

Deacon Ministry
The Need for Deacons
Acts 6:1-7

September 7, 2025

HDBC

The book of Acts offers a good picture of what the church looked like in its early development stages. For example . . .

Acts 2 – Fellowship, Bible Study, Prayer, Worship, Unity

Acts 3 – Willingness to look for every opportunity to share the gospel.

Acts 4 – Willingness to share with other believers to meet needs.

Acts 5 – Perseverance under persecution and opposition.

These are all marks of a healthy N.T. church. Another mark is found in chapter six. A healthy church is willing to adjust to meet real needs. Some things are essential and must remain fixed and are never altered. **The message of the cross. Foundational theology which is rooted in the Bible. The importance of worship, discipleship, prayer, and discipline. The fact that all believers are equipped with spiritual gifts which are to be used for the glory of God, primarily through the church.**

But there are times when the church must be flexible, without compromising the essentials. The first century church experienced a need to flex, to adjust, to do something different, because there was a need that was going unmet.

Jesus spoke of choosing new, fresh wineskins for new wine. Can't put new wine in old skins. The new wine will burst the old skins and both wine and skins will be wasted. One example of an application to this truth is found in Acts 6. The church was doing great. People were being saved, baptized and disciplined. Churches were being planted. The culture was being impacted. But the church found a need to add a ministry. It was that need and the church's response that formed the foundation of what would become **Deacon Ministry**. **This is the first in a three-part series on the Deacon Ministry.**

The N.T. speaks of two primary positions or offices in the church; pastor and deacon. Both are leaders and both are servants. The pastoral role is primarily a leadership role. Pastors are also referred to as **elders** and **overseers**. The deacon role primarily involves service. **Read Acts 6:1-7**

1. The Issue (1-2)

A complaint arose. A problem had surfaced and a storm was brewing. This problem was clearly related to the rapid growth of the young church. The last number that was reported was 5,000 (Acts 4:4) and that included only the men. It is probably that the total number was at least 20,000. This would have led to enormous organizational issues that had to be solved.

Note the nature of the complaint. It involved a group of widows who were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. Once again Satan was trying to derail this young church. He tried through persecution, but it led to greater growth. He tried through introducing sin into the body, but God dealt with it and the result was greater growth. Now he tries a third tactic. He wants to divide the church.

When a certain Dallas church decided to split, each faction filed a lawsuit to claim the church property. A judge finally referred the matter to the higher authorities in that particular denomination. A church court heard both sides and awarded the property to one faction. During the hearing they learned that the conflict had all begun at a church dinner when a certain elder received a smaller slice of ham than a child sitting next to him.

1) The neglected widows (1)

This church cared about the needs of its members, particularly the widows. Wanted to meet needs. Already seen that individuals were willing to give sacrificially and generously to meet needs. Even with the sacrificial giving, some needs were not being met.

Hellenistic Jews - Jews who had embraced more of the Greek worldview. Dropping off their Jewish heritage. Spoke Greek rather than Hebrew. They used the Septuagint rather than the Hebrew Scriptures. These were not natives of Jerusalem, but have moved there from other lands. Some may have come to Jerusalem for Passover and simply decided to stay after they were converted.

The Native Hebrews were those who were more tied to their tradition and may have spoken Aramaic as their main language. The Hellenistic widows were being overlooked. Falling through the cracks in the system.

2) The busy apostles (2)

First thought would be the apostles, who were the teaching leaders of the church could handle this. But, to do so would cause them to have less than necessary time for teaching and prayer. This was not to say widows and food distribution were not important. Matter of priorities for the various members of the body.

2. The Decision (3-4)

They would expand the ministry, increase the work force. Put some people to work. Delegate! Moses was advised by Jethro to do this when the leadership demands became too great.

1) They were to be selected by the church

Not every decision related to the church needs to be made by the entire fellowship. No way to have entire church make all of the day-to-day decisions. But there are some that the fellowship needs to make. This was one. They were going to be setting some members apart from an important ministry. It was out of this early ministry that that office and ministry of deacons emerged.

2) They were to come from the fellowship

The apostles were the teaching, preaching ministers in this early church. That was their role (4). This new ministry would be led by

laymen. Ministry needs to be shared by all in the church. Everyone has a role and a ministry.

3) They were to be carefully chosen

Not just anyone would do. Careful search. Four guidelines were stated in this one verse.

1- Men

They were to choose seven men. Women certainly had vital roles to fill, but this responsibility was given to men.

2- Good Reputation

People whom others have confidence in. Trustworthy. Men who have proven themselves. Consistent in their walk with Christ. Men of integrity. They would be handling a ministry that was already under some criticism and suspicion. Possibly handle funds given to the church.

3- Filled with the Spirit

Men who are spirit-led. Not led by money, power, position. Even the distribution of food to the widows was a spiritual function that needed to be spirit-led.

4- Filled with Wisdom

Wisdom from God that would enable them to faithfully carry out this new ministry. Not simply knowledge, but wisdom.

3. The Action (5-6)

The church followed the leadership of the apostles.

1) The Church approved (5)

The church agreed that this was a good way to meet the need.

2) The Church acted (5)

They chose seven men who would be in charge of this ministry.

Interesting that **all seven men had Hellenistic names**. The church was determined that these Greek-speaking widows would know that there was no conspiracy of disunity. The need would be met!

Stephen – He would play a pivotal role going forward. 1st martyr.

Philip – Took gospel to the Samaritans and Ethiopian eunuch.

Prochorus – Some traditions say he was martyred at Antioch

Nicanor – Nothing else known

Timon – Nothing else known

Parmenas – Nothing else know

Nicolas – He was a gentile convert to Judaism from Antioch

3) The Church affirmed (6)

The church then affirmed them through a ceremony of ordination.

The “laying on of hands” signified affirmation and approval.

4. The Positive Results (7)

The Word kept spreading, the church kept growing, even many priests were being saved. This action not only kept the church from stagnating. It propelled them to further growth.

Takeaways

1. The Church must be sensitive to real needs

Obviously we cannot as a church meet everyone’s needs. Nor does it mean the church is to step in a support someone’s laziness. But where there are real needs that the church can meet, we should consider ways to do so.

2. The church must be flexible

Willingness to make adjustments in how carryout our mission. The church can be sensitive to its culture without compromising the Word of God or the calling that we have. Paul wrote; *I have become all things to all men that I might by all means save some*. No one would accuse Paul of compromising. He was showing wisdom.

We must reject the temptation to become hard and rigid. This hardness will be our doom. We must stay fresh, alive, flexible. We are so comfortable when with the status quo. We have a natural tendency to be suspicious of change. Cling to that which we know. But faith is moving beyond that.

Interesting comment about change written by David McKenna.

A body is in balance when standing still. In order to walk, however, imbalance must be risked as one foot moves forward. In that state of disequilibrium, the body has a natural drive for stability; so the trailing foot is signaled forward and balance is regained.

Change can be frightening to some. But like taking that step and risking a fall, it is necessary for moving forward.

It is interesting that the formation of the initial deacon ministry is one of the great examples of the early church adjusting, changing, being innovative. What makes it interesting is that in too many churches the deacons are the ones who actually resist change. I'm so glad that is not the case with the HDBC deacons. These men are forward thinking, willing to lead our church to adapt for the glory of God and for the advancement of the church.

In the next few weeks we will be going through this year's process of selecting deacons. I'm preaching this series to help prepare us for that.

Please give prayerful and serious consideration to whom you will nominate. If you are nominated, don't immediately dismiss it. Pray and be obedient.