

Ministers of Mercy

As the early church grew in number, it became necessary to appoint people to the task of serving the congregation's physical needs. The apostles were devoted to prayer and the ministry of the word, and a new office was born as seven men were appointed to this duty. (Acts 6:1-6). So important is the role of the deacon that New Testament teacher and author Alexander Strauch urges:

My heartfelt burden is to help deacons get out of the boardroom or the building-maintenance mentality and into the people-serving mentality. Deacons, as the New Testament teaches...are to be involved in a compassionate ministry of caring for the poor and needy....

Christians today must understand the absolute necessity for and vital importance of New Testament deacons to the local church so that the needy, poor, and suffering of our churches are cared for in a thoroughly Christian manner. This is a matter dear to the heart of God.¹

At Crossing, the elders recognize the need and the benefit of structuring the church according to the apostles' example. Therefore, deacons are commissioned (recognized) and empowered by the elders to meet the many practical care needs of those in our congregation. These ministers of mercy ensure that people are cared for and needs are met, and the deacons play a vital role in the way the elders provide holistic care for the flock while devoting themselves to prayer, the ministry of the word, and governing the church's affairs.

Qualifications for Deacons

As he does with elders, the apostle Paul lists qualifications for deacons in 1 Timothy 3. Since the diaconate is a distinct body of servants in the church with a conferral of recognition from the elders, and responsibility over funds, sensitive information, and people's needs, it is no surprise that God has placed standards on the type of person selected for such a role. In addition to the biblical requirements of 1 Timothy 3, Crossing looks for people who are concerned for the church and have a desire to serve.

Can Women Serve as Deacons?

Yes. At Crossing, we do not believe the Bible forbids women from serving as deacons. While there is a historical precedent for, as well as significant cultural advantages in, allowing women to serve in this role — above all, it is our conviction that the New Testament allows it; the apostle Paul even refers to Phoebe as a deacon in Romans 16:1. We believe Paul's prohibition on women exercising authority over men (1 Tim. 2:12) is enmeshed with the specific duty of teaching, which is not a task assigned to deacons.

We are scripturally convinced the office of elder (overseer) is reserved for men, based on God's design for headship and authority in the family and the church. But as servants tasked with meeting practical needs in the church, deacons may be men or women.

¹ Alexander Strauch, *Minister of Mercy: The New Testament Deacon*, Lewis & Roth Publishers, 1992, page 11.