

Stratford CRC Deacon Handbook

1) Introduction

- a) The office of Deacon was instituted by the apostles in response to complaints that Greek Christians were being discriminated against in the distribution of food in the early church. The apostles asked the congregation to choose men from among themselves to ensure the fair distribution of food so that they could focus on the ministry of the word. (Acts 6: 1-6)
- b) In your ordination, you were given the following charge: “To inspire faithful stewardship in this congregation. Remind us that ‘from everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded’ (Luke 12:48b). Teach us to be merciful. Prompt us to seize new opportunities to worship God with offerings of wealth, time, and ability. Realize that benevolence is a quality of our life in Christ and not merely a matter of financial assistance. Therefore, minister to rich and poor alike, both within and outside the church. Weigh the needs of causes and use the church’s resources discerningly. Be compassionate to the needy. Respect their need for dignity; hold in trust all sensitive matters confided to you. Encourage them with words that create hope in their hearts and with deeds that bring joy into their lives. Be prophetic critics of the waste, injustice, and selfishness in our society, and be sensitive counselors to the victims of such evils. Let your lives be above reproach; live as examples of Christ Jesus; look to the interests of others.”

2) Duties

The charge to the deacons can be broken down into five primary responsibilities.

- a) **Encourage stewardship in the congregation.** Communicate to them that giving isn’t just about fulfilling an obligation, but about sharing in the blessing of God’s work here on earth and about trusting in God to provide, rather than in ourselves. This can be done directly by the deacons via presentations, workshops, etc., or in cooperation with the pastor through sermons or classes, or with the elders as a topic to be discussed in home visits. The congregation can also be encouraged to give to various causes more easily if they know more about them and can see the results of their work.
- b) **Manage the resources of the church.** The deacons are responsible for putting together the yearly collection schedule. They must evaluate all the requests for financial support that the church receives from various organizations and decide which ones to recommend to the congregation. The deacons also work with the finance committee to put together the yearly church budget.
- c) **Aid those in need.** The deacons evaluate each request for aid that comes to the church, and with compassion and wisdom, decide on a course of action. The official benevolence policy provides guidance for these decisions. Note that in some cases, the need may be met by coordinating members of the congregation to offer rides, prepare meals, paint, help with moving, etc., rather than writing a cheque.
- d) **Advocate for social justice.** Although the focus of the deacons is on individuals and families that need help, we must also be aware of the greater societal context that often pushes people into difficult situations in the first place. We must speak out against injustice in our society, though we must avoid any kind of advocacy for a specific politician or political party.
- e) **Encourage those experiencing difficulties.** A deacon’s responsibility is not just for financial needs, but to walk along with those going through hard times. Each deacon is assigned a district and is encouraged to visit people in their district who are in the hospital, are shut-ins, or are struggling with hardships of some kind. These visits can be coordinated with the deaconesses and the elders who also conduct such visits as part of their own responsibilities.

3) Characteristics

- a) **Compassionate** – Compassion is probably the most important virtue a deacon should have and develop, particularly for the poor and for those who are struggling. We should not look at people in need just as problems to be solved, but we must be motivated by a genuine love for them and a real concern for their well-being.
- b) **Discerning** – The congregation has entrusted the deacons with their resources, which are, obviously, limited, so we must be wise in how we use them. Automatically giving everything anyone asks for is not necessarily the best use of resources, nor is it always what's best for the one who's asking. Furthermore, there are those who would take advantage of the generosity of the church to scam us. However, when in doubt, err on the side of grace.
- c) **Discrete** – All matters of benevolence are confidential and cannot be shared with anyone outside the deaconate, including a deacon's wife, without the consent of the applicant, whose privacy in this difficult time must be respected. As charged in our ordination: "hold in trust all sensitive matters confided in you." When discussing benevolence in person, make sure the door is closed, and when discussing via email, make sure the subject line doesn't include any revealing information, since email accounts are often shared between husband and wife; it's best to just use the subject "Benevolence".
- d) **Sensitive** – Asking for help can be a difficult thing to do, so we must be careful to always respect people's dignity and avoid saying or doing anything that may embarrass or discourage them. We must avoid an attitude of trying to fix people's problems, but instead walk alongside those who are struggling with financial difficulties or dealing with grief over the loss of a loved one or their health.
- e) **Mature in faith** – Always remember that everything we do as deacons should be for God's glory, not our own, and is done through the power of the Holy Spirit. We must strive to grow in our walk with God and rely on him for strength and wisdom. As leaders of the church, we must serve as examples of godly living.

4) Specific Duties of all Deacons

- a) All deacons are expected to attend the monthly deacon meetings. These are normally held the third Tuesday of every month at 7:30 pm at the church. Occasional absences are permitted if you have a valid reason why you are unable to attend a particular meeting and inform the rest of the deacons ahead of time. Any deacon may be called upon to close the meeting in prayer.
- b) As an example to the congregation, every deacon is expected to attend both morning and evening services.
- c) All deacons meet in the council room along with the elders before each service. An elder is responsible for the pre-service prayer in the morning and a deacon in the evening. This is also the time we decide who will take up the collection during the service. If there aren't enough deacons present, elders may be asked to help.
- d) All deacons meet in the deacon room outside the sanctuary after each service to transfer the collection to the safe and discuss any business or benevolence concerns that cannot wait until the monthly meeting.
- e) All deacons take turns being the deacon on duty for a Sunday on a rotational basis. The deacon on duty is responsible for the following:
 - i) Ensuring the collection is transferred to the safe after both the morning and evening service. Make sure you know how to open the safe.
 - ii) Lead the pre-service prayer in the council room before the evening service

- iii) Either do the morning offertory prayer yourself, or ask the pastor or another deacon to do it for you.
- iv) If you are unable to perform these duties, you are responsible for finding a replacement.
- f) Along with the elders, all deacons serve as members of council. This involves participating in monthly meetings to handle the administration of the church, and possibly serving on one or more church committees as a council representative. These meetings are typically scheduled for the first Tuesday of every month at 7:30 pm at the church.
- g) The deacons are responsible for counting and depositing the weekly collection. This responsibility has been delegated to a special counting team, but any deacon may be called upon to help them if they are short-handed. They typically meet every other Tuesday night at 6:30 pm at the church.

5) Specific Duties of Deacon Chair

- a) Prepare an agenda for the monthly deacons meetings
 - i) Choose an appropriate devotion or bible reading to open the meeting.
 - ii) Determine from the last meeting outstanding items to be dealt with.
 - iii) Include any new business or benevolence items.
 - iv) Agenda must be forwarded to the other deacons at least two days before the meeting.
- b) Chair the monthly deacons meetings
 - i) Open the meeting with devotions / bible reading and prayer.
 - ii) Ask the other deacons for any items that need to be added to the agenda.
 - iii) Have the previous minutes approved.
 - iv) Encourage input from all deacons for matters being discussed while moving the meeting along in an efficient and timely manner.
 - v) Ask another deacon to close in prayer (rotate to a different deacon each month).
- c) Attend church executive meetings
 - i) Along with council chair, council vice-chair, council vice-all, church clerk, and consistory chair, the deacon chair is part of the Church Executive.
 - ii) Church executive will meet when needed to resolve matters that cannot be resolved within full council for various reasons and report to full council
- d) Attend annual budget finance committee meeting
- e) Receive correspondence from various sources
 - i) The chair of deacons receives e-mail from denominational sources to be dealt with or added to monthly agenda. (Examples - Diaconal Developer for our region may set up a workshop for deacons / DMC annual meeting agenda.)
- f) Prepare deacon duty schedule
 - i) The deacon duty schedule for the church year should be created as soon as new deacons have been installed.
- g) Keep the deacon binder up-to-date and bring it to each meeting.

6) Specific Duties of Deacon Secretary

- a) Take minutes for all deacon meetings
 - i) Forward the minutes to the rest of the deacons for review within seven days of the meeting.
 - ii) Present the minutes at council meetings. Note that benevolence items should be excluded as they are confidential – simply indicating that benevolence was discussed is sufficient.
- b) Archive correspondence sent to the deacons
- c) Prepare bulletin announcements

- i) Prepare any bulletin announcements that need to be printed on behalf of the deacons and forward them to the church secretary

7) Specific Duties of Deacon Vice-All

- a) Chair deacon meeting if the chair of deacons is unable to. The chair of deacons should still prepare the agenda if he is able to.
- b) Take minutes for the deacon meeting if the deacon secretary is absent. If both the chair and secretary are absent, ask for a volunteer to perform one of the duties.
- c) Maintain district lists
 - i) New deacons need to be assigned districts once they have been installed.
 - ii) Lists must indicate which members are seniors.
 - iii) Lists must be updated every year. A list of all current members and seniors can be supplied by the church secretary. A good time to update the lists is before the deacons' dinner so we know who to invite.

8) Specific Duties of Deacon Treasurer

- a) Make out cheques from deacons' fund
 - i) Each cheque requires two signatures. No deacons should ever pre-sign blank cheques -- that defeats the purpose of requiring two signatures.
 - ii) Fill out cheque information on the attached stub.
 - iii) Add the cheque number, amount, date signed, recipient, and purpose to the cheque list spread sheet. Include any invoice numbers.
 - iv) Write the cheque number on all invoices or receipts, attach them together, and place them in the appropriate envelope or folder in sequential order for easy retrieval.
- b) Keep the ledger up-to-date
 - i) The church treasurer receives bank statements which he will email to you.
 - ii) Update the ledger with the transactions from the bank statement.
 - iii) Update the "Date Cashed" column in the cheque list spread sheet for each cheque on the bank statement.
 - iv) Place a printed copy of the bank statement and cheque scans into the appropriate envelope or folder.
- c) Update signing authority for the deacons' fund with the bank
 - i) The treasurer and chair should normally sign all cheques, but two others should also have signing authority for when one or the other is unavailable. Typically, but not necessarily, this would be the secretary and vice-all.
 - ii) Signing authority should be updated shortly after the new deacons are installed and new positions are determined.
 - iii) A letter needs to be sent to the bank authorizing the signing authority changes signed by two current signatories.
 - iv) Also, photocopies of two pieces of ID for each person who doesn't currently have an account with the Stratford CIBC needs to be sent (driver's license and credit card are sufficient).
 - v) The two signatories of the authorization letter and whoever is being granted signing authority must meet with the bank representative to sign the papers. The bank will usually allow us to come in at different times of the day if we can't meet at the same time.
- d) Present deacons report at congregation meeting
 - i) Go through the ledger and tally income and expenditures for the calendar year Jan 1 to Dec 31.

- ii) Income and expenditures should be broken up into a few broad categories
- iii) Send the report to the church clerk so it can be included in the agenda distributed to the congregation beforehand.

9) Church envelopes

One deacon should be assigned to manage the church giving envelopes. They have the following duties:

- a) Assign a new envelope number to:
 - i) any family that transfers their membership to Stratford,
 - ii) anyone who makes Profession of Faith, and
 - iii) anyone who asks for them.
- b) Revoke envelope numbers from:
 - i) any family that transfers their membership out of Stratford,
 - ii) anyone who dies, and
 - iii) any inactive family that no longer attends Stratford and no longer has a mail slot.
- c) Keep both envelope lists up to date (one sorted by number, the other by last name) and inform the church treasurer and the counting team of every change.
- d) Distribution of envelopes for the new year are done together by the entire deaconate at least a week or two before the end of the year.
- e) Order envelopes for the next year
 - i) This is usually done around February
 - ii) The envelope company sends renewal forms to the church
 - iii) Make sure they are delivered to a location where they can be picked up -- there isn't always someone at the church to receive them.

10) Offering Schedule

One deacon should be assigned to prepare the yearly offering schedule. They have the following duties:

- a) Present a draft offering schedule at the November deacons' meeting for discussion and approval. Including an alphabetized list of the causes and the scheduled number of collections for each cause can make evaluation of the proposed schedule easier. Note that a yearly calendar from the CRC showing special Sundays and recommended collections is usually sent to the church and can be found on the CRC website (www.crcna.org). The CRC schedule is only a recommendation, however -- we are ultimately responsible for deciding what causes to collect for and when.
- b) Present the offering schedule for approval to council in the December meeting.
- c) The approved offering schedule needs to be passed on to the church secretary so the causes can be announced properly in the bulletin and to the worship committee to aid in their planning.
- d) All changes to the offering schedule throughout the year needs to be passed on to the church secretary and the worship committee after being approved by the deaconate.