

WCOC Deacon Selection

Who is a good candidate to be a deacon?

2012 WCOC Deacon Selection

Early in 2012 the congregation will go through a process to select additional deacons. Nominations will be solicited from every adult member of the Woodbury Church of Christ. Adult members are generally considered to be baptized believers over the age of eighteen. A deacon selection committee will review the nominations and submit to the elders the names of nominees who have received significant congregational support. The elders will meet with these nominees to discuss their suitability and willingness to serve as deacons. The names of approved candidates will then be submitted to the congregation for final approval. Further details and exact dates will be provided soon.

Although Scripture does not provide extensive teaching about deacons, there are a couple of passages—Acts 6 and 1 Timothy 3—that describe the kind of man we are looking for. These descriptions should guide members as they consider who to nominate.

What Kind of Man Should You Look For?

Before examining the two passages mentioned above, a few general comments are in order. First, one of the passages we will examine (Acts 6) does not refer to deacons by that name. However, the work they were called to do suggests that they were to serve in a deacon-like function whether or not they were given the title. Also, it should be noted that the verb form of *deacon* is used in this passage to describe their work.

Second, it is important to note that the two descriptions we will examine are not identical. They are certainly not incompatible, but they are significantly different. Each contains descriptions not found in the other list. This suggests that neither description was meant to be a hard and fast checklist for all deacon candidates throughout the history of the church. Neither can we derive a “checklist” by combining the two descriptions, for that combined list would be different than either of the two churches in Scripture had (the Jerusalem church in Acts 6 and the Ephesian church in 1 Timothy 3). Rather, these descriptions are simply helpful and important guides giving us an idea of the kind of man who would likely make a suitable deacon.

Acts 6

¹ In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.

² So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. ³ Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are **known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom**. We will turn this responsibility over to them ⁴and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.”

On this occasion, the apostles gave a short and to-the-point description of the kind of men they had in mind. They should be “known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom.” That is, they were to be men who demonstrated wisdom in their manner of life. And not just any wisdom, but the wisdom that comes from the Spirit. The word that the NIV translates as “known to be” could be considered as a separate element of the description: “who are *well respected* and are full of the Spirit and wisdom” (New Living Translation).

1 Timothy 3

⁸ In the same way, deacons are to be worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. ⁹ They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. ¹⁰ They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons.

Deacons are to be **worthy of respect**. Verse 8 begins with a look back (“in the same way”) to the previous verses in which Paul had described the kind of men elders should be. He concluded his description by writing that elders must “have a good reputation with outsiders.” This makes it clear that deacons, also, should be respected by outsiders as well as by members of the church. The remainder of verse 8 deals with specific behaviors that impact a man’s reputation with outsiders.

Sincere. The deacon must be a man of integrity. The word in the original language directs attention especially to his speech habits: “not double-tongued” (English Standard Version). **Not indulging in much wine**. Paul does not require deacons to be teetotalers, but they certainly should “not be heavy drinkers” (New Living Translation). **Not pursuing dishonest gain**. Someone who is dishonest in business dealings is unsuitable as a deacon.

They must **keep hold of the deep truths of the faith** with a clear conscience. The “deep truths” or “the mystery of the faith” (New Revised Standard Version) does not refer to truths that are hard to understand, but rather to truths that God has revealed to us. Deacons are not necessarily expected to teach (as elders are), but they are expected to follow the teachings of Scripture in their own lives.

They must first be tested. The passage does not specify how they are to be tested. Our selection process includes interviews with the elders, during which the candidate’s suitability is examined. Also, it is best to select men who are already active in ministry. That is, they are already acting like deacons and have already proven themselves.

¹¹ In the same way, the women are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything.

It is not clear what group Paul is talking about in verse 11, since the same Greek word can mean either “wife” or “woman.” Paul is either referring to female deacons or to the wives of deacons. If he is referring to wives, then we see that they, too, must be **worthy of respect** (see verse 8). Specifically they are to exercise **control in their speech** and are to be **trustworthy**.

¹² A deacon must be faithful to his wife and must manage his children and his household well. ¹³ Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus.

A deacon must be **faithful to his wife**. Literally, Paul says he must be a *one-woman man*. When we compare this to a similar description of widows in chapter five, verse nine, (*one-man woman*) we see that the term does not refer to monogamy, which would be an unnecessary restriction in regard to women in that society where there are no known cases of women with multiple husbands, nor to how many times a person has been married (since Paul, in fact, encourages young widows to remarry), but rather to their faithfulness in marriage.

He also must **manage his children and his household well**. The home is an important proving ground for those who are being considered for a church office. Significant problems in home-life point to potential weaknesses in the candidate.

Please give careful and prayerful consideration to these passages of Scripture as you decide who to nominate as deacons for the Woodbury Church of Christ.