

# **Deacon Handbook**

The Deacon Ministry of

**New Hope Baptist Church,  
Valparaiso, Florida**

## INTRODUCTION

This manual is dedicated to helping you as a deacon to serve faithfully and effectively. It is designed to acquaint you with the Biblical materials related to the position of deacon and the particulars of the deacon ministry of the **New Hope Baptist Church of Valparaiso, Florida**. It is modeled after a Handbook for Deacons developed by the First Baptist Church of Garland, Texas. In the Fall of 2002, their Pastor, Steve Davis, commented that much of the church's growth may be credited to its strong deacon leadership. This handbook is provided to assist each deacon of New Hope in carrying out the responsibilities authorized them by the congregation.

The church has elected you to the honorable position of a deacon because your life has exhibited the characteristics of faithfulness and loyalty both to the Lord and His church. A deacon must remember, however, that Jesus said, "***The greatest among you shall be your servant.***" (Matthew 23:11).

Three passages in the New Testament are commonly cited concerning the office of deacon: Acts 6:1-7, Philippians 1:1, and I Timothy 3:8-12. The word for deacon in the New Testament originally described a **servant** who "*stirred up dust while waiting on tables.*" As a deacon, your major attention will be given to serving God under the leadership of the pastor and deacon officers in the practical ministry of the church.

### I. THE BIBLICAL / HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF A DEACON

Acts 6:1-7 is the passage often cited for the beginning of the office of deacon in the early Christian church. Though the seven who were elected were not specifically called "deacons" in the technical sense, they nonetheless functioned as servants to the church. The office of deacon probably grew out of this experience.

Without belaboring all of the details of the Acts 6 passage, let's look at the purpose for which these men were selected. One reason they were chosen was to solve a problem that arose among the church fellowship. **They were called upon to preserve the harmony of the church.** Another reason was to **free the apostles to give full attention to prayer and the ministry of the Word** (verse four).

The **position** of deacon in Acts 6 is an elected one. A deacon should first feel led by God to serve in that position; however the initiation of that commitment rests in the hands of the local church. It is not a position to which one appoints oneself.

## II. BIBLICAL / PRACTICAL QUALIFICATIONS OF A DEACON

### A. Spiritual Qualifications

Brothers, 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<sup>4</sup> and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."

<sup>5</sup> This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man **full of faith and of the Holy Spirit**; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism.

<sup>6</sup> They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

<sup>7</sup> So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

Acts 6:4-7 (NIV)

#### 1. Full of the Holy Spirit

Many times as churches begin to consider men to serve as deacons, you hear comments such as "X is a good businessman" or "Y is here every service" or "Z is a big giver to the church." It is important to note that the Biblical core qualifications of a deacon are spiritual. God is looking not on the outward that we can easily check or measure, but at the heart. The men the church chooses must be Christians to their very core being, living their lives in and through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Note that Stephen was "a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit" who the Bible records as living in and through the power of the Holy Spirit.

"Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people." Acts 6:8 (NIV)

Philip likewise was mightily used of God as an evangelist.

Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there.<sup>6</sup> When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said.<sup>7</sup> With shrieks, evil spirits came out of many, and many paralytics and cripples were healed.<sup>8</sup> So there was great joy in that city. Acts 8:6-8 (NIV)

#### 2. Full of Wisdom

*Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)--Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia. These men began to argue with Stephen,<sup>10</sup> **but they could not stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke.** Acts 6:9 -10 (NIV)*

If anyone in a Baptist church needs to have a firm grasp of the doctrines of the Christian faith it is the deacon. The church is content oriented. We believe in the revealed Word of God. As a deacon performs his ministry, he will be in contact with the world. Through the power of the Holy Spirit and his grasp and application of God's Word, he will do God's work – God's way.

<sup>16</sup> *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,* <sup>17</sup> *so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*  
2 Tim 3:16-17 (NIV)

The deacon must have a firm grasp on the essentials of our faith and must be held by them. The church is built upon truth. Every member should have this grasp, but the deacon's ministry depends on it.

### **3. Full of Faith**

When the apostles laid out the plan for deacons, the Bible records that : <sup>5</sup> ***This proposal pleased the whole group.*** “ **Acts 6:5 (NIV)** When deacons got busy, complaints about the benevolence ministry ceased. Note that the complaints were by the Greek-speaking believers, and that the Hebrew speaking believers bent over backwards to meet their needs by selecting deacons with Greek names. It is still true today. When deacons serve their church by meeting people's needs the whole church benefits and is more likely to be in unity.

Also note the evangelistic benefits. ***“So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.”*** Acts 6:7 (NIV)

Again, it is still true. When a church has deacons who are serious about sharing their faith, the whole church's evangelism outreach will benefit.

Deacons must be men who are “about the Father's business” regardless of what earthly business they may be in. They are full of faith, and their lives are full of God's work.

## B. Moral Qualifications

<sup>8</sup> Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain.<sup>9</sup> They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience.<sup>10</sup> They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons.<sup>11</sup> In the same way, their wives are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything.<sup>12</sup> A deacon must be the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well.<sup>13</sup> Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus. **1 Tim 3:8-13 (NIV)**

Worthy of respect  
**"semnos"**

A Deacon is to be a man who has the bearing of respectfulness and dignity -- a mature man of character and spiritual demeanor.

Sincere  
**"dilogos"**

A Deacon is to be an honest man who is verbally consistent. Literally this could mean not "double-tongued". He speaks the truth. He must be a man who lives the way that he talks.

Not indulging in much wine  
**"prosexontas"**

While the original word refers to habitual consumption, it is our belief that blamelessness and dignity in a Deacon is increased by total abstinence. Perhaps Solomon had this in mind for those who lead when he wrote, *"It is not for kings ... to drink wine, not for rulers to crave beer; lest they drink and forget what the law decrees ..."*. (Proverbs 31:4-5a, NIV) For this reason, the Deacons of **New Hope** are men who choose to limit their liberty for the sake of unquestionable credibility in this area.

Not pursuing dishonest gain  
**"aisxrokerdes"**

A Deacon must be purely motivated in his ministry (glorifying God's name and cause). The acquisition of financial gain or power cannot be his hidden agenda. His business dealings outside the church must be worthy of one who represents Christ and His church.

Keep hold of the faith  
**"tes pisteos"**

A Deacon must understand Christian truths as well as New Hope's doctrinal position and unreservedly acknowledge and promote those truths with clear conscience. Paul wrote, *"In view of this, I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and before men"*. (Acts 24:16)

First tested  
**"dokimazesthrosin"**

A Deacon must have proven over a period of time that he evidences qualities of character and ministry necessary for serving the Body. The guideline we follow is that a Deacon nominee must have been a church member in good standing for at least 12 months.

Husband of one wife  
**"mias gunaikos andres"**

A Deacon must be clearly committed and devoted to his wife. This phrase could be translated "one woman man." It should be clear to those who know the candidate best that he is in loving relationship with his wife. Divorce occurs in many families. If it has occurred in the life of the prospective deacon the circumstances and the way in which the candidate reflected his faith will be the subject of discussion in the screening process. We will examine each case and candidate individually.

Good manager at home  
**"kalos proistamenoj"**

A Deacon must be the spiritual leader in the home and one who manages the affairs of his household with diligence. When, and if, children do rebel against the values of the home, the Deacon is responsible for responding biblically. The issue at hand is not blamelessness in the children of the Deacon, but the relationship and responsibility of the Deacon toward his children being developed and maintained in biblical fashion.

## QUALIFICATIONS FOR THE WIFE OF A DEACON (1 TIMOTHY 3:11)

***In the same way, their wives are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything. 1 Tim 3:11 (NIV)***

1. **Worthy of respect** \*

This is the same term found in v.8 concerning deacons. It means "dignified, honorable, not taking lightly things that are of a serious nature."

2. **Not malicious talkers** \*

This comes from the Greek word *diabolos* or devil. One of the devil's chief characteristics is that he slanders or makes false accusations. A deacon's wife must not speak quickly and when she does speak, do it in love. Gossip must never be a part of her nature. She could undo in one sentence what her husband worked out in loving service.

3. **Temperate** \*

This means having self-control in all things.

4. **Trustworthy in everything** \*

A deacon's wife must be trustworthy. From time to time she will hear information that for the good of the church and the people she must keep to herself.

\*All scripture quotes are from the New International Version.

## PRACTICAL DUTIES

The **practical duties** of a deacon are the following:

1. Loyal support of the pastor and staff.
2. Faithful attendance at the services of the church.
3. Encouragement of and participation in the organizations of the church - Sunday School, Music, Missions, Outreach, Prayer Room, etc.
4. A consistent commitment to stewardship shall be attested by the Deacon's example of tithing to the Church.
5. Personal evangelism among the lost and visitation of the sick, shut-ins and indifferent of the membership.
6. Regular attendance at the meetings of the deacons.
7. Assistance with new member assimilation.
8. Participation in the "Deacons of the Week" assignments.

## III. SELECTION OF A DEACON

**GENERAL:** The number of new deacons needed shall be determined by the deacon officers, as stipulated in a Church Constitution (example: one (1) deacon for every thirty (30) to fifty (50) resident members), or at the pleasure of the Church to meet changing needs. Candidates must have been members of this church for a minimum of one year. The following provisions shall serve as guidelines for nominations for election:

- A. Over a period of two or three Sundays during late spring, a "Deacon Candidate Ballot" will be distributed and collected during church services. Deacon qualifications will be publicized.
- B. The Pastor and Deacon Officers will meet with candidates who are selected by the church and outline Biblical qualifications for becoming a Deacon. The Deacon Questionnaire (Reference Attachment 1) will be given to the candidates at this time.
- C. A "Deacon Questionnaire" must be filled out and returned to the Pastor's office for one's name to be considered for election and service. (See Appendix A for Questionnaire)
- D. A Deacon Confirmation Committee will be made up of the past Deacon Chairmen in the church, plus two appointees of the current Chairman (appointees will not be deacon officers.) *(Upon initial implementation this role will be filled by the Pastor and Minister of Music as an interim Confirmation committee that dissolves once the deacon body is*

*formed.*) The appointees will have been ratified by a majority vote of a quorum of the Deacon body present at a regular meeting of the deacons. The chairman of the committee will be the past Deacon Chairman whose term was earliest. The Deacon Confirmation Committee will review the questionnaires and meet with each candidate personally.

- E. After the candidates have met with the Confirmation Committee and have agreed to serve, their names will be published. Any church member with an objection to a candidate may do so in writing to the Pastor. The Pastor will meet with the candidate privately to review the objection. If necessary, the Pastor will reconvene the Deacon Confirmation Committee to review the objection.
- F. The candidates who are confirmed by the committee and complete orientation will be submitted to the Deacon body for consideration. Candidates who are qualified to serve and who have not been previously ordained as deacons will be presented to the church for ordination. *(Initially after clearing confirmation and orientation, candidates will be submitted to the church for approval by 2/3 vote at any monthly business meeting. Hereafter the deacon body serves in that role.)*
- G. If an individual has previously served as a deacon in another church, and desires to actively serve at New Hope Baptist Church, he must:
  - (1) Be a member for at least one year;
  - (2) Notify the Pastor and the deacon officers of his desire for active deacon ministry;
  - (3) Meet with the Pastor and the deacon officers;
  - (4) Complete the Deacon Questionnaire and Deacon Orientation sessions;
  - (5) Be approved by 2/3 majority of a quorum (50% of active deacons) present at a regular meeting of the deacons and then by 2/3 majority of the church membership meeting in regular conference.

The individual may attend regular meetings of the deacons, but will not have a voting privilege until the process for active service has been completed.

#### **IV. SERVICE OF A DEACON**

- A. A deacon shall remain in active status as long as he annually indicates his desire and commitment to serve, is regular in attendance at the deacons' meetings and participates in the ministries of the deacon body. If a deacon is absent from three (3) consecutive deacons' meetings without acceptable explanation, he will be declared inactive, and a replacement will be sought. Inactive means just that, no voice and no vote.
- B. There are some instances when a deacon feels it is necessary for him to become inactive for a period of time. As long as his inactive service does not exceed two (2) consecutive years, he will be given opportunity to reactivate himself at the appropriate time.
- C. If a deacon exceeds two consecutive years of inactive service, he may be declared active again after notifying the deacon officers of his desire, meeting with the Pastor and deacon officers for an updated orientation, and approval by two thirds majority vote of the quorum present at a regular meeting of the deacons.

## V. RELATIONSHIPS OF A DEACON

Certainly the deacon's primary relationship is to his Lord. Without that vertical relationship being what it ought to be, the horizontal relationships will be distorted. A deacon should be more concerned about his walk with God than anything. Next in importance is the deacon's knowledge and understanding of his role in relation to his family, pastor, church committees, and the church membership at large.

### A. Family

The New Testament mentions a deacon's responsibility in relation to his wife and children; therefore, the church feels that a deacon should give his family ***first priority*** in his devotion, care and ministry. It is through this ministry to his family that the deacon's faith and devotion to God will be on display most often. Consequently the deacon body and the pastor will strive to support and encourage one another in their family ministry role.

### B. Relationship to the Pastor

1. A deacon should serve under the leadership and spiritual direction of the pastor and be loyal to his pastor in prayer support, encouragement and ***followership***.
2. The **New Hope Baptist Church** looks to the pastor for giving overall leadership and administration to the church and its ministry. The church therefore expects the deacons to respect the office of pastor and to welcome the unique opportunity to learn from and serve with the pastor. As a deacon functions in the practical ministry of the church, the pastor is freed to give attention to prayer and the ministry of the Word.

### C. Relationship to Committees

The deacon body may give counsel to, but will not have control of, all committee actions. **Nowhere in the New Testament is there even a hint that the deacon body is to function as a "board of directors" or as administrators of the church's business affairs. Deacons are servants first and last.** Out of courtesy, committees may report to the deacon body concerning actions or recommendations for information and feedback. The deacon body may indicate support or give counsel, but may not instruct committees as to what they can or cannot propose to the church for official action. The deacon's role is that of a servant. If their expertise and wisdom can help others serve Christ more effectively, it can be offered, but it is up to those to whom it is offered to decide whether to accept it or not.

### D. Relationship to the Church Membership at Large

The deacons are to be active in ministry to the church family, and to promote peace, harmony and a spirit of cooperation and unity among the membership. The primary relationship of the deacons to the church is as follows:

1. **Deacons are to be problem solvers and preservers of church harmony.** Robert Naylor, former President of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, in his book, **The Baptist Deacon**, wrote concerning the deacon's responsibility to preserve harmony in the church: *"When a man becomes a deacon, he loses the privilege, if such exists, of participating in a church row. A member of the ranks may claim that often-abused privilege, 'speaking his mind.' When a man becomes a deacon--selected and called by the Holy Spirit, chosen by the church, dedicated by personal choice--he forfeits the right to promote in any fashion, a division in the life of the church. The one inescapable duty of the deacon in the New Testament was the protection of the church fellowship. When things arise that are divisive, it is time for a deacon who believes the Book to stand up and say: "We cannot do it this way in this church. We must have harmony and peace if we are to follow Christ." That could make the difference between a great, fruitful church and an ineffective, dried-up one."*

Every deacon carries two imaginary buckets: one of water and one of gasoline. He determines in many situations whether he will help put out the fires of disharmony or if he will fuel the problem.

2. **Deacons are to be active in ministry** that will enable the pastor to feed the flock faithfully and to be able to spend the necessary time in prayer for God's direction and inspiration in leading the church.

## **VI. RESPONSIBILITIES OF A DEACON**

In accordance with the meaning of the word of the New Testament, deacons are to recognize their roles as ministering servants of the church. They are to be members of this church whose character and qualifications shall be as specified in I Timothy 3:8-13, Acts 6:1-6, and Titus 1:6-9.

Responsibility: The deacon body shall serve under the leadership of the pastor and assist him in performing duties in order to free him for the ministry of the Word. The deacons will support and work with the pastor as follows:

- A. To lead the church in the achievement of its mission;
- B. To minister the gospel to believers and unbelievers;
- C. To care for the church's members and others in the community;
- D. To have a consistent commitment to stewardship that shall be attested to by the Deacon's example of tithing to the Church;
- E. To demonstrate Christ-like consecration, loyalty, prayer support and faithfulness to the local church program;
- F. To visit the sick, needy and indifferent of the church;
- G. To encourage and strengthen new converts and the spiritually weak;
- H. To attend deacons' meetings regularly.
- I. To be available with his wife at worship services for assisting the pastor in receiving new members. Training sessions will be offered to acquaint everyone with the procedures to follow.
- J. To be available to assist with the "Deacon of the Week" assignments for contacting guests from Sunday, providing assistance in serving and/or cleaning up from the Wednesday night fellowship meal, and participating in the prayer visits.

## **VII. DEACON EMERITUS**

When a deacon is unable to regularly participate in the meetings and activities of deacon service due to age or health restrictions, he may request a "Deacon Emeritus" status, which exempts him from regular duties without affecting his participation and voting privileges in deacons' meetings.

## **VIII. DEACON MEETINGS**

The meetings of the deacon body shall be restricted to active deacons of this church, those classified as "Deacon Emeritus", the pastor, and ministerial staff, unless otherwise requested by the deacon body. Regular meetings will be determined by the Deacon officers in consultation with the Pastor. Meetings of the deacon body will be generally scheduled once a month, but no less than once every two months.

## **IX. ORDINATION OF A DEACON**

The ordination of a deacon is designed to be a meaningful time of commissioning to faithful service. I Timothy 3:10, states that a man must first be "tested" before serving as a deacon. Time in the faith, in the church, and in diligent study of the Bible and prayer help produce Godly men. As leaders of men and servants to all it is customary before ordination for a man to submit to a time of questioning concerning the following subjects:

- A. What is your view of the Bible? (II Timothy 3:16, II Peter 1:20)
- B. Do you believe in the security of the believer? Cite supportive Scripture references (Ephesians 2:8, John 3:16, I John 5:11-13; John 10:28-29)
- C. What is the mission of the church? (Evangelism and Discipleship- Matthew 28:19-20, and Ministry, Worship, and Fellowship – Acts 2:42-47).
- D. What does it mean to be filled with the Holy Spirit? (Ephesians 4:24-31, 5:18, Galatians 5:22-25).
- E. Do you believe in spiritual warfare? Cite a scripture reference for guidance (Ephesians 6:10-18)
- F. Are you faithful in your stewardship by tithing to New Hope Baptist Church?
- G. Would you share your personal testimony?
- H. Is your wife in full support of your service as a deacon?
- I. What would she tell us about your service to Christ in the home, your witness to the world, and your commitment to the church?
- J. Have you read together the qualifications of a deacon's wife, found in I Timothy 3:11? Does she understand the limits on speech, demeanor, and the call to faithfulness the deacon's wife must embrace?
- K. Is she willing to live by that standard?

## **CONCLUSION**

The office of a deacon demands a high level of commitment, a mature knowledge of the faith and dedication to fellowship and service.

I Timothy 3:13 summarizes it best, **"For those who have served well as Deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus."**

That high standing does not mean a qualification for promotion in the church. Rather, it is the ability to speak with boldness from a faith and a testimony grounded in loyal and humble service to Christ and to His bride, the church.

That great confidence does not give one the right to look down on any man, but the ability, borne out of a Christ-centered life, to look anyone in the eye and tell of Christ's love in an appeal to their decision to trust Christ as you have trusted Him and live for Him.

May your service as deacon be one of the richest and most rewarding parts of your walk with the Lord.