

## God's Surprisingly Simple Solution Part 2

Main Idea: The Spirit gives deacons a job description through biblical examples.

### Intro:

This is part two of a message the elders asked me to give on deacon ministry. I want to apologize to you at the outset. A topical message on Sunday morning is the hardest type of sermon to listen to. But I can see no other way to teach what I was asked to cover. If you want a subtitle for today's message, I'd suggest, "Searching for a Missing Job Description!" Last week in Acts 6:1-7 we saw Satan conspiring with man's fallen human nature to attack the unity of the congregation and divert the apostles' attention from their priority tasks of preaching and praying. The temptation the apostles faced was to try to fix the problem themselves, to jump in and serve (that is, deacon) tables rather than "deaconing the Word!". But then we saw the wisdom of God in leading the apostles to a surprisingly simple solution to this great problem. God didn't do a miracle to repel the attack of Satan on the infant church. Instead, the Spirit led the apostles to appoint seven simple men, men from the congregation, men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom to assist the apostles by taking care of the problem. You see, the flock of God needs shepherding!

There is no indication in Acts 6 that the apostles were consciously instituting the new office of deacon in the church, but it does appear that the way in which the Spirit led them to handle this situation was a prototype for the office that later appears in the New Testament. The office of deacon is not prominent in the Scriptures only showing up two times for sure and possibly three times. The most obvious is in I Timothy 3 where Paul gives qualifications for the office of deacon. Those qualifications merit a whole message by themselves, and we are not going to go into detail on them today, but they are essential to effective deacon ministry. The second time deacon as an office shows up is in Phil. 1:1 Paul and Timothy give greetings "*to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers (or elders, bishops) and deacons.*" These two groups identified and included in the greeting in this parallel verbiage, would give the deacons status as officeholders in the church, same as the elders had in the New Testament. Remember one can discern the job description of the elders in a church from a number of passages. Let's quickly look at two of them. In Acts 20:28 Paul told the Ephesian elders, be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood." And in I Peter 5:1-3, Peter as a "fellow elder" said to the elders, "Shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock." The Spirit chose the shepherding metaphor to indicate the care the elder, the overseer, the pastor should have for the flock of the Chief Shepherd, Jesus. So, shepherding the flock is the job of the elder as he cares for the church. But the problem in the infant church in Jerusalem was that it expanded too fast as people kept coming to faith in Jesus. The apostles couldn't meet all the shepherding needs because there weren't enough elders, and they couldn't be in enough places in the right moment with enough time to adequately deal with the challenges in shepherding.

So, the apostles appointed deacons to focus in on what I like to call "hands-on shepherding." Remember, this was far more than waiting on tables. This is practical shepherding, helping the congregation, both the Hellenistic and Hebraic Christians, deal with prejudice, envy, jealousy, and bitterness. This practical shepherding, this "hands-on shepherding," preserved the unity of the church and thwarted the attack of Satan against God's work in the infant church. This "hands-on" shepherding actually allowed the apostles, the elders, to fulfill their God-given role of shepherding the whole congregation. It is important to note that the apostles didn't cede their God-given authority in their oversight of the ministry. Nor did they divert from their God-given role of prayer and ministry of the Word! These most significant aspects of elder ministry are the ones that biblically still hold priority for elders. The office of deacon obviously did develop in the life of the early church, as I mentioned before, seemingly following the prototype of the Acts 6 appointees. But we are facing a challenge in our examination of the deacons' work.

### **An Office Without a Job Description**

Imagine yourself on the top floor of a 20-story office building, sitting in your own office right next to the corner office with all the windows. You were hired as the assistant for the president of the company who has the office next door. You've been paid well for the first two weeks, but you still have no idea what your responsibilities are. Wouldn't we all wonder what had gone wrong in the personnel department that there was no job description given to help you organize your time to fulfill your role. You were only introduced to your job title and your office, that's all! That is much how it is though as we look for the job description for deacon that is given in the New Testament! There really is none! Pastor Brad has done a much better job than that in detailing the duties of the Office Manager and her Administrative Assistant:

"The role of the Office Manager is to serve the pastoral staff in their various ministries, specifically by planning, coordinating with other staff, assigning and personally participating in the completion of the daily work of the church office."

Then, listed below that heading are 15 specific ways that the Office Manager serves the elders and pastors. The Administrative Assistant's relationship to that work is also clearly defined.

Now why couldn't the New Testament Scriptures be more specific about the job description of the deacons. I can only conclude that the ministry to which God calls those in the office of Deacon is tremendously fluid in its nature. It would vary according to the specific challenge in shepherding and would depend a lot on the availability and particular gifting of the elders giving oversight to the flock. That is a construct that comes from theological reasoning and of course must be held up by the scrutiny of Scripture. It is important to note that with the possible exceptions of the seven in Acts 6 and Phoebe in Romans 16:1 there are no other deacons specifically named as such in the Scriptures. Contrast that to Barnabas, James, Timothy and Titus and others who are categorized as elders in the Scriptures. The lack of specificity in deacons' names makes it especially challenging to understand what deacons are supposed to do by looking at deacons' ministries. It is instructive to read outside the Scriptures about what the early church understood about the deacon role and their practice in that ministry, but I don't want to spend an inordinate amount of time on it this morning because I want to get back to the Scriptures. Several early church fathers mention deacons, but I want to take you only to the Didache, an instruction manual of the early church, probably from the end of the first or beginning of the second century, about 40-50 years after the deaths of Paul and Peter. This portion has been translated out of Koine Greek:

*Didache 15:1, 2; "Appoint for yourselves bishops and deacons who are worthy of the Lord: men who are meek and not lovers of money, and who are honest and proven. For to you they also perform the service of the prophets and teachers. Therefore, do not hold them in contempt, for they are honorable men along with the prophets and teachers."*

It's evident that the deacons served the teachers and prophets at this time in the church, but even here the job description is veiled. Jim Krieg, our resident Greek grammarian pointed out to me that in the Greek text, there can be two slightly different understandings in the Didache passage. Jim asks, "Are the overseers and deacons *servicing the people on behalf of* or *as directed by* the prophets and teachers, or are they serving the prophets and teachers directly?" Jim favors the first interpretation of the "...overseers and deacons are serving the people in tangible, spirit-filled ways (liturgical ways) under the direction of prophets and teachers." Jim feels that it fits Acts format for deacon ministry very well.

### **Searching for a job description:**

Let's go to the New Testament now to try to deduce a description of the deacon ministry through biblical examples. My understanding of examples of deacon ministry is informed by just reading the text of the New Testament so I recognize that because they are not explicitly named as deacons, these examples I've chosen may not be the best. But it does seem that these people served under the influence of the Holy Spirit and at the behest of the apostles, just as deacons would. Many of them are named multiple times in various contexts, but most often, it seems they are named in association with elders or apostles. One commentator noted that from his reading, it seemed that deacons served as "...go-betweens or intermediaries between the bishop and his flock, the Scriptures and daily life, and the church and society. (They also served as) ...epistle bearers for

the world wide web of Early Christianity." I've found these groupings and a few others to be a handy way to explore scriptural deacon ministry, enabling a more adequate job description.

So, let's look at some examples of deacons serving in these ways. As you see these examples, you will realize that at times there is considerable overlap in the ministries of deacons and elders.

1. First of all, examples of intermediaries between an elder and his flock.
  - a. I Cor 16:4 *"I rejoice over the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus, because they have supplied what was lacking on your part, for they have refreshed my spirit and yours. Therefore, acknowledge such men."*
  - b. Phil. 4:18 *"But I have received everything in full and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, and acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God."*
  - c. Titus 3:12-15 *"When I send Artemas or Tychicus to you..."*
2. Acting as scribes:
  - a. Rom 16:22 *"I Tertius, who wrote this letter, greet you."* (He was the scribe for Paul who evidently had some terrible problems with eyesight)
  - b. I Peter 5:12 *"Through Silvanus, our faithful brother (for so I regard him), I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it."*
  - c. Gospel of Luke and Acts... *"we sailed..."* in association with Paul
  - d. Gospel of Mark written in association with Peter.
3. Here is an example of a deacon connecting the Scriptures and daily life:
  - a. Epaphras, was a *"fellow prisoner"* of Paul in Rome (Philemon 23) was the one who took the gospel to the Colossians on behalf of Paul. (Colossians 1:6-7) *"...since the day you heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth; just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow bondservant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf..."* He was serving the Colossians, bringing them the Gospel on behalf of Paul. Col. 4:12 *"Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God, for I testify that he has a deep concern for you and for those who are in Laodicea and Hierapolis."*
4. Some served as traveling and ministry companions:
  - a. Col. 4:10-11, 14 Aristarchus, Barnabas' cousin Mark, Jesus called Justus, Luke, and Demas.
  - b. II Tim. 4:20 *"Erastus remained at Corinth, but Trophimus I left sick at Melitus."*
5. Some were epistle bearers:
  - a. Phoebe: Rom. 16:1-2 are verses from Paul's hand, verses of commendation of Phoebe. It seems from Paul's words written according to first-century custom, that Paul actually sent the letter to the Romans by her hand, typically a deacon function. One scholar commented that as she traveled, *"Phoebe carried under the folds of her robe the whole future of Christian theology."*
  - b. Tychicus: Col 4:7 & 8 taking the letter to Colossae.

I want to finish up with two of my favorite examples of great deacon ministry. Association helps me to recall lots of things. It doesn't matter if the association is erudite or inane; anything that works is fine! So, I'm characterizing Tychicus' ministry in automotive related terms, a blue tooth cell connection, a car seat, and a shock absorber. Let me explain!

First of all, serving as Blue Tooth Cell Connection:

Paul was a prisoner when he wrote the epistles of Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon. He didn't have a cell phone hooked up to blue tooth like I do in my truck. I can talk with people any time, but Paul was limited. So, look at how he communicated with the church in Ephesus in Eph 6:21 *"But that you also may know about my*

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*circumstances, how I am doing, Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord will make everything know to you. I have sent him to you for this very purpose, so that you may know about us, and he may comfort your hearts." And then to the Colossians in Col. 4:7-9 "As to all my affairs, Tychicus, our beloved brother and faithful servant and fellow bondservant in the Lord, will bring you information. For I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts; <sup>9</sup> and with him is Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of your own. They will inform you about the whole situation here."*

Now look at how Tychicus was serving as car seat: Note that Onesimus is brought into the conversation in verse 9 of Colossians 4. You can read more about him in Paul's letter to Philemon, verses 10-18. But in the letter to the Colossian church, Paul characterizes Onesimus as a "...*faithful and beloved brother, who is one of your own.*" How Onesimus got put into the car seat is an interesting story, one that we have clues about in the letter to Philemon that was carried along with this letter to the Colossians by Tychicus and Onesimus. I'm filling in the gaps with a little sanctified imagination without straying from the facts that we know for sure. Though Paul called Onesimus faithful and beloved, Onesimus was anything but faithful and beloved when he snuck out of Philemon's household. He ran away from his master to Rome, hoping to lose himself in the crowds there, never again to be a slave. He thought that he was free and was finally safe! Then one day, he saw someone that he knew from his life as a slave, and worse yet, the Apostle Paul recognized him. This was the worst thing that could happen. A runaway slave never went unpunished.

Paul sought out Onesimus and lovingly shared the Gospel with him. As he put his faith in Jesus Christ, for the first time in his life, Onesimus found out what it was to be free, really free. The problem was, the Holy Spirit started to work on his conscience. We can only guess what that was all about. Maybe he stole some gold and silver from Philemon when he ran away. Maybe he had sold himself into slavery to Philemon to pay a debt that he owed, and he still owed Philemon that money. At any rate, the Spirit convinced Onesimus that he had to return to Philemon's household, a dangerous proposition for a slave. As Onesimus talked with Paul about his conviction that he had to return, Paul wisely strapped him tight into a car seat where he could not get out. He could try to wander but would be restrained. He could whine, groan, and maybe even throw a tantrum just like young kids sometimes do when you strap them into a car seat. But the one thing that Onesimus couldn't do was get out of the car seat, because Paul sent him back to Philemon with Tychicus.

Imagine their ship stopping to take on provisions on the way back to Asia. Tychicus was there to make sure that Onesimus was on it when it sailed again. He stood by the rail with Onesimus until they could no longer see land so that Onesimus wouldn't jump overboard to try to swim back. When Onesimus would plot to run again when they reached Colossae before they reached Philemon's house, Tychicus was there telling him to put his eyes on the Lord Jesus, to trust Him fully. Tychicus told him to listen to the Spirit, to obey His promptings. Once Onesimus made the original commitment to obey the Spirit and put to rights whatever wrong he had done to Philemon, Paul made sure that Deacon Tychicus was there to help Onesimus follow through! That is hands-on shepherding!

And then Serving as a Shock Absorber: In Venezuelan Spanish, a shock absorber is a common metaphor for someone who takes the impact to soften a blow. Think of the action of the shock absorber in your car as you hit a pothole, as you go across a speed bump in a parking lot, or as you corner your car out on a fast highway. A shock absorber keeps things on an even keel, smoothing out the impact to your tires and not letting the car continue with a follow-through bounce on the springs. I'm suggesting that the Apostle Paul expected Deacon Tychicus to serve as a shock absorber in that initial meeting with Onesimus. Imagine how Onesimus would have come out of the house, in a rage with a whip in his hand to lash his returned slave. But Tychicus might have had his arm around Onesimus, making it impossible for Philemon to lash at Onesimus without hitting Tychicus too. Tychicus could have entreated Philemon to first read his letter from the Apostle Paul before doing anything to Onesimus. Indeed, if Onesimus was to have a Christian entrance back into the household of Christian Philemon, a shock absorbing deacon ministry had to be in place!

**Aquila and Priscilla, the teachers of the preacher.**

Another great example of deacon ministry starts in Acts 18.

1. Acts 18:2-3 *"And he (Paul) found (in Corinth) a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus having recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. He came to them and because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and they were working, for by trade they were tent-makers."*
2. Acts 18:19 *"Now Paul, when he had remained many days longer, took leave of the brothers and sisters and sailed away to Syria, and Priscilla and Aquila were with him."* Note name order changing like Paul and Barnabas...the more prominent of the two becoming increasingly named first (c/w Acts 11:25-30; 13:2; 42,43,46,50 etc.).
3. Acts 18:24-28 *"Now a Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by birth, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus; and he was proficient in the Scriptures. This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he was accurately speaking and teaching things about Jesus, being acquainted only with the baptism of John; and he began speaking boldly in the synagogue. But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained the way of God more accurately to him."*

Note that in their ministry Priscilla and Aquila weren't sitting around panting with anticipation like a dog waiting for his master to throw a stick to fetch. The Holy Spirit led them to work with Apollos, hands-on shepherding him without Paul giving them orders. Paul possibly was not even there! *"And when he wanted to go across to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him; and when he had arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace, for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ."* Apollos became one of the greatest early preachers because he was deaconed by a young couple led of the Holy Spirit with effective hands-on shepherding!

4. Rom 16:3, *"Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus"*
5. II Tim. 4:19 *"Greet Priscilla and Aquila..."*

### **A Useful Job Description that is Supported by Scripture:**

So, we come back to the great question: What is a useful job description for deacons that stands up to biblical evidence? Let me give you a few more observations and then we will examine the job description that we use for the deacon ministry here at EBC.

1. To "deacon" is not the only word that might be employed in the idea of service or helping out someone else. *Doulos*, another common word for instance seems to be used often about spiritual service, not just about slave labor. There are at least nine Greek words that are at times translated serve or servant. What is important though is that you would understand that service in the church doesn't dead end in the office of deacon. All of us in the church are called to serve (Gal. 5:13, I Pet. 4:10). Some of us are given a particular spiritual gift of service (Rom 12:7). And because some deacon tasks require demonstrated character and experience as well as authorization in order for the church to recognize that these duties are entrusted to trustworthy and tested individuals, some occupy the office of deacon (Phil. 1:1 and I Tim. 3:1-7).
2. Acts 14:23 gives an historical example saying that at the end of their missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas *"...appointed elders for them in each church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed."* And the Apostle Paul tells a young pastor Titus (1:5), "For this reason I left you in Crete...that you would appoint elders in every city as I directed you." Then Paul proceeds to list the qualifications for those elders. But you never see such an historical precedent or such an order in Scripture for establishing the office of deacon in the churches. Again, it is most likely that the deacons were brought on in an as-needed basis, filling the office only as qualified deacons were matched up with the need.
3. One can read of deacons in the Scriptures taking direction both from the Holy Spirit directly and through the elders (shepherds) of the church. This would certainly give a fluid character to their job at any given time and ministry context.
4. Many churches today differentiate between deacon and elder ministry saying that while the elders have a spiritual ministry, the deacons have a physical and logistical ministry to allow the elders to do their

spiritual ministry. These churches tend to make the trustees, the treasurer, the ones who facilitate large gatherings of the church or coordinate ministries, into deacons. While this is not necessarily wrong in every case, it seems to understate the real point of deacon ministry such as we see in Acts 6. It doesn't seem to translate well across the centuries of church existence either. For instance, there were no facilities for the church trustees to maintain in the early church because the churches weren't burdened with church owned buildings to care for. And the early church precedent seems to be that the elders were more involved in finances than deacons.

5. Because of their view of church offices, many people would not allow the participation of a woman in the deacon office. At Emmanuel, for a number of reasons the elders do not hold that position. I've asked the ladies in the office to make a paper that I put together available at the information desk with some Scripture investigation and theological reasoning that represents the elders' position fairly well. Feel free to pick it up after the service if you would like to study the matter more deeply. It is obvious that in the prevailing culture of N.T. times, intimate ministry by a man toward a woman would be even less acceptable than it is today. We find no other Scriptural leadership model for deacon ministry to women that would be culturally acceptable in that time. And today, especially in our Christian culture, there are still intimate shepherding needs of women, needs that need the hands-on shepherding intervention of deacons. God hasn't called male leadership to intervene in that way. We elders find it hard to ignore or discard scriptural indications of the validity of deaconess ministry, especially since we don't find that women in biblically understood deacon ministry, would be in conflict with passages like I Timothy 2:9-15, passages that are normally used to argue the regulation of participation in ministry by women. While there are meritorious alternative conclusions from theological reasoning to be respected, it is the consensus of the EBC Elder Board that women indeed can be qualified and called to deacon ministry and office. The elders believe that a proper understanding of the office and function of deacon in no way contravenes other Scriptural principles regarding women and church order, thus precluding women from serving at EBC in this way. At Emmanuel, the elders do not understand women to be candidates to the biblical office of elder.

As the EBC congregation started to grow, it was the consensus on the EBC Elder Board that we were in a situation very like that of the church in Acts 6 and that at that time, the Lord was leading us to implement a Scriptural deacon office and function at EBC.

The job description employed at Emmanuel to guide our deacon ministry is:

**EBC Definition Office and Ministry of Deacon:**

***The Office of Deacon at EBC will be filled by men and women who are recognized by the church as being full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom (Acts 6), who meet the qualifications for deacon in I Timothy 3:8-13, and who have a servant's heart toward the flock of Christ. When God's call to them is confirmed as the elders publicly lay their hands on them, they will be commissioned for specific Holy Spirit initiated, focused and empowered shepherding ministries. The deacons' ministry will be fluid in its nature, adaptable to the changing needs of the church, thus enabling the elders to fulfill their God given oversight shepherding role at EBC.***

As we close, I want to ask you to prayerfully seek the Lord for how this information you've received from the Word would apply to you personally. Here are some points of application that God has led me to mention.

**Application:**

- Congregation: More appreciation and support by all of us for the EBC deacons in their ministry.
- Congregation: More prayer for our deacons in their ministry. They indeed need to be full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom.
- Congregation: More seeking of assistance from EBC deacons and deaconesses, particularly in times when we need close shepherding.
- EBC Leaders: More intentionally close ties between deacon and elder ministries in those areas where there is crossover in shepherding.
- EBC Deacons: More consistent consciousness by the Deacons that deaconing doesn't dead end with the deacons' ministry. It goes on to include other members of the congregation. The members of the body mature as they are also included in ministry opportunities.

As Jesus builds His church, He employs simple redeemed men and women to meet even the greatest challenges facing His people, resulting in eternal honor and glory for Him as He is revealed by His character and His power in His people!

### **Women in the Office of Deacon at EBC:**

The view of church office held by many Christians would not allow the participation of a woman in the deacon office. At Emmanuel, the elders do not hold that position, mainly for the following reasons:

1. There are commands such as is found in Hebrews 13:17 to submit to the elders of the church in obedience. There are no such commands about deacons. A woman would not be usurping authority over men, violating some of Paul's instructions in the epistles to Timothy as she filled the office of deacon.
2. Rom. 16:1-2 are verses from Paul's hand, verses of commendation of Phoebe. It seems from Paul's words written according to first-century custom, that Paul actually sent the letter to the Romans by her hand, typically a deacon function as we saw earlier. One scholar commented that "Phoebe carried under the folds of her robe the whole future of Christian theology."
  - a. Phoebe is called, "...a servant (or deaconess) of the church which is at Cenchræ", tying her in an official capacity to that church. The case for Phoebe's functioning as such seems strengthened by Paul's use of another Greek word, *ousa* (*being*), which would then translate to "...being a servant (deaconess).
  - b. Then there is a particular word describing her which is translated a number of different ways, the Greek word *PROSTATIS*, meaning *to stand before*. Interestingly enough, this word has been translated in different New Testament versions apparently according to the translator's bias for or against women in that office. Some translate it making her a patron, a rich woman who funds ministry or a servant. Then others would make her a deaconess. This is the only appearance of the word in the New Testament, but the same word is used in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament that predates the time of Christ. The word's use in verses such as I Chronicles 27:31, II Chronicles 8:10, and 24:11 of the Septuagint tend to signify some type of leadership function.
3. A study of I Timothy 3:11 in the qualifications for deacons reveals that the Greek word used for women can refer to either women in general or wives. The use of the word "likewise," in both Vs. 8 & 11 seems to indicate that this is the third in the series of offices and would not indicate a linking of the deacon office with the wives of the deacons. The fact that I Timothy 3 speaks of the "women" rather than "their women" would suggest no marriage linkage between the deacons and the women. It is noteworthy that the lists of qualifications for deacons and elders (I Timothy 3:1-13) are different in that the list for elders includes no qualifications for women. Since both deacons and elders had the same privileges of marriage, the fact that qualifications for "the woman" exist only in I Timothy 3:11 (in the deacon leadership grouping) would indicate that it is not just referring to the deacon's wife but a woman occupying the office of deacon.
4. In the prevailing culture of N.T. times, intimate ministry by a man toward a woman would be less acceptable even than it is today. We find no other Scriptural leadership model for ministry to women that would be culturally acceptable in that time. Today, especially in our Christian culture, there are still intimate shepherding needs of women, needs that need the hands-on shepherding intervention of deacons. God hasn't called male leadership to intervene in that way.

The EBC elders find it hard to ignore or discard these indications of the validity of deaconess ministry, especially since we don't find that they conflict with passages like I Timothy 2:9-15 that are normally used to argue the regulation of participation in ministry by women. While there are meritorious alternative conclusions from theological reasoning to be respected, it is the consensus of the EBC Elder Board that women indeed can be qualified and called to deacon ministry and office. The elders believe that a proper understanding of the office and function of deacon in no way contravenes other Scriptural principles regarding women and church order, thus precluding women from serving at EBC in this way. At Emmanuel, the elders do not understand women to be candidates to the biblical office of elder.