

PHILOSOPHY

1. Biblical Basis

We see the prototype for today's diaconate in Acts 6:1-7, a list of high qualifications in I Timothy 3:8-13 and the church office assumed in Philippians 1:1.

2. The Problem and Solution

The creation account in Genesis 1-3 places people in perfect relationship to God, self, others and the rest of creation. A profound lack of poverty existed. However, Adam's sin destroyed these relationships, giving rise to various poverties seen throughout the Bible. Scripture records the human struggle in light of God's sovereign salvific plan, culminating in the complete reconciliation of all things ultimately and only in Jesus (i.e. Colossians 1:20). Reconciliation is the deepest need for all of humanity and Jesus is the only complete answer.

Until all things are reconciled, we all have various broken relationships, giving rise to poverty of various kinds.

The problem deacons exist to address in practical love is the poverty of broken relationships with God, self, others and the rest of creation. This poverty is not limited to the materially poor and may express itself as emotionally, socially, physically and financially challenging circumstances. Practically loving hurting people in these challenging circumstances and working with them to alleviate the particular poverty is how the deacons seek to see the Gospel transform everything. This is a practical expression of Christ's command to all believers to love our neighbor as ourself.

For example, the early church organized the prototype for today's deacon to extend practical love to hurting people by serving tables (Acts 6:1-7). In this case, a deeper issue was broken relationships between the widows and others (discrimination).

3. How

Unlike the elders, who are responsible for preaching, teaching, counseling, prayer, and casting the vision of the church, the diaconate focus on extending practical mercy and compassion.

The diaconate strives to link individuals to the broader Christian community within The Town Church, in the hopes that they will sense Christ's love long beyond their experience with the diaconate (Deuteronomy 15:7-11; James 2:12-16; Acts 2:44,45). In addition, when providing material assistance, the diaconate strives to do so in the context of long-term empowering relationships rather than enabling relationships.