

Support Your Local Pastor: How Deacons Can Help Their Pastors

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Pastors and deacons are the two scriptural offices (leadership positions) of the church named in the Bible (1 Tim. 3:1-13) and in the *Baptist Faith and Message 2000* (Article VI). God intends the persons who serve in these two key church offices to work together cooperatively, not against each other. In this article, let me suggest eight ways that deacons can enhance the life and ministry of the pastors with whom they serve the Lord and His church.

Be a Problem Solver. The group of men described in Acts 6, commonly understood to be the first deacons, was established in order to solve a problem in the Jerusalem church. There was a perception among the Greek widows that they were not being treated equally with the Hebrew widows. The first deacons were appointed in order to solve this problem, thus allowing the apostles (who were the pastoral leaders of the Jerusalem church) to focus on the ministry of the Word (Acts 6:1-4). Good deacons are always problem solvers. Because they are respected and trusted leaders in their church and community, they are in a unique position to solve problems that arise within the church. Deacons can intervene among the people of the congregation to soothe hurt feelings, mediate disagreements, clear up misunderstandings, and resolve personality conflicts. When they are solving problems, deacons are performing the specific task for which the office of deacon was originally created to accomplish.

Be a Servant. The New Testament word for “deacon” (*diakonos*) means to be a servant (1 Tim. 3:8). The original assignment of the first group of deacons in the Jerusalem church was to wait tables at church meals and to minister to the poor. Deacons should be engaged in a ministry of servanthood, ministering to and serving the people of God. Deacons who attempt to be a Board of Directors that tells the pastor how to do his job have departed from the original function and meaning of being a deacon. Every deacon should serve the church in some way, consistent with his gifting from God.

Be a Companion in Ministry. Pastoral ministry can be lonely. Most pastors appreciate having deacons who go along with them for evangelistic visits, hospital visits, shut-in visits, and nursing home visits. Having a companion along is particularly helpful when a pastor is visiting a woman, in order to avoid any false allegations or misleading rumors. Also, the deacon’s presence may enhance the quality of the pastor’s visit for the person being visited. If the deacon has a special connection with the person being visited, he can help facilitate a deeper and more meaningful level of communication in the visit.

Be a Prayer Partner. Pastors are always in need of prayer. They cannot accomplish anything of lasting, supernatural impact through their own strength. Such life transformation

comes only through the intervention of the Holy Spirit. Pastors can feel the difference when the people of the church pray for them. It is hard to criticize and undermine the ministry of those for whom we pray. Deacons should lift up their pastors in both private and public prayers. Many pastors would be encouraged by having a deacon as a prayer partner, or to have a group of deacons praying for them before worship services. Prayer is the key to the spiritual power of the church, and deacons should be exemplars of prayer in the church.

Be Consistent. The New Testament list of qualifications for deacons mentions that a deacon should not be “double tongued” (1 Tim. 3:8, NASB) or “hypocritical” (1 Tim. 3:8, HCSB). Deacons should be men of integrity, men of their word who mean yes when they say “yes” and mean no when they say “no” (Matt. 5:37). Deacons who disagree or have concerns with church proposals should have the integrity to voice those concerns. However, after the deacon fellowship agrees to support a proposal, all deacons should unite to support it publicly. Deacons should not flee the field at the first sign of disagreement on something they have previously agreed to support. Once they agree to a proposal, deacons should be consistent in their support in both private and public conversations.

Be an Encourager. King David was blessed by having three mighty men who distinguished themselves not only with their bravery in battle, but also by their intense personal loyalty to David (2 Sam. 23:8-12). One time in the midst of a war with the Philistines, when the enemy had occupied David’s home town of Bethlehem, David made an offhand comment about how much he desired a cup of water from the Bethlehem well. At great personal risk, the three mighty men sneaked through the Philistine lines to secure the cup of the cherished Bethlehem water for their leader (2 Sam. 23:15-16). Good deacons listen attentively to hear the desires of their pastors, and seek to meet them. When deacons demonstrate their loyalty to their pastor by meeting even minor needs or wants, they can be a great encouragement to the pastor.

Be a Trusted Confidant and Friend. Pastors are public figures known to many people in the community, but it is not prudent for them to “bare their souls” to anyone and everyone in the church. Some of the pastor’s deepest burdens may involve sensitive or confidential information which cannot be shared widely. Deacons can be a “sounding board,” trusted confidants who listen and provide their advice about how to handle these issues. Of course, such matters must be kept in absolute confidence, without sharing this information with anyone. No matter how “juicy” the confidential communications are, good deacons would never share that information with others. To do so would violate the confidence and cause even greater problems, including the pastor and other persons involved feeling betrayed. Deacons can be trusted confidants who befriend their pastor through these personal and ministerial challenges. Sometimes the pastor needs to be pastored himself as he walks through personal setbacks and sorrows. Deacons can also serve as accountability partners to help their pastor progress in his own spiritual pilgrimage.

Be a Positive Man of Faith. In the Apostle Paul’s description of the qualifications for a deacon, he twice lists faith as a crucial quality for deacons. Deacons should be men who hold

“the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience” (1 Tim. 3:9, HCSB), and who have “great boldness in the faith that is in Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 3:13, HCSB). Men of faith are not always criticizing or thinking of reasons why something won’t work. Men of faith are positive, supportive, and encouraging. Instead of allowing challenges to be an excuse to give up, men of faith find ways to overcome challenges. Pastors are charged with being the vision casters for the church, but deacons can help that vision become a reality. Because deacons are trusted and respected leaders, their affirmation means a great deal to assure the success of a new proposal. Positive, successful churches usually have deacons who are positive men of faith.

When deacons and pastors work together effectively, the result is normally a successful ministry. Deacons being all that they should be help their church become all that it should be.

This article was originally published as Steve Lemke, "How Deacons Can Help Their Pastors," the second in a series about the role of deacons published in the “Theological Thought” column of the [Louisiana] *Baptist Message*, vol. 124, no. 12 (11 June 2009), 14; copied here with permission from the *Baptist Message*.