven men were set apart for service. The text reads that the men stood before the apostles who "laid hands on them." The practice of laying on of hands to establish a person in a position of authority is found in the Old Testament.[147] Was this in fact an ordination with the laying on of hands? Both Krodel and Lenski agree that ordination should not be understood here.[148] The rite of ordination may be based on this text and others like it, but it is unlikely that the church, at this very early stage, had developed such a formal rite.

Thus the problem of the widows who were being overlooked by those in charge of aid distribution was solved. The church appointed seven new leaders over that task specifically in order to allow the Twelve to continue in their work of furthering the Gospel. This passage and

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[145] In both Luke and Acts, the author attempts to show that Christianity was an acceptable religion and that Christians were good citizens. Cf. Carson and Moo, *Introduction*, 303–04. The portrayal of Christian leaders as having a good reputation in the community may be an example of one instance of this attempt.

[146] BDAG, 1088. BDAG favours the translation of "office" in this verse. Cf. Haenchen, *Acts*, 263.

[147] For example: Num 8:10; 27:18, 23. The laying on of hands also symbolizes a transfer of something from the one laying on the hands to the one on whom the hands are laid. Cf. Lev 1:4 and the transfer of sins from the person to the sacrificial animal.

[148] Krodel, *Acts*, 134 and Lenski, *Acts*, 247.

the situation it portrays reveal several things about the early church and its leadership. First of all, it depicts the early Christian assembly creating a secondary position of leadership in order to meet the needs of the people at the time. The group's primary leadership, the Twelve, felt the addition of a secondary group was appropriate.

The process by which the seven new leaders were selected reveals more: the new position was deemed to be an important one. The whole of the Christian assembly was involved in the selection and approval process and candidates had to meet specific qualifications of character ("good reputation") and of faith ("full of the spirit and wisdom"). Upon selection, the Seven were formally and publically declared to be leaders in the church, and were assigned a specific task. Such care and concern shows that both the task and those who fulfilled it were highly valued.

The manner in which the position is developed and discussed also suggests that it was in some way subordinate to the position of Apostle, although specifics cannot be discerned. It is important to note, however, that this probable subordination does not appear to portray the idea of lesser importance. As already noted, the care with which the men were selected and the process by which they were set apart for their task suggests that they held a position of importance in the community and they may legitimately be described as holding an office.

This passage demonstrates the New Testament church's authority to create official roles alongside that of the Twelve through which to carry on the work that needed to be done. It does not, however, explicitly refer to this new position as "deacon." Whether or not these men can be called deacons depends on how that term is defined. If we make a brief comparison we can see that there are several similarities between the men of Acts 6 and the deacons portrayed in Philippians and 1 Timothy. Both groups are people of firm faith and good character. Both serve local communities. Also, both positions were in some way subordinate to another position of higher authority. The one major difference between these groups is that while 1 Timothy leaves open the possibility of the inclusion of women, in Acts 6 only men are part of the office. According to this definition then, Acts 6 does describe deacons and not only that, but their very institution.

This conclusion, however, cannot be left without certain qualifications. While we, looking back, may legitimately call these the first deacons according to our own definitions, it is unlikely that the church at that point in time would have used that term to label these men. It is very likely, however, that in later years, after Christians were forced out of Jerusalem and took their message far and wide, the model found here (a secondary group assisting a primary group in some way) was carried on. This may be the impetus for the development of deacons in the Pauline churches twenty or thirty years later, which eventually developed into a more structured office that emerges in the centuries which followed.

Romans 16:1:

Thus far it has been established that there is evidence for a diaconate of sorts in the New Testament, the roots of which probably go back as far as the time immediately following the death and resurrection of Christ. While the most explicit evidence for this is found in 1 Tim 3 and Phil 1, there may also be other places where this position is explicitly mentioned in the New Testament. By examining passages where the noun διάκονος is used in reference to a specific person, the identities of early deacons may be established.

The Pauline letters refer to six different people using the noun διάκονος: Paul,[149] Apollos,[150] Timothy,[151] Tychicus,[152] Epaphras,[153] and Phoebe.[154] In order to ascertain which of these instances can be translated as "deacon" and which are simply referring to these people as general servants, the information which the New Testament shares concerning each of these individuals must be compared with the working definition of "deacon" which has been previously established.

According to the information gleaned from 1 Timothy, Philippians and Acts, it can be said that deacons: 1) are people of firm faith; 2) are people of good character; 3) serve the Christian community in a local congregation, but not the greater church; 4) are secondary leaders, under some kind of supervisor; and 5) may be men or women. Given that each of these six people appears to be a member in good standing of the greater Christian community, and one who is in some kind of leadership role, it can be assumed that the faith and character of these people are not in question. The points which are most important to consider in this chapter are numbers three and four: the location of service and the level of leadership.[155]

A thorough examination reveals that the only one of these six individuals who can be called a "deacon" according to the established definition above is Phoebe. In short, Paul, Apollos and Epaphras are not a secondary leaders, but primary leaders and with the possible exception of Epaphras, all of the other men cannot be said to be local leaders, but rather, they are travelling leaders. This certainly does not diminish the importance of these five men in the leadership of the early church; it simply means that their status as servants (διάκονοι) is of a different sort than we are hoping to examine.

Phoebe is mentioned only in Romans 16:1 where she is identified as being from Cenchrea, near Corinth. Romans 16:1 reads: Συνίστημι δὲ ὑμῖν Φοίβην τὴν ἀδελφὴν ἡμῶν, οὖσαν [καὶ] διάκονον τῆς ἐκκλησίας τῆς ἐν Κεγχρεαῖς ("I introduce to you Phoebe, our sister, who is [also] a deacon of the church in Cenchrea"). This verse shows that Phoebe was a stranger to the Roman Christians. Paul commends her to them and asks them to welcome her while she is with them. Many suggest, probably correctly, that Phoebe was the letter carrier[156] which explains the presence of this passage in the letter.

There is good reason to believe that this passage is meant to portray Phoebe as a deacon and several commentators translate it so.[157] Witherington and Dunn call her the "first recorded 'deacon' in the history of Christianity"[158] and both Witherington and Cranfield directly link the use of διάκονος in this passage with its use in Phil 1:1 and 1 Tim 3:8 and 12.[159]

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[149] 1 Cor 3:5; 2 Cor 3:6, 6:4, 11:23; Eph 3:7; and Col 1:23, 25.

[150] 1 Cor 3:5.

[151] 1 Tim 4:6; 2 Cor 3:6, 6:4.

[152] Col 4:7 and Eph 6:21.

[153] Col 1:7

[154] Rom 16:1

[155] In the case of Phoebe, point five, that deacons may be men or women, is also important.

[156] Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 729; Cranfield, *Romans 9–16*, 780; Jewett, *Romans*, 942–43; Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 886 and Moo, *Romans*, 913.

[157] Translating as either "deacon" or "deaconess" are: Cranfield, *Romans 9–16*, 781; Witherington and Hyatt, *Romans*, 377; Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 885 and Moo, *Romans*, 912.

[158] Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 887. Cf. Witherington and Hyatt, *Romans*, 382.

[159] Cranfield, *Romans 9–16*, 781and Witherington and Hyatt, *Romans*, 382. Even though Phoebe may be considered a deacon, it is probably going too far to translate διάκονος as "deaconess" since the Greek actually uses a masculine noun and "the specific order of women church workers called deaconesses did not exist for another three hundred years." Witherington and Hyatt, *Romans*, 382.

The way in which Phoebe is connected to the Cenchrean church suggests that not only is she more than a lay-women, she actually is a deacon. When she is called "διάκονος *of the church at Cenchrea*" she is placed firmly in a local congregation.[160] While Epaphras was connected to the Christians in Colossae and area, he was called "a διάκονος of Christ" and so his service was linked to Christ, rather than to the specific people in Colossae. Phoebe's service on the other hand, is clearly connected to the congregation which makes it very possible that she should be considered a deacon.

The fact that Phoebe may be subordinate to another leader further strengthens the interpretation of Phoebe as a deacon. While Rom 16:1 does not explicitly say that Phoebe is under the direction of another leader, the context of the verse does not immediately refute this either. While it is correct that leadership is at times associated with διάκονος, the word is not necessarily meant to imply the highest leader of the church and this word alone cannot satisfactorily cast Phoebe as the church's main leader.[161] Thus far, Rom 16:1 shows that Phoebe is well-qualified to be the only deacon in the New Testament who is explicitly called by that name.[162]

Further information concerning Phoebe and her role as deacon at Cenchrea can be found in Rom 16:2. The verse reads: "so that you might welcome her in the Lord, in a way fitting of the saints, and that you might help her with any matter with which she might need your assistance, for she has been a patron of many and myself also."[163] As noted above, Phoebe is going to Rome for some unknown reason and Paul is asking the Christians there to assist her in whatever way she may need. An important detail that this verse gives us is that Phoebe was a patron of many and also of Paul. This detail is important in fully understanding her role among the Christians of Cenchrea.

The patronage system was a major part of life in the Greco-Roman world. Moxenes describes the patron-client relationship as:

> social relationships between individuals based on a strong element of inequality and difference in power. The basic structure of the relationship is an exchange of different and very unequal resources. A patron has social, economic, and political resources that are needed by a client. In return, a client can give expressions of loyalty and honor that are useful for the patron.[164]

Patronage could also occur between one person and a group (public patronage). In this case, the patron paid for a public building or banquet in exchange for "statues, inscriptions, and public office."[165] People could also be patrons of clubs or religious guilds of which they were members. In these cases, the patrons were often rewarded with leadership roles in the group.[166] It is significant that women were also known to be patrons of both individual men and women of lower status[167] as well as clubs.[168]

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[160] Jewett agrees that she is a local leader. Jewett, *Romans*, 944–45.

[161] Contra Jewett, *Romans*, 944. Based on my extensive study of the term not included here it is clear that the word διάκονος on its own cannot establish Phoebe as the main leader of this congregation.

[162] There may be other people named in the New Testament who could arguably be called deacons according to our five criteria; however, they are not called by the title "διάκονος."

[163] ἵνα αὐτὴν προσδέξησθε ἐν κυρίῳ ἀξίως τῶν ἁγίων καὶ παραστῆτε αὐτῇ ἐν ᾧ ἂν ὑμῶν χρῄζῃ πράγματι· καὶ γὰρ αὐτὴ προστάτις πολλῶν ἐγενήθη καὶ ἐμοῦ αὐτοῦ.

[164] Moxnes, "Patron-Client Relations," 242.

[165] Osiek and Balch, *Families*, 50.

[166] Osiek and Balch, *Families*, 50.

[167] Cf. Osiek and Balch, *Families*, 52.

[168] Cf. Meeks, *Urban Christians*, 24.

Despite the fact that there is a historical precedent for women patrons, scholars are divided over whether or not Phoebe should be considered one. Given the great importance of the patronage system in Roman society, it is difficult to imagine how an association between it and the word προστάτις could have been avoided when the word was heard by Roman ears. It is because of this cultural factor that Witherington clearly links this term with the patron-client system.[169] Based on Paul's use of the term προστάτις, the historical data which support the possibility of female patrons, and a lack of textual evidence which would dictate otherwise, there is no reason to doubt that Phoebe was a patron.[170]

Phoebe's status as a patron sheds some light on who she was and what she did. In order to be a patron, Phoebe would have to be a woman of wealth and high social standing.[171] It is also likely that she was independent, given that she is not linked with a man.[172] In her role as patron Phoebe may have provided hospitality[173] or performed charitable works[174] on behalf of individuals, such as Paul, who would be obligated to her as clients. It is also possible that Phoebe may have hosted Christian gatherings in her home.[175] Although specifics of Phoebe's activities cannot be known, all of these suggestions are within the realm of possibility.[176]

Though Phoebe is both "deacon" and "patron" the exact relationship between these two roles is unclear. There is no evidence to show that Phoebe had to be a patron in order to also be a deacon and it is not necessarily true that she was a deacon only because she was also a patron. Although a patron would no doubt have been influential in the Christian community, Phoebe's status as leader comes from the designation "διάκονος" more clearly than it does from that of "προστάτις." Having said this, there is nothing preventing her from being both deacon and patron and the two roles fit nicely together. It is possible that they were meant to go hand-in-hand.[177]

Conclusions

Our modern diaconate in LCC is certainly not identical to that of the New Testament. At a most basic level, they had no schools in which school deacons could serve and their congregations looked very different than ours. Their congregational needs were also very different than those that we have in Canada in the twenty-first century. Nevertheless, some important parallels can and should be drawn between the two times and places.

Based on the information in this study, LCC's diaconate can be summarized in eight key points. These points, which are described below, allow comparison of the LCC diaconate to be made to that of the New Testament. While the New Testament may not directly address all of these points, they provide an important guide for the study of the New Testament diaconate.

The first of these points concerned the way in which each diaconate was instituted. The LCC diaconate was formally instituted as an office of the church based on a study of scripture

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[169] Witherington and Hyatt, *Romans*, 384.

[170] In agreement with Phoebe as patron are: Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 731; Jewett, *Romans*, 943; Cranfield, *Romans 9–16*, 783 and Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 889.

[171] Meeks, *Urban Christians*, 60.

[172] Meeks notes that she was independent. Meeks, *Urban Christians*, 60. Although women were generally thought to be under the control of a male relative at all times, it seems that this may have been more tradition than actual fact and at times women could break out of this system. Cf. Meeks, *Urban Christians*, 23 and Osiek and Balch, *Families*, 57.

[173] Winter, *Roman Wives*, 195 and Osiek and Balch, *Families*, 33.

[174] Witherington and Hyatt, *Romans*, 383.

[175] Winter, *Roman Wives*, 195; Osiek and Balch, *Families*, 33and Bryan, *Preface to Romans*, 39.

[176] Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 731.

[177] Cf. Witherington and Hyatt, *Romans*, 383.

and history as well as in answer to a perceived modern need. The New Testament also reveals a small amount of information concerning the origins of the first-century diaconate. Although there is no information about how deacons came to be serving in Philippi, Ephesus, or Cenchrea, we do have information about a general origin of the New Testament diaconate. I have demonstrated that the model upon which the New Testament diaconate was based is found in Acts 6:1–6 and so this passage also sheds light on how the office was instituted. While there is no evidence of a lengthy study or discussion concerning this office, it seems likely that the New Testament Christians did not enter into this model of assistant leadership without careful thought. Acts records that the assembly of Christians appointed the Seven on the advice of their primary leaders, the Twelve, in order to fulfill a group need. Both in the New Testament and in LCC it can be said that the office of deacon, or at least what would eventually become the office of deacon, was instituted because of the need in the Christian community to have a second group of workers to assist in filling a void.

A second point of comparison concerns the geographical settings in which deacons served. Were they local servants or travellers or both? In LCC, deacons are primarily intended to serve either in a local congregation or in a school setting, depending on their training. While it is possible for LCC's deacons to serve in other areas such as part of a service organization or in an administrative position at a district office, this is generally not the case. Similarly, as far as can be discerned, the kind of New Testament leader which we are calling "deacon" served one geographic location. Whether there were several smaller "congregations" or house churches within that one geographic location and whether a single deacon may have interacted with multiple such congregations is unknown. It can be said that the two offices are generally consistent.

Some differences between the New Testament and LCC do emerge at this point. There is no evidence that a New Testament deacon would have acted as a school teacher, nor is there a parallel for deacons working in administrative-type positions. I suggest that both of these situations come about as a result of the greater length of time that LCC's diaconate has had to develop. Neither school teachers nor administrative positions such as those known in LCC today were issues during the time of the New Testament. Our differently developed society has left LCC with needs which are distinct from those of first-century Christians and so some aspects of the LCC diaconate will also be distinct. If the diaconate was developed in order to help the church meet its needs, and if the church has a need for some of its deacons to move beyond the local sphere, then this can still be viewed as consistent with the spirit of the New Testament diaconate. Even with these slight differences, LCC's diaconate is found to be consistent with the idea that deacons are local leaders.

A third point of comparison is the level of respect afforded to the office. The LCC office of deacon is one which carries dignity and respect. This is evident based on the fact that LCC maintains a deacons' roster, includes deacons as members of Synod, and continues to maintain a careful diaconal selection and training process. By creating the diaconate, LCC granted an extra level of dignity and respect to the various positions which make up the diaconate by giving them a legitimate status in the leadership and governance of the Synod. In the New Testament, it is also apparent that those who were deacons were respected and had dignity. In Phil 1:1 the overseers and deacons are included as part of the letter's opening, possibly in order to show these local leaders respect. In 1 Tim 3:8–13 Paul outlines in great detail the qualities that such people are to possess in order to be appointed to the office. It seems questionable whether he would have gone to such lengths for a position of no great consequence. Also, Rom 16:1−2 describes

Phoebe in ways which suggest she was highly respected. Paul uses her position as deacon as one means of recommending her to the Christians at Rome. If this designation did not carry with it some kind of weight, it seems unlikely that he would have mentioned it. Also, Paul describes Phoebe as a patron, a position which would also have granted her great respect and honour in that culture. If Phoebe's role as deacon is somehow connected to her role as patron, this grants the position of deacon even greater respect and dignity according to Greco-Roman reckoning. While in different ways and for different reasons, it is clear that in both the New Testament and LCC deacons hold positions of respect and dignity.

A fourth point of comparison is the relationship between the deacon and other leadership positions. In LCC the office of deacon is subordinate to the office of pastor and is under pastoral supervision. According to this model, unless there is an office of pastor there cannot be an office of deacon. There is a strikingly similar situation in the New Testament. In Phil 1:1, 1 Tim 3:1–13 and Acts 6:1–6 there are always two levels of leadership present and the deacon is subordinate to the primary leaders. In Rom 16:1–2 while no overseer is mentioned, it cannot be satisfactorily established that Phoebe is the primary leader of the Christian community at Cenchrea. Also, by definition, the διάκονος, be that person a household servant, a messenger or a deacon, is working at the command of another. The New Testament and LCC are the same in their placement of the deacon in a secondary leadership position, under the supervision of a primary position.

A fifth point of comparison concerns the duties of the deacon in comparison with its supervisory position. In LCC all diaconal duties flow from the office of pastor; however, deacons are not eligible to preach or administer the sacraments as these two things are considered to be duties of the pastoral office alone. It is very difficult to make a detailed comparison between the New Testament and LCC on this point because the New Testament does not present any concrete evidence concerning the exact duties of the deacon. The Seven, in Acts 6:1–6, are presented as assisting in the distribution of aid for widows, but it is not at all apparent that this is the only function of the office as it began to develop. Also, Acts 6 serves primarily as a model for an assistant-type of position, not the final word on what such assistants were able to do. Additionally, Phoebe's role as patron may suggest that deacons used their wealth to provide things for the Christian community, but the extent to which her position as deacon is dependent upon her role as patron is in question. First Timothy 3 presents an even vaguer picture. While several qualifications of the deacon are mentioned, and while many try to discern diaconal duties based on these qualifications, I find this to be a somewhat futile task.

While comments on the exact duties of the New Testament deacon are nearly impossible to make with any certainty, a couple of important things can still be said. First of all, given that the deacon is always paired with another position whose title implies oversight, it can safely be said that these two positions were meant to be distinct. The differing qualifications listed in 1 Tim 3:1–13 also supports some distinction between the positions. Whether they are meant to be completely distinct positions with no overlapping duties is uncertain. What this shows, however, is that LCC's distinction between the duties of its deacons and those of its pastors is paralleled in the New Testament distinction between overseers and deacons.

A sixth point of comparison concerns the qualifications for becoming a deacon. Lutheran Church—Canada requires that deacons undergo scholarly and practical training, be recommended to the office and also accept a call to serve before they are made deacons. A person's recommendation to the office of deacon is also contingent on his or her knowledge of theology, appropriate practical skills, Christian character and blameless lifestyle. While the New Testament speaks of no schooling for deacons there are some parallels for LCC's other

requirements. In 1 Tim 3:8–13, Paul outlines several characteristics which deacons must possess. According to these verses, a deacon must be a person of firm faith. Lutheran Church—Canada is also concerned with the faith of their deacons. The concerns that deacons have knowledge of theology, possess Christian character and live a blameless lifestyle according to Christian principles are also all designed to get at the heart of an individual's faith.

First Timothy also speaks about the deacon's personal traits such as being dignified, able to properly manage his household, not being greedy for money, and not given to drunkenness. These give the deacon a positive reputation not just among the Christians he or she serves but also in the greater non-Christian community. This positive reputation of Christian leaders in turn gives Christianity itself a positive reputation. The fact that LCC requires their deacons to live a blameless lifestyle and also that they possess practical skills suited to the office are in keeping with these requirements of character in 1 Timothy.

One other parallel between 1 Timothy and LCC's process for diaconal selection can be made: 1 Timothy requires that deacons be tested before they can serve. While the exact nature of this test is unknown, a parallel can still be found in LCC. The deacons of LCC are required to undergo an extensive interview process and complete both academic and practical requirements to a satisfactory level. It is only after an individual passes these "tests" that they are eligible to receive a call and become a deacon. This demonstrates that LCC's process for screening those who wish to belong to the office of deacon is in keeping with the New Testament's requirements of firm faith, good character, and the passing of a test.

A final point of comparison between these two offices of deacon concerns gender. According to LCC, the office of deacon may be filled by either a man or a woman. This is also the case in the New Testament. Based on the findings of this study, both 1 Tim 3:11 and Rom 16:1 include women as part of the diaconate and thus, LCC's inclusion of women as part of this office is consistent with the New Testament.

This comparison shows that the model which the New Testament presents for the office of deacon is paralleled by LCC's office of deacon. It is important to note, however, that these two offices are not identical. The office of deacon in LCC is much more developed than what we can determine about the office of deacon in the New Testament period and so things such as schooling, interview processes, and synodical membership are not addressed by the New Testament. Also, the cultural differences between the ancient Christians and those of modern day LCC is vast.

This less-than-complete picture should not be cause for alarm nor should it cripple the modern LCC diaconate. In many ways it is a blessing. The information which the New Testament does provide is enough from which to glean a general model for the modern church. It provides insight into structure; it suggests qualifications; and it provides some history. All of the things which are known provide an important foundation. The things which are not known provide important freedom. The modern LCC is two thousand years removed from first-century Christianity in development and oceans apart in culture. The lack of information on some topics allows LCC to shape its diaconate into something that meets the needs of the twenty-first century Canadian church and yet still follow the model left for it by its first-century brothers and sisters.

Part 3: Contributions of the Diaconate to LCC Today and in the Future

LCC is indebted to the deacons of its past and those who are actively serving today. Our deacons serve in a vast array of areas and these will be highlighted below. Before doing so,

however, it is worth taking a brief glance at the kinds of activities the original Task Force suggested that deacons could and should participate in as congregational and school leaders.

Activities of Deacons in Lutheran Church—Canada

It was important for the original Task Force to consider which activities would be appropriate for deacons to participate in because without clarification, confusion may arise. For example, if a specific understanding of what duties a deacon is able to perform is not stated, some deacons may be given duties beyond what is intended for the office, and others may be unnecessarily restricted. Also, unless a proper distinction between deacon and pastor is made, a confusion of roles may result which may lead to power struggles in a congregation and an atmosphere of conflict rather than Christian unity.

As previously discussed, LCC teaches that the office of deacon flows out of the office of pastor and is thus under the supervision of the local pastor. Despite this close connection between the offices and the fact that all activities of the deacon may also be carried out by the pastor, deacons may not assume all aspects of the pastoral office. The document *The Ministry: Offices, Procedures and Nomenclature* states,

> Functions that are essentially exercises of the ministry of Word and sacrament should be performed by those who hold the office of the public ministry. Thus, preaching in the worship service, leading in public prayer, celebration of the Sacrament of the Altar, baptisms, wedding and funeral services should be carried out by those who hold the office of public ministry.[178]

These functions of the pastoral office are not normally open to deacons; however, this same document goes on to note that in certain circumstances, deacons may fulfil some of the duties normally only performed by those in the pastoral office, so long as there are not other reasons why they should not assume such duties. It states:

> However, in exceptional circumstances or in emergencies (as when a pastor is incapacitated), members of the auxiliary offices or other qualified individuals may temporarily be called upon to perform, under proper supervision, functions that are otherwise performed by the pastor and that are not for other reasons precluded (e.g., women teachers or deaconesses preaching in the public service).[179]

It is important to note that this does not effectively create two classes of deacons. Male deacons who, in times of emergency, fulfil some of the duties normally assigned to the pastoral office are not qualified to do so because they are deacons. Rather, these men are qualified, just as any other layman might be qualified, because they are well-versed in scripture and are leaders within the congregation.[180]

Apart from these above-mentioned activities which are specific to the office of pastor alone, there are several other functions of the pastoral office which all deacons are eligible to perform. After a study of scripture and church history, the task force suggested five areas in which deacons may serve.[181] The first area is described as an "office of love." This is described as deacons "[spearheading] common efforts of one or more congregations to give concrete expression to the love that flows from faith."[182] The kinds of activities described here encompass

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[178] CTCR of LCMS, *Ministry*, 35. This is a document of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the LCMS.

[179] CTCR of LCMS, *Ministry*, 35. Since LCC does not ordain women to the office of pastor, a female deacon should not assume any of the duties which are specifically assigned only to the pastoral office.

[180] CTCR of LCMS, *Ministry*, 37–38.

[181] These are outlined in Winger et al., "Scriptural, Dogmatic, and Historical Perspectives," G.76–77.

[182] Winger et al., "Scriptural, Dogmatic, and Historical Perspectives," G.76.

various charitable works, social work and healthcare. Although this is primarily based on observations of the historical diaconate, the Task Force does link this to the Seven in Acts 6.[183]

A second area where deacons may serve is in pastoral care. In this area, a female deacon might be better suited to serve some of the congregation's women than would a male pastor, depending on situation and circumstance. This is one of the ways in which the women of the diaconate are invaluable. The Task Force document also states,

> Bearers of the diaconal office may extend pastoral care in such a way that the unity and cohesion of the Church is promoted and the laity receive assistance to fulfil their calling as this has been described by St. Peter: 'Always be prepared to make a defence to any one [*sic.*] who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence.' (I Pet. 3:15 RSV).[184]

Under this category, the task force also included the idea of female theologians contributing to scholarly research, writing, and teaching.

The third area of diaconal service is in the area of catechesis. This area is not meant to include instruction through preaching, but rather the work of Lutheran Teachers as they teach the Word of God in the classroom.[185] It also may encompass the activities of congregational workers as they teach in various non-preaching capacities within the congregation.[186]

The final two areas where deacons may serve are in church administration and the position of church musician. No qualifications or restrictions are mentioned in the document in relation to these two areas.[187] These five areas of service provide many different avenues by which men and women of various gifts can serve their Lord under the title of "deacon."

Generally speaking, these recommendations accurately reflect the kind of work carried out by deacons in LCC today. Given the breadth of work that deacons participate in, I think it is safe to say that no two deacons serve in exactly the same capacity anywhere in our church body. Our deacons work long hours alongside pastors and lay-people to do what needs to be done in order to further the gospel in the congregations and schools where they serve.

How do deacons serve? In a plethora of ways: mission trips (local, national, international), teaching in Nicaragua, leading youth and young adult retreats (congregational, district, synod), counselling, visiting, living the faith, encouraging parents, teaching all ages, running mission organizations, teaching (school), coaching sports teams, leading after-school clubs, training up future church workers from pre-school age, encouraging pastors, empowering volunteers, leading choirs, playing musical instruments for services, listening, praying, serving on district and synodical boards and committees, acting as delegates to conventions and being ready to perform the work that God has called them to do.

In the latest edition of our LCC Annual, there are ninety-five deacons listed.[188] By far the ABC District has the largest number of deacons who are actively serving congregations or schools. In the ABC District there are twelve congregational deacons and twenty school deacons. The Central District has two congregational deacons and none serving schools. The East District has four congregational deacons and four serving schools. Additionally, there are thirty-six more deacons across Canada who are candidates, some of whom are serving congregations or schools

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[183] Cf. Winger et al., "Scriptural, Dogmatic, and Historical Perspectives," G.76.

[184] Winger et al., "Scriptural, Dogmatic, and Historical Perspectives," G.76.

[185] Winger et al., "Scriptural, Dogmatic, and Historical Perspectives," G.77.

[186] The exact words used are "the instruction of the baptized" and it specifically notes that Teachers and DCEs fulfill this role. Cf. Winger et al., "Ecclesiastical Administration," G.79.

[187] Winger et al., "Scriptural, Dogmatic, and Historical Perspectives," G.77.

[188] February, 2014, electronic edition.

without official calls. Finally, there are fifteen emeritus deacons, most of whom are school teachers. The remaining four deacons are listed in the annual without a category next to their name and so their current status is uncertain. As we have just concluded the post-secondary academic year, it is also worth noting that there are two diaconal students beginning congregational internships this summer and one additional Director of Parish Services candidate still awaiting a placement. We had no school deacons graduate this spring. We have a plethora of deacons ready, willing, and able to serve our Canadian church.

Images of Deacons

After considering the material both from the original Task Force and our deacons in active service, there are three images of "deacon" which I would like to leave you with. First is the deacon as a delegate of the leader. We see an example of this in Exod 13:18−26 where Jethro admonishes Moses to appoint men among the people to help him. Moses could not be the only one to whom the Israelites looked to for help and Godly guidance; Moses could not handle the pressure of the task alone. Therefore, Jethro advised him to appoint appropriate helpers so that Moses would not become overwhelmed with his task. Deacons serve such a purpose with the pastors with whom they serve. It is impossible in this day and age for pastors to both teach school and manage a congregation as they once did. They need school deacons to help them in the task. Often the pressures and expectations placed on a pastor of a busy congregation makes it difficult for him to also manage and attend to all the business of the congregation and its members. A congregational deacon can assist in teaching, visiting, organizing, equipping and leading as the pastor requires.

A second image of deacon which we have already examined is found in Acts 6:1−6. The Seven are appointed here to fulfil a need in the Christian community which the Apostles cannot meet as they are otherwise occupied. Nevertheless, the need must be met. The community, on the advice of the Apostles, appoints the Seven to fulfil this need for them. In the same way, deacons today assist in meeting the needs of their congregations and schools which may not otherwise be met. They assist the pastors and congregations in accomplishing the tasks that need to be done.

Finally, Exod 17:8−13 provides an image of deacon which perhaps embodies the heart of what the diaconate is. Here the Israelites are engaged in battle with the Amalekites. Moses is watching the battle from the top of a hill. While Moses' hands are raised, the Israelites are ahead in the battle. As Moses gets tired and is no longer able to hold up his hands on his own, the Israelites begin to lose the battle. In order to assist, Aaron and Hur bring a stone for Moses to sit on and each of them holds up one of Moses' hands. Because of their assistance, the Israelites defeat the Amalekites. In the same way, we can think of deacons as "holding up the hands" of the pastors that they serve with. For a time the pastor may be able to function alone. After a while, however, when the proverbial battles that are fought daily by pastors for the souls of the lost and for the spiritual health of those for whom they are responsible grow difficult, a deacon or deacons can step in to lighten the load and hold up the hands of those with whom they serve that the Gospel may prevail and the battle may be won.

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