SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST ®

DEACON'S AND DEACONESS'S HANDBOOK

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PREFACE

This is the latest in the series of handbooks for local church ministry, produced by the Ministerial Association of the General Conference. The first one, The *Seventh-day Adventist Minister's Handbook,* informs and guides the work of local church pastors. The second, The *Seventh-day Adventist Elder's Handbook,* provides guidelines for the work of elders in the local church. This handbook deals with the ministry of deacons and deaconesses of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. All three handbooks follow the policies pertaining to the beliefs and practices of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as outlined in the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual.* It is hoped that pastors, elders, deacons, and deaconesses will find these handbooks helpful in fulfilling their day-to-day ministries in their local church.

Although many individuals were involved in planning, writing, editing, and publishing *Seventh-day Adventist Deacon's and Deaconess's Handbook,* the central responsibility rests with the General Conference Ministerial Association. The in-house Ministerial Association staff of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists—Jonas Arrais, Robert Costa, Alfredo Garcia-Marenko, Willie E. Hucks II, Anthony Kent, Derek Morris, Janet Page, and Jerry Page—was responsible for the revision, approval, and production of the final manuscript. John M. Fowler, a pastor and consulting editor of *Ministry* magazine, has done the principal writing and editing.

We are grateful to the South American Division for producing in Portuguese its first handbook for deacons and deaconesses. That handbook sowed the seed and provided a basic outline that led to the development of this handbook.

This handbook is based on biblical principles, counsels from the writings of Ellen G. White, and the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*. It is hoped that this guide will help deacons, deaconesses, and clergy in planning and implementing activities that support the local church and advance the preaching of the gospel—the original purpose for the establishment of deacons and deaconesses in the early church.

Much of this handbook deals with techniques and procedures that guide and counsel deacons and deaconesses in the performance of their ministry. But ministry itself is more than techniques and procedures; it is to build an abiding relationship with our Lord, ensure the glory of His name within the fellowship of the church, and to fulfill our Lord's wish for His church: "Let all things be done decently and in order" (1 Cor 14:40).

May this handbook be a blessing to all deacons and deaconesses, and strengthen their ministry so that "the word of God" may "spread and the number of disciples" multiply "greatly" (Acts 6:7).

Jonas Arrais, Associate Secretary
Ministerial Association
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists
July 1, 2015

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CHAPTER 1
THE MINISTRY OF DEACONS AND DEACONESSES: BIBLICAL FOUNDATION

The word "deacon" comes from the Greek word *diákonos,* which is often used in the New Testament to describe the work of a servant, helper, and attendant. As a word that refers to an office with the young church, Paul was perhaps the first to use it as such in Philippians (1:1) and 1 Timothy (3:8, 10, 11). But where and how does the work of the deacon first appear in the New Testament church?

The answer may be traced to a peculiar situation that emerged in the early church as a result of the post-Pentecostal rapid expansion of believers, as recorded in Acts 6. Some scholars estimate that around the time described in Acts 6, the church in Jerusalem had grown to some twenty thousand believers. These believers constituted a cultural milieu, with Hebrew-speaking Jews and Greek-speaking Hellenists comprising two major groups. A sizable section of these believers were poor, and the church had set up a ministry of caring for their needs, including distribution of food.

Along with the staggering growth of the church and the introduction of a system of caring for the poor, a peculiar problem confronted the apostles. The Greek widows in the church felt that they were neglected in their care as compared with the help extended to Jewish widows. The problem was not confined to physical needs alone, but slowly began to erode the spiritual function of the church. Ellen G. White describes the situation: "The enemy [Satan] succeeded in arousing the suspicions of some who had formerly

been in the habit of looking with jealousy on their brethren in the faith and of finding fault with their spiritual leaders" (AA 88).[1]

The apostles recognized the seriousness of the situation and suggested that the church set aside a special team of spiritually mature members to attend to this important need in the young church. Doing so would free the apostles to concentrate on their primary mission: "prayer and . . . the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4). The proposal pleased the church and with much prayer they chose seven men full of faith and spirit. The apostles prayed and set them apart by the laying on of hands. Stephen was one of those: "a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit" (Acts 6:5), mighty in preaching the Word, and the first martyr to the gospel of Jesus Christ (Acts 7). Philip was another (Acts 8:5) whom the Lord used later to take the gospel to Samaria (Acts 8:4–6), to the Ethiopian official, and to Caesarea (Acts 8:26–40).

Faithful in church membership and responsibilities, known for their upright characters, filled with the Holy Spirit and wisdom, the deacons were chosen and set apart to meet the growing needs of an ever-expanding body of God's people. Part of this setting-apart service, Acts 6:3–6 tells us, is prayer and the laying on of hands by the apostles. This action derives from an ancient Hebrew custom where they indicated publicly that the faith community had chosen certain leaders to perform specific functions of leadership and service within that community.

The election and ordination of church deacons and deaconesses continues today in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*[2] states: "newly elected deacons cannot fill their office until they have been ordained by an ordained pastor currently credentialed by the conference" (p. 77). The *Church Manual*

[1] For abbreviations of Ellen G. White books, see the concluding pages of this book.
[2] All references to and quotations from the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* are from the 18th edition (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2010).

also states, "The sacred rite of ordination should be characterized by simplicity and performed in the presence of the church. The pastor . . . assisted by an elder where appropriate, ordains the deacons by prayer and the laying on of hands" (p. 77).

FROM SERVANT TO DEACON

In Acts 6:2 the Greek word used for "servant" is *diákonos*. This has also been translated as "table waiter." This inference has led to some controversy regarding the kinds of service intended by the term. However, the Greek words for "to be ministered unto" and "to minister" used in the New Testament also come from the same root word *diakoneõ,* indicating that the word is used for varied kinds of service. Therefore the word "deacon" refers to different kinds of service related to the church.

In Greek usage, *diakonia* suggests many kinds of service, just as the English word *service* does. The words *diákonos*, *diakoneõ*, and *diakonia* have just as wide a variety of meanings, but in general they refer to any kind of service that supplies the needs of another person. The words are used at least one hundred times in the New Testament, and they are usually translated with variants of the English words "serve" or "minister." In a few places in the King James Version they are translated differently—*diakonia* is "administration" in 1 Corinthians 12:5 and 2 Corinthians 9:12, and "relief" in Acts 11:29. But in these verses and in other New Testament usage the primary meaning has to do with service and ministry.

DEACONESSES

Men were not the only ones serving the church. In his letters, Paul speaks of several women who served the church. Romans 16:1, 2 refers to Phoebe as a *diakonon*, the same word used to describe the first seven deacons in Acts.

In Philippians 4:2, 3, Paul requests believers to help two women who have worked with him—Euodia and Syntyche—and accept them as "co-workers" even as he requests other Christians to help them in their work.

Scripture supports women deaconesses with an active, serving role in the church. Paul describes that their character should be as lofty as their service: "In the same way, the women are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything" (1 Tim 3:11, NIV). Paul is emphasizing here the woman's role in the church as not simply being a reflection of her husband, but being a "servant" in the church.

While the record of women as deaconesses in the Bible is sparse, scriptural evidence and extra-biblical sources indicate that deaconesses were part of the history and growth of the Christian church. They ministered to other women, especially those who were poor and sick, and their ministry is recorded in the history of the church through centuries.

The Adventist Church also owes a great deal to the ministry of women for its growth. This is particularly so with Ellen G. White, through whom God chose to manifest the gift of prophecy, which guided, counseled, and led the church from its earliest days. Other women who helped in the early beginnings of the Adventist church include Sarepta Myrenda Irish Henry, Anna Smith, and others who also followed the biblical teaching of servanthood. Truly, our Adventist faith has been blessed by God and His guidance to these women to be both shepherds and servants in the early years.

LEADERSHIP OF DEACONS: EXAMPLE OF STEPHEN

Stephen was among the first to be chosen by the early church as a deacon. His life illustrates the kind of person who should be chosen to serve in this important ministry. He is described as a person "full

of faith and power" who "did great wonders and signs among the people" (Acts 6:8). Being "full" of the Spirit (Acts 6:5) implies that Stephen experienced what the apostle would later explain as the fruit of the Spirit: "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Gal 5:22, 23).

Although Stephen was a person of great faith and spirituality, he did not see his role as one to exercise power and authority over other leaders. He had the support of the congregation but did not use this to dominate the church or promote himself. He just allowed God to work in and through him. Of him White says: "Stephen, the foremost of the seven deacons, was a man of deep piety and broad faith. Though a Jew by birth, he spoke the Greek language and was familiar with the customs and manners of the Greeks. He therefore found opportunity to preach the gospel in the synagogues of the Greek Jews. He was very active in the cause of Christ and boldly proclaimed his faith. Learned rabbis and doctors of the law engaged in public discussion with him, confidently expecting an easy victory. But 'they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.' Not only did he speak in the power of the Holy Spirit, but it was plain that he was a student of the prophecies and learned in all matters of the law. He ably defended the truths that he advocated and utterly defeated his opponents" (AA 97).

Stephen's full understanding of the biblical narrative of salvation history, as his speech in Acts 7 reveals, and his total commitment to the gospel of Jesus Christ shows to Christians of all time what it truly means to be a deacon of Jesus: to believe in Him, to trust Him, to serve Him, to preach His word without any hesitation, to proclaim Him as the Savior of the world, and then finally be ready to give himself if necessary in dying for Him. Therefore, a deacon is a person in full commitment to his Lord.

CHRIST, THE PERFECT EXAMPLE OF SERVICE

Who set the example and taught these early believers to be servants to others? How were the first apostles and disciples, first deacons and deaconesses, trained? The story goes farther back to its roots in history, back to the Old Testament. There the prophet Isaiah, foretelling the coming of Christ as the Savior, predicted His first advent ministry in terms of a servant. Isaiah 61:1, 2 has the Savior describe His ministry as one of service: "The Spirit of the Lord GOD *is* upon Me, because the LORD has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to *those who are* bound; . . . to comfort all who mourn." In Isaiah 53:11 God calls Jesus "My righteous Servant [who] shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities." Jesus Himself was fully self-conscious of His mission on earth as one of a suffering servant. On one occasion, He said, "the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Matt 20:28). Throughout His life on earth, Jesus taught, healed, preached, and ministered to others that they may have a taste of God's love and be drawn to Him. His life was a source of every blessing human beings needed: emotional health, spiritual healing, physical well-being, training for God's service, and above all a guidance that all may become like Him—children of God.

Therefore, the concept of service so crucial to the ministry and authenticity of deacons and deaconesses links the church with Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Church and the Servant of God. Christ Himself points to His own life of service as the model for Christians to follow: "Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve" (Mark 10:43–45, NIV).

The service of Jesus embraced many facets. He fed the hungry, He cared for the poor, He healed the sick, He loved the children, He

had compassion on the widows, and He sought to fill every type of human need—spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical. In doing so, He fulfilled the essence of pure religion: "Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble" (Jas 1:27). He is the model for all Christians, particularly for deacons and deaconesses. In word and deed Jesus showed His followers the true meaning of service: it is not power and control; it is not position and authority; it is service in the truest sense to God and humanity.

Such service-oriented ministry of deacons and deaconesses, elders and pastors is mutually supportive and cooperative. Such service is essential for the sustaining, strengthening, and growth of the church.

CHAPTER 2
THE CHURCH WE SERVE

[In order for deacons and deaconesses to function effectively within their local churches, it is important for them to understand the nature and functions of the Church. This chapter provides an outline of that nature and function, as provided in the Church Manual. *The selections, while not exhaustive, are from the* Church Manual *and include supporting statements from Scripture and the writings of Ellen G. White.*[3]*]*

THE CHURCH: THE BODY OF CHRIST

To belong to the church of God is a unique and soul-satisfying privilege. It is God's purpose to gather out a people from the far corners of the earth to bind them into one body, the body of Christ, of which He is the living head. All who are children of God in Christ Jesus are members of this body, and in this relationship they may enjoy fellowship with each other and fellowship also with their Lord.

IN CHRIST: NO WALL OF PARTITION

Christ sought by precept and example to teach the truth that with God there was to be no dividing wall between Israel and other nations (John 4:4–42; 10:16; Luke 9:51–56; Matthew 15:21–28).

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[3] While the selections are quoted verbatim from the *Church Manual,* subheadings are adapted from the original to reflect the core point of the selections. The Bible passages and quotes from the writings of Ellen G. White are placed in quotation marks, but selections from *Church Manual* do not carry quotation marks. Unless otherwise noted, Bible texts are from the New King James Version. Scripture references are spelled out in full.

Nor is there to be among Christ's followers any preference of caste or nationality or race or color, for all are of one blood. The elect of God are a universal brotherhood, a new humanity, "all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

"Christ came to this earth with a message of mercy and forgiveness. He laid the foundation for a religion by which Jew and Gentile, black and white, free and bond, are linked together in one common brotherhood, recognized as equal in the sight of God. The Savior has a boundless love for every human being" (7T 225).[4]

THE CHURCH: SUPREME OBJECT OF CHRIST'S REGARD

Those in Christ's service who are called to leadership are to "take care of the church" (1 Timothy 3:5).

"I testify to my brethren and sisters that the church of Christ, enfeebled and defective as it may be, is the only object on earth on which He bestows His supreme regard. While He extends to all the world His invitation to come to Him and be saved, He commissions His angels to render divine help to every soul that cometh to Him in repentance and contrition, and He comes personally by His Holy Spirit into the midst of His church" (TM 15).

As the bride of Christ and the supreme object of His regard, the church is expected in all its functions to represent the order and the character of the divine.

ORGANIZATION AND AUTHORITY

Church organization is based on God's principles. "Never allow anyone's ideas to unsettle your faith in regard to the order and harmony which should exist in the church . . . . The God of heaven is a God of order, and He requires all His followers to have rules and regulations, and to preserve order" (5T 274).

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[4] *For abbreviations of Ellen G. White books, see the concluding pages of this book.*

BIBLICAL BASIS FOR CHURCH ORGANIZATION

When God called the children of Israel out of Egypt and chose them as His peculiar people, He provided for them an impressive system of organization to govern their conduct in both civil and religious matters.

"The government of Israel was characterized by the most thorough organization, wonderful alike for its completeness and its simplicity. The order so strikingly displayed in the perfection and arrangement of all God's created works was manifest in the Hebrew economy. God was the center of authority and government, the sovereign of Israel. Moses stood as their visible leader, by God's appointment, to administer the laws in His name. From the elders of the tribes a council of seventy was afterward chosen to assist Moses in the general affairs of the nation. Next came the priests, who consulted the Lord in the sanctuary. Chiefs, or princes, ruled over the tribes. Under these were 'captains over thousands, and captains over hundreds, and captains over fifties, and captains over tens,' and, lastly, officers who might be employed for special duties" (PP 374).

The New Testament church showed the same perfection in its organization. Christ Himself, who formed the church (Matthew 16:18), "set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased" (1 Corinthians 12:18). He endowed them with gifts and talents adequate for the functions devolving upon them and organized them into a living, working body, of which He is the head.

"For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another" (Romans 12:4, 5). "And He [Christ] is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence" (Colossians 1:18).

"There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord" (1 Corinthians 12:4, 5).

"For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ" (1 Corinthians 12:12). "Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues" (1 Corinthians 12:27, 28).

IMPORTANCE OF ORGANIZATION

Just as there can be no living, active human body unless its members are organically united and functioning together, so there can be no living, growing, prospering church unless its members are organized into a united spiritual body, all performing their God-given duties and functions under the direction of a divinely constituted authority. Without organization no institution or movement can prosper. A nation without organized government would be chaos. A business enterprise without organization would fail. A church without organization would disintegrate and perish.

For the sake of the church's healthy development and for the accomplishment of its task of carrying the gospel of salvation to all the world, Christ gave it a simple but effective system of organization. Success in its endeavors to achieve its mission depends on loyal adherence to this divine pattern.

"Some have advanced the thought that as we near the close of time, every child of God will act independently of any religious organization. But I have been instructed by the Lord that in this work there is no such thing as every man's being independent" (TM 489).

"Oh, how Satan would rejoice if he could succeed in his efforts to get in among this people and disorganize the work at a time when thorough organization is essential and will be the greatest power to keep out spurious uprisings and to refute claims not endorsed by the

Word of God! We want to hold the lines evenly, that there shall be no breaking down of the system of organization and order that has been built up by wise, careful labor. License must not be given to disorderly elements that desire to control the work at this time" (TM 489).

PURPOSES OF ORGANIZATION

"As our numbers increased, it was evident that without some form of organization there would be great confusion, and the work would not be carried forward successfully. To provide for the support of the ministry, for carrying the work in new fields, for protecting both the churches and the ministry from unworthy members, for holding church property, for the publication of the truth through the press, and for many other objects, organization was indispensable'" (TM 26).

THE NEW TESTAMENT MODEL

The Savior's commission to the church to carry the gospel to all the world (Matt 28:19, 20; Mark 16:15) meant not only preaching the gospel but ensuring the welfare of those who accepted that message. This involved shepherding as well as housing the flock, and also meeting relationship problems. Such a situation called for organization.

At first the apostles constituted a council that directed the activities of the church from Jerusalem (Acts 6:2; 8:14). When the company there became so large that the administration of its practical affairs became a problem, the church appointed deacons to care for its business (Acts 6:2–4).

CHURCH ORGANIZATION TODAY

The Seventh-day Adventist form of governance is representative, which recognizes that authority rests in the membership and is

expressed through duly elected representatives at each level of organization, with executive responsibility delegated to representative bodies and officers for the governing of the Church at each separate level. This form of governance recognizes also that ordination to the ministry is recognized by the Church worldwide.

"Every member of the church has a voice in choosing officers of the church. The church chooses the officers of the state conferences. Delegates chosen by the state conferences choose the officers of the union conferences, and delegates chosen by the union conferences choose the officers of the General Conference. By this arrangement every conference, every institution, every church, and every individual, either directly or through representatives, has a voice in the election of the men who bear the chief responsibilities in the General Conference" (8T 236, 237).

OUTLINE OF DENOMINATIONAL ORGANIZATION[5]

The current organizational system of the Seventh-day Adventist Church consists of the following levels, beginning from the local church consisting of a group of members to the worldwide unified expression of the church through the General Conference:

1. Local Church

2. Local Conference [Mission/Field]

3. Union of Churches

4. Union Conference/Mission

5. General Conference and Its Divisions

The church organization thus conceived recognizes the importance of each level, which is organized and empowered to function as specified in the Church Manual*. While the local church consists of members who gather to worship, fellowship and witness as a congregation within a defined location, several such local churches*

[5] This section is written by the General Conference Ministerial Association.

come under a local conference/Mission that exercise jurisdiction over the functioning of its constituent churches. A group of conferences/ missions within a larger geographical area is organized by the General Conference to function as a Union of Churches, or a Union Conference/ Mission. The General Conference, the highest administrative body of the church, consists of all the Unions. Its worldwide functions are exercised through regional offices known as Divisions. The General Conference meets as a full executive body at least twice a year to vote annual budgets, to review policies, and to promote worldwide mission, evangelism, growth and unity. The entire world church meets once every five years through a representative system, and this meeting is known as the General Conference in Session, which is considered as the voice of the Church.

CHAPTER 3
THE MINISTRY OF A DEACON/DEACONESS: ELLEN G. WHITE'S PERSPECTIVE

[As noted earlier, the ministry of deacons or deaconesses had its beginning in apostolic times and was related to service of different kinds in the early church. It is a commonly accepted belief that the work of the deacons began with the selection of seven men, including Stephen and Phillip, by the apostles to care for the charitable work of the Jerusalem church (Acts 6:5–7). Later, the New Testament also mentions the service of female deaconesses, such as Phoebe (Rom 16:1). Thus the ministry of deacons and deaconesses is biblical in origin. A totally converted life of godliness, moral and spiritual uprightness, identity with God's people and His cause, and wisdom and discernment are some of the essential qualities of those called to church leadership. The following is an invaluable perspective on the ministry of deacons and deaconesses for the service of the church. This selection is from Acts of the Apostles *by Ellen G. White.*[6]*]*

In those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration.

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[6] Except for the subheadings, the entire portion that follows is from Ellen G. White, *Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911), 87–96, and is based on Acts 6:1–7. Scriptural references are placed in parentheses, instead of footnotes as in original.

THE CHALLENGE OF A GROWING CHURCH

The early church was made up of many classes of people, of various nationalities. At the time of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, "there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven" (Acts 2:5). Among those of the Hebrew faith who were gathered at Jerusalem were some commonly known as Grecians, between whom and the Jews of Palestine there had long existed distrust and even antagonism.

The hearts of those who had been converted under the labors of the apostles were softened and united by Christian love. Despite former prejudices, all were in harmony with one another. Satan knew that so long as this union continued to exist, he would be powerless to check the progress of gospel truth; and he sought to take advantage of former habits of thought, in the hope that thereby he might be able to introduce into the church elements of disunion.

Thus it came to pass that as disciples were multiplied, the enemy succeeded in arousing the suspicions of some who had formerly been in the habit of looking with jealousy on their brethren in the faith and of finding fault with their spiritual leaders, and so "there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews." The cause of complaint was an alleged neglect of the Greek widows in the daily distribution of assistance. Any inequality would have been contrary to the spirit of the gospel, yet Satan had succeeded in arousing suspicion. Prompt measures must now be taken to remove all occasion for dissatisfaction, lest the enemy triumph in his effort to bring about a division among the believers.

ORGANIZING FOR EFFICIENT SERVICE

The disciples of Jesus had reached a crisis in their experience. Under the wise leadership of the apostles, who labored unitedly in the power of the Holy Spirit, the work committed to the gospel

messengers was developing rapidly. The church was continually enlarging, and this growth in membership brought increasingly heavy burdens upon those in charge. No one man, or even one set of men, could continue to bear these burdens alone, without imperiling the future prosperity of the church. There was necessity for a further distribution of the responsibilities which had been borne so faithfully by a few during the earlier days of the church. The apostles must now take an important step in the perfecting of gospel order in the church by laying upon others some of the burdens thus far borne by themselves.

Summoning a meeting of the believers, the apostles were led by the Holy Spirit to outline a plan for the better organization of all the working forces of the church. The time had come, the apostles stated, when the spiritual leaders having the oversight of the church should be relieved from the task of distributing to the poor and from similar burdens, so that they might be free to carry forward the work of preaching the gospel. "Wherefore, brethren," they said, "look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word." This advice was followed, and by prayer and the laying on of hands, seven chosen men were solemnly set apart for their duties as deacons.

THE RESULT OF SHARED LEADERSHIP

The appointment of the seven to take the oversight of special lines of work, proved a great blessing to the church. These officers gave careful consideration to individual needs as well as to the general financial interests of the church, and by their prudent management and their godly example they were an important aid to their fellow officers in binding together the various interests of the church into a united whole.

That this step was in the order of God is revealed in the immediate results for good that were seen. "The word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith." This ingathering of souls was due both to the greater freedom secured by the apostles and to the zeal and power shown by the seven deacons. The fact that these brethren had been ordained for the special work of looking after the needs of the poor, did not exclude them from teaching the faith. On the contrary, they were fully qualified to instruct others in the truth, and they engaged in the work with great earnestness and success.

To the early church had been entrusted a constantly enlarging work—that of establishing centers of light and blessing wherever there were honest souls willing to give themselves to the service of Christ. The proclamation of the gospel was to be worldwide in its extent, and the messengers of the cross could not hope to fulfill their important mission unless they should remain united in the bonds of Christian unity, and thus reveal to the world that they were one with Christ in God. Had not their divine Leader prayed to the Father, "Keep through Thine own name those whom Thou hast given Me, that they may be one, as We are"? And had He not declared of His disciples, "The world hath hated them, because they are not of the world"? Had He not pleaded with the Father that they might be "made perfect in one," "that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me"? (John 17:11, 14, 23, 21). Their spiritual life and power was dependent on a close connection with the One by whom they had been commissioned to preach the gospel.

Only as they were united with Christ could the disciples hope to have the accompanying power of the Holy Spirit and the co-operation of angels of heaven. With the help of these divine agencies they would present before the world a united front and would be victorious

in the conflict they were compelled to wage unceasingly against the powers of darkness. As they should continue to labor unitedly, heavenly messengers would go before them, opening the way; hearts would be prepared for the reception of truth, and many would be won to Christ. So long as they remained united, the church would go forth "fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners" (Song of Solomon 6:10). Nothing could withstand her onward progress. The church would advance from victory to victory, gloriously fulfilling her divine mission of proclaiming the gospel to the world.

A MODEL FOR CHURCH ORGANIZATION

The organization of the church at Jerusalem was to serve as a model for the organization of churches in every other place where messengers of truth should win converts to the gospel. Those to whom was given the responsibility of the general oversight of the church were not to lord it over God's heritage, but, as wise shepherds, were to "feed the flock of God . . . being ensamples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:2, 3); and the deacons were to be "men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom." These men were to take their position unitedly on the side of right and to maintain it with firmness and decision. Thus they would have a uniting influence upon the entire flock.

Later in the history of the early church, when in various parts of the world many groups of believers had been formed into churches, the organization of the church was further perfected, so that order and harmonious action might be maintained. Every member was exhorted to act well his part. Each was to make a wise use of the talents entrusted to him. Some were endowed by the Holy Spirit with special gifts—"first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of

tongues" (1 Corinthians 12:28). But all these classes of workers were to labor in harmony.

"There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; to another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues: but all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He will. For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ" (1 Corinthians 12:4–12).

DIVISION OF RESPONSIBILITIES UNDER MOSES

Solemn are the responsibilities resting upon those who are called to act as leaders in the church of God on earth. In the days of the theocracy, when Moses was endeavoring to carry alone burdens so heavy that he would soon have worn away under them, he was counseled by Jethro to plan for a wise distribution of responsibilities. "Be thou for the people to Godward," Jethro advised, "that thou mayest bring the causes unto God: and thou shalt teach them ordinances and laws, and shalt show them the way wherein they must walk, and the work that they must do." Jethro further advised that men be appointed to act as "rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens." These were to be "able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness." They were to "judge the people at all seasons," thus relieving Moses of the wearing responsibility of giving consideration to many minor matters

that could be dealt with wisely by consecrated helpers.

The time and strength of those who in the providence of God have been placed in leading positions of responsibility in the church, should be spent in dealing with the weightier matters demanding special wisdom and largeness of heart. It is not in the order of God that such men should be appealed to for the adjustment of minor matters that others are well qualified to handle. "Every great matter they shall bring unto thee," Jethro proposed to Moses, "but every small matter they shall judge: so shall it be easier for thyself, and they shall bear the burden with thee. If thou shalt do this thing, and God command thee so, then thou shalt be able to endure, and all this people shall also go to their place in peace."

In harmony with this plan, "Moses chose able men out of all Israel, and made them heads over the people, rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. And they judged the people at all seasons: the hard causes they brought unto Moses, but every small matter they judged themselves" (Exodus 18:19–26).

Later, when choosing seventy elders to share with him the responsibilities of leadership, Moses was careful to select, as his helpers, men possessing dignity, sound judgment, and experience. In his charge to these elders at the time of their ordination, he outlined some of the qualifications that fit a man to be a wise ruler in the church. "Hear the causes between your brethren," said Moses, "and judge righteously between every man and his brother, and the stranger that is with him. Ye shall not respect persons in judgment; but ye shall hear the small as well as the great; ye shall not be afraid of the face of man; for the judgment is God's" (Deut 1:16, 17).

DAVID'S LEADERSHIP CHARGE

King David, toward the close of his reign, delivered a solemn charge to those bearing the burden of the work of God in his day.

Summoning to Jerusalem "all the princes of Israel, the princes of the tribes, and the captains of the companies that ministered to the king by course, and the captains over the thousands, and captains over the hundreds, and the stewards over all the substance and possession of the king, and of his sons, with the officers, and with the mighty men, and with all the valiant men," the aged king solemnly charged them, "in the sight of all Israel the congregation of the Lord, and in the audience of our God," to "keep and seek for all the commandments of the Lord your God" (1 Chronicles 28:1, 8).

To Solomon, as one called to occupy a position of leading responsibility, David gave a special charge: "Thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve Him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind: for the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek Him, He will be found of thee; but if thou forsake Him, He will cast thee off forever. Take heed now; for the Lord hath chosen thee: . . . be strong" (1 Chronicles 28:9, 10).

PRINCIPLES OF GODLY LEADERSHIP

The same principles of piety and justice that were to guide the rulers among God's people in the time of Moses and of David, were also to be followed by those given the oversight of the newly organized church of God in the gospel dispensation. In the work of setting things in order in all the churches, and ordaining suitable men to act as officers, the apostles held to the high standards of leadership outlined in the Old Testament Scriptures. They maintained that he who is called to stand in a position of leading responsibility in the church "must be blameless, as the steward of God; not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; but a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate; holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught,

that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers" (Titus 1:7–9).

The order that was maintained in the early Christian church made it possible for them to move forward solidly as a well-disciplined army clad with the armor of God. The companies of believers, though scattered over a large territory, were all members of one body; all moved in concert and in harmony with one another. When dissension arose in a local church, as later it did arise in Antioch and elsewhere, and the believers were unable to come to an agreement among themselves, such matters were not permitted to create a division in the church, but were referred to a general council of the entire body of believers, made up of appointed delegates from the various local churches, with the apostles and elders in positions of leading responsibility. Thus the efforts of Satan to attack the church in isolated places were met by concerted action on the part of all, and the plans of the enemy to disrupt and destroy were thwarted.

"God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints" (1 Corinthians 14:33). He requires that order and system be observed in the conduct of church affairs today no less than in the days of old. He desires His work to be carried forward with thoroughness and exactness so that He may place upon it the seal of His approval. Christian is to be united with Christian, church with church, the human instrumentality co-operating with the divine, every agency subordinate to the Holy Spirit, and all combined in giving to the world the good tidings of the grace of God.

CHAPTER 4
THE IMPORTANCE OF THE OFFICE

To be a deacon or deaconess is to accept the calling of a servant in the community of faith. To be involved in the service of Jesus at any level of His calling is to follow Him, who said, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve" (Mark 10:45). No greater example in service can we have than that of Jesus, who introduced a new dynamic in human structure and relations: fulfillment comes not from power but service; leadership derives its authority not from position but servanthood. "Our Lord Jesus Christ came to this world as the unwearied servant of man's necessity. He 'took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses,' that He might minister to every need of humanity (Matt 8:17). The burden of disease and wretchedness and sin He came to remove. It was His mission to bring to men complete restoration; He came to give them health and peace and perfection of character" (MH 17).

The call of Jesus is to be like Him in service. It is not enough to take the title of deacon, elder, pastor, teacher, or president. Take the towel instead, wash the feet of another; take the bread and share it with others (John 13:3–17). In these and other acts of self-effacement, Jesus gave us an example of service. Without becoming a servant, there could be no ministry. In servanthood begins the work of a deacon.

That's how the first deacons in the early church were appointed. When the church grew rapidly, and meeting various needs of the believers—spiritual and physical—became too heavy so as to lessen the time for evangelism, the apostles felt a need for additional help.

They concluded, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables." So they told the church, "Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of *good* reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business" (Acts 6:2, 3).

The Bible does not tell us much about these seven men. They all had Greek names. One of them is mentioned as a Gentile converted to Judaism (v. 5). It was a custom of those days for Palestinian Jews to assume Greek names, but the Bible does not inform us how many of the seven were Palestinian Jews or how many were Hellenists (people from outside Palestine). What seems certain is that the seven were chosen from those who were at least familiar with Greek culture. For example, Stephen: "Though a Jew by birth, he spoke the Greek language and was familiar with the customs and manners of the Greeks" (AA 97).

Although Acts 6 does not call these seven male "deacons," they were nevertheless chosen to care for "the daily distribution" and to "serve [at] tables" (Acts 6:1, 2). Because the Greek terms that describe these services have their root in the word *diákonos,* these seven men were recognized from the beginning as the first "deacons" of the Christian church. Ellen G. White agrees: "By prayer and the laying on of hands, seven chosen men were solemnly set apart for their duties as deacons" (AA 89). She further attests the effect of the introduction of deacons on the growth of the church: the "ingathering of souls was due both to the greater freedom secured by the apostles and to the zeal and power shown by the seven deacons" (AA 89). Stephen, of course, was "the foremost of the seven deacons [and] was a man of deep piety and broad faith" (AA 97).

QUALIFICATIONS FOR DEACONS

Although the work of the deacons began with the ordination of the seven in Acts 6, it was only later as the church grew both in

geography and strength that formal qualifications of the deacons were dealt with. A deacon's qualifications, only slightly less than those of an elder, are mentioned in 1 Timothy 3:8–13: "Deacons *must be* reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience . . . . Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling *their* children and their own houses well. For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus."

White's comments on the deacon's work and qualification are worthy of note: "The fact that these brethren had been ordained for the special work of looking after the needs of the poor, did not exclude them from teaching the faith. On the contrary, they were fully qualified to instruct others in the truth, and they engaged in the work with great earnestness and success.

"The appointment of the seven to take the oversight of special lines of work, proved a great blessing to the church. These officers gave careful consideration to individual needs as well as to the general financial interests of the church, and by their prudent management and their godly example they were an important aid to their fellow officers in binding together the various interests of the church into a united whole" (AA 89).

WORK OF DEACONESSES

Men were not the only ones serving as deacons or servants of the church. Women were included in the lists of officials in the early Christian church. Paul speaks of one such: "I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea, that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also" (Rom 16:1, 2).

The name Phoebe means "bright and radiant," and from Paul's brief comments about her, it seems that those words did indeed characterize her personality and her Christian life. Paul commends her to the church at Rome in three different ways: as a sister in Christ, as a servant, and as a helper of many, including himself. To refer to Phoebe as "our sister" meant that she was a devoted member of the family of God, and the context makes clear that she was especially dear to the apostle. To refer to her as a servant beloved by those she served in her home church at Cenchrea, and probably in the mother church at Corinth as well, is significant, for the word "servant" translates *diákonos,* the root from which we get *deacon.* By the time Paul wrote this, "deacon" was already recognized as a church office, and women had already begun to serve in this office (see Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:10).

Therefore, the service of women as deaconesses had already become a reality in the early church, even as the church spread far and wide during the missionary journeys of Paul. The New Testament also mentions other women who served the cause of the gospel, such as Evodia and Syntyche (Phil 4:2, 3), Tabitha praised for her almsgiving (Acts 9:46), Lydia (Acts 16:14) recognized for her hospitality to Paul and his companions, and Priscilla, involved in missionary work (Rom 16:3). Female deacons are mentioned in the salutations of the epistle to the Philippians (1:1), and the first epistle to Timothy (3:8, 12). So women have been recognized as early as men for the use of their talents and gifts in the ministry of the church.

ELECTION OF DEACONS AND DEACONESSES

The nature of the responsibility and the seriousness of the work involved require that the local church exercise utmost care in the election of deacons and deaconesses. The basic qualifications have already been mentioned earlier, and the body charged with the election

of the deacons and deaconesses should review these. As Paul says, "let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless" (1 Tim 3:10).

Once their qualification as a deacon or deaconess has been attested, their names are presented to the church membership to vote, accepting them as a deacon or a deaconess. In addition to the qualifications already mentioned, there are other aspects to be taken into account in the election procedures.

1. The local church cares for the election. The election is done by church members through a nominating committee that elects all officials who will serve the church. The procedures governing the organization of the nominating committee are provided in the *Church Manual,* chapter 9.

2. A deacon or deaconess should be a member of the church in regular and good standing.

3. The term of office shall generally be one year, except where the church in a business meeting votes to have election every two years.

4. Opportunities for service should be granted to the youth, according to their spiritual gifts, to keep them committed and involved in the leadership and mission of the church. Providing such opportunities to youth helps them understand better the nature and mission of the church, and mature in their spiritual life.

ORDINATION OF DEACONS AND DEACONESSES

The newly elected deacons and deaconesses cannot begin to so function until an ordained pastor currently credentialed by the conference has ordained them**.** The ordination service should be simple and performed in the presence of the congregation. The pastor shall present a summary statement describing the functions of deacons and deaconesses as outlined in the Bible, and the primary functions they are authorized to perform. After a short exhortation to

faithfulness in service, the pastor, assisted by an elder, will ordain the deacons and deaconesses by prayer and the laying on of hands. It is suggested that the ordination of deacons and deaconesses be performed at the same time during the same service. They serve for the period they are elected. When they are reelected, they need not be ordained again. Elders subsequently elected as deacons need not be ordained again as the elder's ordination covers the deacon's office as well.

As long as they remain members in regular standing, deacons and deaconesses, once ordained, do not have to be ordained again should they transfer their membership to another church. When their term of office expires, they may be reelected, should the congregation so desire.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church ordains its deacons and deaconesses for the ministry of the local church. They are "not authorized to preside at any of the ordinances of the church or business meetings and cannot perform the marriage ceremony or officiate at the reception or transfer of members" (*Church Manual*, 77).

CONCLUSION

After the calling of the disciples and the apostles, the New Testament history of the church recognizes the establishment of the deacons as essential to strengthen the ministry of the church and proceed with the various services needed to build the community of faith and care for its spiritual and physical needs. Therefore the importance of the office of the deacon and deaconess should not be minimized. Indeed, much prayer and spiritual nurture on the part of the whole local church should be involved in the selection and ordination of these "servants" of the church. The ministry of these "servants" helps the church as the body of Christ and as the community of faith to fulfill the intent and purpose for which the church was established.

As in the Jerusalem church, the deacons today "by their prudent management and their godly example . . . [can be] an important aid to their fellow officers in binding together the various interests of the church into a united whole" (AA 89).

CHAPTER 5
QUALIFICATION FOR THE OFFICE

In choosing the first deacons of the church, the apostles did not look for their social class, educational attainment, national origin, economic status, or racial background. They laid out the fundamental qualifications that leaders chosen to serve the church should possess. Such leaders should be (1) of good reputation, (2) filled with the Holy Spirit, and (3) full of wisdom (Acts 6:3). This chapter will review these basic qualities and then look at other lifestyle qualities that apostle Paul mentions in 1 Timothy 3:8–12.

BASIC QUALIFICATIONS

A Good Reputation

A deacon's good reputation in the community cannot be over emphasized. In a situation such as the Jerusalem church faced, it was obvious that the Hellenist widows had a feeling that those in charge of distributing daily welfare measures were treating the Hebraic widows better. As a result, "the enemy [Satan] succeeded in arousing the suspicions of some who had formerly been in the habit of looking with jealousy on their brethren in the faith and of finding fault with their spiritual leaders" (AA 88).

The situation would have gotten out of hand had the disciples not intervened. In order to handle the situation peacefully, effectively for the benefit of everyone, the deacons known and respected by everyone for their character and actions were to be chosen. The actions and decisions of such persons would be fair, and would not be suspected of any bias.

Later Paul describes how "good reputation" is needed in the selection of an elder as well: "He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap" (1 Tim 3:7, NIV).

Full of the Holy Spirit

Deacons whose lives are described as "full of the Spirit" are expected to possess a living connection with God. Through this living connection, they should be believers of good report, leading a life of the Spirit, and serving unselfishly as Jesus did. To be full of the Spirit means to come under the direction of the Holy Spirit in all that we do, especially as it relates to the Body of Jesus and to the life of love and service to which we are called. Deacons are called to such a life and, therefore, are to live a life of the Spirit. "The Spirit is constantly seeking to draw the attention of men to the great offering that was made on the cross of Calvary, to unfold to the world the love of God, and to open to the convicted soul the precious things of the Scriptures" (AA 52).

Spirit-filled leaders will be "speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph 5:19, 20).

Full of Wisdom

The wisdom that Acts 6:3 speaks of is more than the awareness of wise living gathered from day-to-day experiences and relationships. It calls for spiritual wisdom—a discernment to know the difference between good and evil and to choose the former consistently; an enduring love of and faith in God; and a devotion to the way of God, for "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Prov 9:10).

Wisdom goes beyond learning the basics of knowledge—to seeking the way of God as revealed in the Bible, applying in real

life its lessons, examples, and guidance. Wisdom also includes learning from past experiences and applying this to challenges of the present. In a church environment, deacons and deaconesses have the responsibility (and authority) to handle problems as they occur without always having to turn to the pastors or elders for their guidance or direction. The deacons and deaconesses should be wise enough to care for the needs of the church so as to maintain its sanctity and order.

Whenever a church is blessed with deacons who are qualified with good repute, the infilling of the Holy Spirit, and the maturity that comes from wisdom, that church will manifest the unity and the power of the redemptive experience that comes from Christ. It would be said of that church as it was of the Jerusalem church: "Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7).

LIFESTYLE QUALIFICATIONS

As the early church grew beyond the borders of Judea and spread into various parts of the Roman empire, the need for more and more leaders such as deacons and elders became evident to take care of the local ministry of each church. Paul was perhaps among the first to recognize the development of quality leadership, and he refers to this in the practical portions of his epistles. One such prominent counsel that the apostle gives concerns the lifestyle qualifications of deacons found in 1 Timothy 3:8–13: "Likewise deacons *must be* reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being *found* blameless. Likewise, *their* wives *must be* reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things. Let deacons be the husbands of one

wife, ruling *their* children and their own houses well. For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus."

An analysis of the above passage provides us the lifestyle characteristics that should mark the deacons and deaconesses: that is to say, how they are seen by the community around them (1 Tim 3:8–10) and how they are seen in their home life (1 Tim 3:12). Together the following nine characteristics stand out.

1. Be "Worthy of Respect"

The phrase "worthy of respect" (1 Tim 3:8, NIV) is rendered in different ways by various translations: "grace" (KJV), "reverent" (NKJV), "serious" (NRSV), and "dignified" (ESVS). While the translations may vary, what is intended is clear. A deacon or deaconess is known in the church community and outside as a person of serious and dignified character, known for being fair, trustworthy, upright, and wise in any situation. Moral and spiritual standing of a church leader must stand above any suspicion.

2. Be Truthful in Speech

Paul warns that deacons should "not be double-tongued" (1 Tim 3:8). The apostle's phrase is also translated as "sincere" (NIV) and it refers to one's speech and the relationship it indicates—that it cannot be insincere, manipulative, or dishonest.

An insincere tongue is a deceitful tongue, and a Christian cannot afford to be insincere in speech. A Christian's speech and conduct should be trustworthy. This call for trustworthiness on the part of a deacon or deaconess is a call for integrity in word and speech so as to uphold the good name of the church, root out malicious gossip, and uphold the worthiness of the name of Christ. As the apostle James says, "Let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'" (Jas 5:12).

3. Be Temperate

Paul counsels that the deacons must be "not given to much wine" (1 Tim 3:8). This personal requirement can be summarized by the word temperance, which "teaches us to dispense entirely with everything hurtful and to use judiciously that which is healthful" (PP 562). Biblical temperance does not focus only on abstinence from alcohol, but any form of addiction—be it drugs, tobacco, immoral thought, pornography, hobbies—that takes our attention away from God, away from our families, and away from our service in ministry. Any addiction that takes our attention away from God creates an opening for sin that affects the life and example of a deacon or deaconess. Ellen G. White warns, "The conscience will lose its sensibility to sin, and a process of hardening to iniquity will most certainly take place, till the common and the sacred will lose all difference of significance. How can we then meet the standard of the divine requirements?" (PP 362).

4. Be Honest

Paul's counsel that deacons should "not [be] greedy for money" (1 Tim 3:8) is a call for strict adherence to financial integrity and honesty. The commandment "You shall not steal" (Exod 20:15) is all the more relevant in the protection of the church's financial stability and integrity. Here the deacons, as the ones who collect, count, and sometimes manage the distribution of church funds, need to exercise utmost diligence. The finances of a church are God's finances for His work to be done for different ministries, both inside and outside the church. Any misuse or abuse of a church's finances puts both the church and ministry operations in jeopardy.

5. Lead a Consistent Life

The apostle's insistence—"holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience" (1 Tim 3:9)—requires that just as a deacon cannot

be double-tongued, so should a deacon's profession of faith and practice in life not be inconsistent. A life in which profession of truth and conduct are at variance damages both Christian life and faith. Those who have accepted the truth as in Jesus will manifest this truth in their lives: living a life where sin has no place, and having a faith that does not compromise with evil. In such a life there is no room for sexual immorality, pilfering money, dishonest practices, hatred toward fellow humans, pride, or mixing falsehood with the gospel.

A consistent life demands a level of spiritual maturity that may not be found in a person who is new to the faith. Just as the first deacons had experience studying the Word and living a godly life leading to a strong connection with God and a spiritual maturity to handle their assigned tasks effectively, so too new members may need time to achieve maturity in Christian experience, relationships, worship, prayer, and study of the Word. It may be good, therefore, for the church to wait until members reveal a level of spiritual maturity such as Paul describes in 1 Timothy 3 before they are ordained as deacons and deaconesses.

6. Be Beyond Reproach

It is not enough for deacons and deaconesses to be "holding the mystery of faith with a pure conscience." They should be "tested . . . [and] *found* blameless" (1 Tim 3:10). "Being blameless" does not mean a sinless life, but rather a life in consonance with the faith they have assumed in Jesus Christ. Such a life will be above reproach; those who see such a person will see a reflection of the life of Christ. The verse further indicates that through some form of review or checkup by a representative church body, prospective deacons should be examined and approved to serve in this ministry. Their characters should be like that of Daniel, who considered "the approval of God . . . dearer to him than the favor

of the most powerful earthly potentate—dearer than life itself" (PK 483). A strong, faith-filled connection with Christ, a life free from sin and sinful influences, an exemplary moral and spiritual conduct that will reflect the character of Christ will be seen in deacons and deaconesses. They will indeed be blameless in their life and beyond reproach in their service.

7. Be Responsible Spouses

The apostle in 1 Timothy 3:11, 12 develops the lifestyle that should characterize the deacon's family: "Likewise *their* wives *must* be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things. Let deacons be the husbands of one wife." Many scholars have viewed the last part of this passage as speaking against bigamy or polygamy, common those days. Yes, it does. A deacon or deaconess must have rejected the then pre-Christian custom of being married to more than one person.

The issue here goes beyond marital status. A single person or a widower/widow can be elected to serve in this ministry as effectively as a married person. The character and the moral status of a deacon or deaconess are stressed here. While the deacon or deaconess should be married to only one spouse, the relationship within the marriage should be holy, loving, and above reproach. The intent is clear—to prevent sin from entering the married relationship of a husband and wife, destroying the family structure, and negatively impacting the church.

Christ must be the foundation of marriage. Love, mutual trust and respect, integrity, and teamwork should characterize the relationship between a husband and wife, and this is more so in the life of deacons. "Your companionship in the marriage relation should be close and tender, holy and elevated, breathing a spiritual power into your lives, that you may be everything to each other that God's word requires.

When you reach the condition that the Lord desires you to reach, you will find heaven below and God in your life" (AH 112).

8. Be Godly Parents

In addition to being loving and devoted spouses, deacons and deaconesses are expected to be "ruling *their* children" (1 Tim 3:12). Parents are the primary role models for children. Children learn through observation and example. The example a deacon or deaconess sets in their loving, Christ-centered marriage will serve as an important lesson for their children's self-esteem, self-image, and their future, as well as developing *their* relationship with Christ. A Christ-centered home will place God and His Word at the center of all its activities. The family will read the Bible together, pray and worship together, honor the Sabbath, and relate well with the church community.

White states, "Every Christian home should have rules; and parents should, in their words and deportment toward each other, give to the children a precious, living example of what they desire them to be. Purity in speech and true Christian courtesy should be constantly practiced. Teach the children and youth to respect themselves, to be true to God, true to principle; teach them to respect and obey the law of God. These principles will control their lives and will be carried out in their associations with others" (AH 16).

9. Manage the Family Well

Finally, Paul counsels the deacons to rule "*their* own houses well" (1 Tim 3:12). A house that is not well managed according to Christian love and principles has nothing much to share on the power of the gospel. As responsible leaders in the church, deacons are expected to manage their households well by overseeing the upbringing of their children in the fear of the Lord, and by treating all other members of

the household, including helpers, with the same grace and tenderness that Christ shows toward them.

Good family management moves from marital integrity and family relationships to include management of time, finances, household responsibilities, and community relationships. When deacons and deaconesses show they are not wasting their home resources, they show they are capable of effectively managing the church's resources as responsible stewards. If deacons are good in family management, they will also be conscious in the management of the finances of the church, caring for physical facilities, guarding the material resources, and building a spiritual stewardship.

WOMEN IN 1 TIMOTHY 3

Who are the women mentioned in 1 Timothy 3:11? Are they deaconesses or wives of the deacons? The question has been debated through the years between two camps—one holding that "wives" refers to spouses of male deacons, and the other arguing for women deaconesses. The debate continues.

While it may be difficult to arrive at a decisive conclusion, in the modern context it is best to remember that the qualities of character mentioned in 1 Timothy 3:8–13 are applicable to the family of the deacon—the deacon, the deaconess or the wife of the deacon, and even the children. What the passage calls for is not gender delineation but moral and spiritual uprightness. Holding an office in the church requires maturity of character and dedication to the lordship of Jesus, both personally and as a whole family. That moral compass will cover (1) reverence, loyalty, and devotion to Christ; (2) carefulness in personal life so that no hurtful words, no untruthfulness, and no gossip escape from one's mouth; (3) temperate living, avoiding all that is harmful, and judiciously consuming that which is good; and (4) being trustworthy, honest, and accountable, preserving the name of the church in good repute.

That being said, at a time in church history when churches ordain both deacons and deaconesses to carry on different aspects of ministry, it is only proper that both groups come under the character umbrella defined by 1 Timothy 3:8–13.

CONCLUSION

The positions of a deacon or deaconess, inasmuch as they are chosen to serve the church, are to be taken seriously. They are sacred calls to Christian ministry. By accepting to serve in that ministry, deacons and deaconesses pledge to adhere to the qualifications defined in Acts 6:3 and 1 Timothy 3:8–12. "God has placed in the church, as His appointed helpers, men of varied talents, that through the combined wisdom of many the mind of the Spirit may be met. Men who move in accordance with their own strong traits of character, refusing to yoke up with others who have had a long experience in the work of God, will become blinded by self-confidence, unable to discern between the false and the true. It is not safe for such ones to be chosen as leaders in the church; for they would follow their own judgment and plans, regardless of the judgment of their brethren. It is easy for the enemy to work through those who, themselves needing counsel at every step, undertake the guardianship of souls in their own strength, without having learned the lowliness of Christ" (AA 279).

CHAPTER 6
THE SPIRITUAL DIMENSIONS AND GROWTH

The call to serve as a deacon or deaconess is to be perceived and accepted as coming in the name of Jesus to glorify God and to serve His people in such a way that the entire church will feel blessed. While that call to serve has its blessings and joy, one needs to guard that call with utmost spiritual seriousness. As Peter says, those called to Christian faith and service are constantly under attack from the enemy: "Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Pet 5:8, NIV).

Ellen G. White warns of this danger, and provides a simple formula to guard against the enemy: "No man is so high in power and authority but that Satan will assail him with temptation. And the more responsible the position a man occupies, the fiercer and more determined are the assaults of the enemy. Let God's servants in every place study His word, looking constantly to Jesus, that they may be changed into His image" (CL 77).

White's three principles outlined above—study God's Word, look constantly to Jesus, and seek earnestly to be transformed—are helpful in battling the enemy's attack against our ministry. That attack often comes at several levels—personal, family, team ministry—to the detriment of the church and its growth.

We can picture these levels in concentric circles, starting with deacons and deaconesses at the center, their families in the next circle, their ministry teams in the next circle, and their churches in the outer circle. As the deacons and deaconesses grow stronger, the

inner circle is strengthened, and it grows to support the strength and growth of the next circle, the family. A family with a strong spiritual foundation is an asset to the growth of the team ministry, which in turn will galvanize the growth of the church. All the levels benefit and grow independently and interdependently, as each one of them studies God's Word, looks constantly to Jesus, and seeks earnestly to be transformed.

PERSONAL LIFE

Study God's Word

The study of God's Word in the life of a Christian cannot be over emphasized, more so in the life of deacons and deaconesses. Paul counseled young Timothy, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim 2:15, KJV). Without constant study and dependence on God's Word, no one can be a worthy steward of His ministry. Unless deacons and deaconesses personally discover the message and the power of the Word, they cannot be God's ministerial stewards. Ministry—be that of a deacon or a pastor—is first and foremost an outflow of what one discovers about God's love through Scripture.

Studying God's Word does not mean a casual approach to the Bible. It is not a "something here, something there, a few verses now, a few verses later" approach. What Paul counsels Timothy and all the ministers to follow is a consistent devotion to the Bible and its message to all—individually and as members of the body of Christ. This kind of consistent study requires a planned approach in terms of time, study, meditation, note-taking, and sharing the Word. The following steps may help.

1. Select a Bible translation that you are comfortable with.
2. Set aside a specific time each day for study and meditation,

preferably first thing in the morning. Decide on how much time you want to devote, and stick to it.

3. Decide on a study plan. Perhaps you like a sequential plan that begins with Genesis and ends with Revelation. Or maybe you enjoy studying portions from the Old and New Testaments simultaneously. Or maybe you would rather start with your favorites—say, biographies, psalms, proverbs, gospels, or the epistles. Another option is to use the *Adult Bible Study Guide* as part of your devotional. Regardless of your choice, stay focused and complete your study plan.

4. Keep a journal as you study the Word. Recording the thoughts that nourish your soul as you study the Word will prove immensely beneficial. Perhaps you will find a thought from Scripture that leaps out and tells you, "Preach me," or "Share me with so-and-so who needs this." And perhaps you will find a prayer or an experience of sorrow or joy that speaks to your own soul. Remember, different passages speak for different needs—wisdom, praise, thanksgiving, comfort, and guidance. The practice of writing out Bible passages can also help us memorize Scripture, which is an important spiritual skill to have. Nourishment from Scripture is never sufficient, but always fulfilling.

5. Apply the Scripture you have studied to your personal life. This helps you see yourselves and others from God's perspective. Ask yourself, *What does this reading teach me for today? Are there corrections I should make in my life, in my relationships, in my work? Am I ready to make them? How does the Word of God become my food and water for today's living?*

6. Begin and close your study with prayer.

Look Constantly to Jesus

Looking to Jesus constantly means that we fix our eyes, our hearts, our affection—our all—upon Him. The apostle speaks of the

constant continuance of this look as being essential to our faith and ministry: "Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb 12:2).

Observe what is involved in looking constantly to Jesus. It is necessary because He is the author and finisher of our faith. He is our joy. He is our salvation. He bore our sin. He took upon Himself our sin and our shame. In Him we have the possibility of being with God forever.

In speaking to His disciples, Jesus used a powerful example: "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5, NIV). Called to serve as deacons and deaconesses, our ministry becomes effective when we are firmly rooted and grounded in Him. Just as attachment is necessary between the branches and the vine to bear fruit, so should we as branches be attached to Jesus the true Vine. When we pursue nurture through seeking Jesus, the blessing and life we receive from Him flows from us to everyone we interact with.

How do we attach ourselves to Jesus? Says White: "The life of the vine becomes the life of the branch. So the soul dead in trespasses and sins receives life through connection with Christ. By faith in Him as a personal Saviour the union is formed. The sinner unites his weakness to Christ's strength, his emptiness to Christ's fullness, his frailty to Christ's enduring might. Then he has the mind of Christ. The humanity of Christ has touched our humanity, and our humanity has touched divinity. Consequently, through the agency of the Holy Spirit man becomes a partaker of the divine nature. He is accepted in the Beloved" (DA 675).

As deacons and deaconesses, our lives are empowered only by being attached to Him. Hence we must constantly seek Jesus through

prayer, cultivate an abiding relationship with Him, and obtain from Him strength and guidance.

Seek to be Transformed

The third principle deacons and deaconesses need to follow at a personal level is "seek to be transformed." Writing to the believers in Rome, the apostle Paul commanded them to remember an essential Christian responsibility: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Rom 12:2, KJV).

In the service of the church, conformity to the world has no place. We cannot be deacons and deaconesses if our lifestyle, habits, friendships, and thoughts reflect the priorities of the world. As Christians, and more so as those who are called to serve the church, we are expected to renounce such priorities and practices, and instead undergo a drastic and daily transformation of life that will reflect the character of Christ.

When you seek to live a transformed life, you will "make God your entire dependence. When you do otherwise, then it is time for a halt to be called. Stop right where you are, and change the order of things. . . . In sincerity, in soul-hunger, cry after God. Wrestle with the heavenly agencies until you have the victory. Put your whole being into the Lord's hands soul, body, and spirit, and resolve to be His loving, consecrated agency, moved by His will, controlled by His mind, infused by His Spirit . . . then you will see heavenly things clearly" (SD 105).

Such a transformed life will yield to the plans, purposes, and requirements of God. Be it in caring for personal interests or sharing the beauty and seriousness of marriage, be it in disciplining our children or reaching out to the orphans and the widows, be it in preaching the Word or leading a person to the baptismal pool, be

it in paying a faithful tithe or observing the Sabbath in its true and sanctifying manner, the deacons and deaconesses will let Christ's spirit of transformation provide the pattern and the power of life.

A deacon or deaconess, so transformed, looking constantly to Jesus, and living a life of devotion to prayer and God's Word will find divine empowerment to overcome the onslaughts of Satan and lead the church in true and triumphant ministry.

FAMILY

A deacon or deaconess committed to a Christ-centered life has already discovered on a personal level the foundation of effective ministry. The next area that deserves attention is the family life of such an individual. A family that stays close to Christ and grows in Him finds less room for temptation or sin to take root. Strong families not only ensure their own spiritual growth but also are able to minister to others in the church. They are able to discover and develop their God-given gifts to share in ministry, and become role models to others, sharing Christ's presence and blessing with other families.

White says: "Home should be made all that the word implies. It should be a little heaven upon earth, a place where the affections are cultivated instead of being studiously repressed. Our happiness depends upon this cultivation of love, sympathy, and true courtesy to one another" (AH 15).

How do deacons and deaconesses develop strong, spiritual homes? The same formula that helps the growth of spiritual life on a personal level also helps at the family level—seek His Word, look constantly to Jesus, and seek to be transformed.

Study God's Word

A family that prays together stays together. That's more than a slogan. Spiritually strong families are not a result of an accident,

but an outcome of growing together in experiencing Christ as their Savior and Lord. Families that spend time together in worship, in Bible study, in prayer, and in service to others will experience transformation and spiritual strength, and they will be of great service to the church. Says White: "God would have our families symbols of the family in heaven. Let parents and children bear this in mind every day, relating themselves to one another as members of the family of God. Then their lives will be of such a character as to give to the world an object lesson of what families who love God and keep His commandments may be. Christ will be glorified; His peace and grace and love will pervade the family circle like a precious perfume" (AH 17).

It is the spiritual responsibility of deacons and deaconesses to work toward making their homes a heaven on earth, where God's Word will be honored, prayer and worship will be regular, every meal will be an occasion for thanksgiving to God, the poor and the needy will be cared for, the children will be taught the way of the Lord, and the Sabbath will be considered and kept as a delight. Such a home will be a tower of strength and an example of what God expects of His servants.

Look Constantly to Jesus

Just as the spiritual life of an individual grows strong by seeking the presence of Jesus in their lives, so it would be with the family. Individuals build relationships with Jesus through prayer and meditation, and so does the family. Prayer in the family is not limited to asking for God's help with challenges others or we are facing. Family prayer affirms God's loving presence in our lives and praises Him for guiding and blessing us. Prayer is our special way to grow closer to Jesus, both as individuals and as a family.

Seek to be Transformed

As families grow together through studying God's Word and building their relationship with Jesus, individuals and the family as a whole are transformed in God's image. Challenges are faced together. Feelings, thoughts, and ideas are shared openly. Each family member is respected for who he or she is. Love remains the sole foundation of family relationship. Because anger and resentment are not present, temptation and sin have no opportunity to take root and break the family bond apart. Parents share a strong, loving relationship based on their love for Jesus; their example shows their children how to form relationships outside of the family, in church, at school, and elsewhere.

White summarizes how family worship and togetherness benefits children in the family: "Children who receive this kind of instruction will . . . be prepared to fill places of responsibility and, by precept and example, will be constantly aiding others to do right. Those whose moral sensibilities have not been blunted will appreciate right principles; they will put a just estimate upon their natural endowments and will make the best use of their physical, mental, and moral powers. Such souls are strongly fortified against temptation; they are surrounded by a wall not easily broken down" (AH 17).

When their personal and family lives are spiritually strong, deacons and deaconesses have the primary essentials to build a strong ministry team in their church—a ministry that can withstand every attack of Satan and his agents.

MINISTRY TEAM

Now we move to the third level: the ministry teams of deacons and deaconesses. How do we focus spiritual growth and development among them as a team, and help them stay dedicated and focused on the demands of their ministry? This spiritual support can act as

a bridge between individual team members and the church, and can also provide a sanctuary when the demands of ministry become overwhelming.

However, ministry team meetings can easily become business meetings, dealing with the routine and deflecting time and space from spiritual growth and fellowship. How, then, can we focus ministry meetings on Jesus while supporting one another and the church? While strong relationships, prayer, Bible study, a connection with Jesus, and a ministry journal can provide a foundation for the spiritual life and growth of the ministry of deacons and deaconesses, the three-fold formula we applied in relationship to personal and family growth is also relevant at this level.

Study God's Word

The Bible is the best guide for team ministry. The books of Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the gospels, and pastoral epistles are good sources of wisdom, inspiration, and strength for team ministry. The Bible studies can be led on a rotational basis and deal with biblical examples. For example, researching the biblical origins of the first seven deacons and studying Christ's life of service are good lessons for deacons and deaconesses as they carry forward this teamwork.

Start each team ministry meeting with group prayer, followed by a short Bible study or meditation. A period of personal or intercessory prayer in small groups may follow. A rotating leadership schedule for prayer and Bible study will help encourage and affirm each member. At times, inviting the pastor or a guest to lead in these studies may provide a different outlook.

Look Constantly to Jesus

Bring Jesus into every moment of team ministry. Christ is our foundation and our connection to God. We connect to Jesus as

the source of our strength and the inspiration for spiritual growth as individuals and families. Likewise we must remain connected with Him to support our ministry in the church and in the church community. But connecting to Jesus is not simply a theory. That connection must lead the service as deacons and deaconesses to bear fruits for Jesus—to help His body on earth grow.

The book of Acts indicates that when the believers united together in prayer, the Word of God spread and the church grew (Acts 1:14, 15; 2:42, 47; 4:18–33; 8:15–25; 10:9–48; 12:1–25). So it is with team ministry and prayer today. Church leaders need to guide their members into spending time together seeking the Lord—praying for one another, planning, and nurturing the fruit He gives. "The promise is made [Matt 18:19, 20] on condition that the united prayers of the church are offered, and in answer to these prayers there may be expected a power greater than that which comes in answer to private prayer. The power given will be proportionate to the unity of the members and their love of God and for one another" (Lt 32, 1903, p. 5).

Seek to be Transformed

Individuals and families are transformed into God's image through Bible study and through their growing relationship with Jesus. This is also true for the team ministry of today's deacons and deaconesses. Their ministry is also transformed and mirrors the service given by the first deacons of the early church.

THE CHURCH: STRENGTHENED TO SERVE

So far we have traced how the spiritual growth of deacons and deaconesses at various levels—personal, family, team ministry—is strengthened by the study of God's Word, by constantly looking to Jesus—the Author and Finisher of our faith and the founder of the church—and by seeking daily to be transformed. When such

spiritual strength takes full possession of their individual lives, their families, and their ministry teams, they will discover that the entire church becomes spiritually strong and reflects the glory of God in the community. Even after seeing this result, the study of God's Word, continual dependence on Jesus in prayer and worship, and a daily search for transformation of life must continue at the corporate level of the entire congregation. Only then will the ministry of the church fully reflect the character of Jesus. Only then will deacons and deaconesses grow to full maturity. Only then will they see their faith community become strong and able to stand against every wile of the devil, and be a witness to the saving grace and power of Jesus.

CONCLUSION

When deacons and deaconesses strive for spiritual maturity and live according to biblical standards, their lives become a powerful witnessing tool for the power of God's saving grace. When they maintain integrity in their personal and professional lives, as well as in the church, they will truly become *diakonia*—those committed to serve the church, strengthening those within, drawing those outside—the fellowship of faith in Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER 7
PARTNERS IN MINISTRY

Ministry at the local church involves various levels of leadership, each with specific responsibilities and all levels working in harmony. The pastor and associate pastors provide a leading role in the local ministry. That ministry includes preaching the Word, worship services of the church, planning for evangelism, growth and development of the church, fostering the spirit of a united family among church members, maintaining a link with the local conference, promoting stewardship, and keeping the church alive as an active partner of the worldwide family that makes up the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The elders form the next rung of the leadership and ministry to the local church, with specific functions that assist the local pastor.

The next rung of leaders at the local church consists of deacons and deaconesses. Their function is not limited to caring for the needy and the poor, even though that responsibility is what initiated the creation of such an office in the apostolic church (Acts 6:1–7). Even in those early days, deacons and deaconesses were partners in the ministry of the local church, whose mission and influence were growing day by day. Some of those early deacons turned out to be powerful preachers and evangelists. Stephen, for example, was the first deacon to stand before Jerusalem's Jewish leaders and others and present a powerful exposition from the Old Testament, tracing the history of God's plan of salvation from the time of Abraham to the recent events of the crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus and His enthronement at the right hand of God. Deacon Stephen's commitment to the ministry

eventually led him to martyrdom (Acts 6:8–60). Likewise, Philip, another deacon, at the command of an angel gave a Bible study to an Ethiopian officer and led him to become a Christian, thereby sowing the first gospel seed in faraway Ethiopia (Acts 8:26–40).

So deacons and deaconesses are to be trained, enabled, and encouraged to be partners in the ministry of the church, in addition to caring for the physical and community needs of the church. Ellen G. White states: "The fact that these brethren had been ordained for the special work of looking after the needs of the poor, did not exclude them from teaching the faith. On the contrary, they were fully qualified to instruct others in the truth, and they engaged in the work with great earnestness and success" (AA 89). The apostle Paul recognized the role deacons must play as bearers of the gospel when he wrote in one of his last epistles (1 Tim 3:8–13) about the spiritual qualities that should characterize the life and ministry of deacons. The apostle was certain that deacons and deaconesses are partners in the ministry of the local church, and expected that they "ought to conduct" themselves as such "in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (2 Tim 3:15).

PROMOTING CHURCH HARMONY

One of the most important duties of ministry that all church members, including deacons and deaconesses, should be involved in is the promotion and maintenance of unity within the fellowship. Church unity is too precious to be taken for granted. Any discord in that fellowship harms the body of Christ, dishonors His name, and facilitates the work of Satan in destroying the unity of the church. Unity among church members as a witness to the saving power of God is stressed throughout Scripture. Jesus prayed that all His disciples "may be one, as You, Father, *are* in Me, and I in You"

(John 17:21). As noted already, even the establishment of the first deacons became necessary in the apostolic church in order to deal with discord that arose between two dominant communities that comprised the early church (Acts 6:1). The appointment of the seven to take the oversight of special lines of work proved a great blessing to the church. These officers gave careful consideration to individual needs as well as to the general financial interests of the church, and by their prudent management and their godly example they were an important aid to their fellow officers in binding together the various interests of the church into a united whole.

"That this step was in the order of God, is revealed in the immediate results for good that were seen. 'The word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly'" (AA 89).

How should deacons and deaconesses promote and maintain church harmony?

1. Follow the example of the early church. "The organization of the church at Jerusalem was to serve as a model for the organization of churches in every other place where messengers of truth should win converts to the gospel. Those to whom was given the responsibility of the general oversight of the church were not to lord it over God's heritage, but, as wise shepherds, were to 'feed the flock of God, being ensamples to the flock' (1 Pet 5:2, 3); and the deacons were to be 'men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom.' These men were to take their position unitedly on the side of right and to maintain it with firmness and decision. Thus they would have a uniting influence upon the entire flock" (AA 91).

2. Show in word and deed your highest priority to church unity. Personal preferences, influence of family and friends, group interests, and prejudices should not come in the way of ministering to the church. Discord thrives when church leaders give the appearance of being partial to one side.

3. Facilitate an atmosphere of openness and friendship. Do not take sides between parties in dispute. Be open to listen to both parties. Encourage them to affirm that no problem is beyond solution when differing sides submit their views to the reconciling ministry of the Holy Spirit and seek the Spirit's guidance through earnest prayer. Avoid a judgmental spirit or any negative feelings to dominate the discussions. The focus should not be to dwell on the wrongs that may have occurred in the past but the right course to follow in the future—the harmony of the church is preserved when the past is buried and the future is open to lasting unified actions.

Says White: "If matters of difficulty between brethren were not laid open before others, but frankly spoken of between themselves in the spirit of Christian love, how much evil might be prevented! How many roots of bitterness whereby many are defiled would be destroyed, and how closely and tenderly might the followers of Christ be united in His love!" (MB 59).

4. Cultivate the habit of praying regularly for the unity of the church. Church unity and advancement through a ministry of continual prayer must be the first and last concern of every church member—particularly those involved in the leadership of local ministry. Deacons and deaconesses should set an example in constant and intercessory prayers.

5. Visit those who are in disagreement or displaying resentment toward a particular person or aspect involving local ministry. Be discreet, and never make inappropriate comments to or about people involved in the dispute. Don't become biased or even give the impression that you are leaning toward one side. Try a third option that is different from the ones the disputing parties are holding on to. If necessary, take the help of an elder or the pastor. At all times, seek the forgiving love of God to do its silent work among all parties concerned.

White's counsel on dealing with disputes in the church is timely and wise: "Whenever the message of truth comes home to souls with special power, Satan stirs up his agents to start a dispute over some minor question. Thus he seeks to attract attention from the real issue. Whenever a good work is begun, there are cavilers ready to enter into dispute over forms or technicalities, to draw minds away from the living realities. When it appears that God is about to work in a special manner for His people, let them not be enticed into a controversy that will work only ruin of souls. The questions that most concern us are, Do I believe with saving faith on the Son of God? Is my life in harmony with the divine law?" (DA 396).

ORGANIZING FOR MINISTRY

Although there are specific functions assigned to deacons and deaconesses, they do not operate independently from other church leaders. They function as partners in ministry with those assigned to care for the congregation—pastors and elders. Each office is designed to function in a particular ministry of the church and together they all accomplish the overall growth and strengthening of the church and its mission.

White says "it is necessary that the same order and system should be maintained in the church now as in the days of the apostles. The prosperity of the cause depends very largely upon its various departments being conducted by men of ability, who are qualified for their positions" (SR 260).

The pastor, elders, deacons, and deaconesses complement each other in addressing the needs of the congregation. The elders, deacons, and deaconesses support the pastor, the principal leader. Together, all play a part in the ministry of spiritual nurture, evangelism, reclaiming, and the care of individuals and families in the church that could not otherwise be done.

In this pivotal task of the church, what is the special role of deacons and deaconesses? In the early church, the appointment of deacons proved to be a great blessing for meeting the needs of the community, for spreading the word of God, and for the onward growth of the church (Acts 6:7). The deacons "gave careful consideration to individual needs as well as to the general financial interests of the church, and by their prudent management and their godly example they were an important aid to their fellow officers in binding together the various interests of the church into a united whole" (AA 89).

In today's world, when the growth and nature of the church is complex and demanding, the church needs the office of deacons and deaconesses to be well organized for serving the varied demands of a growing church. Such organization includes constitution of boards, holding of regular board meetings, maintaining of proper board minutes, and planning ahead for important services.

BOARD OF DEACONS AND DEACONESSES

While small churches may elect two or three deacons who can work together quite harmoniously without any formal organization, large churches may need several deacons. In the latter case, it is wise to organize a board of deacons. The pastor or head elder may call all the elected deacons as soon as the election is over and guide in the organization of the board of deacons. This organizational meeting could select a head deacon—someone respected by the church for his/her spiritual maturity and leadership, and who has had previous experience in serving as a deacon. Another deacon may be elected to serve as the secretary of the board of deacons. The board chairperson is responsible for coordinating the service schedule of deacons for various church services and for particular Sabbath assignments.

The same principle applies in the formation of a board of deaconesses and in the choosing of a head deaconess. The board of

deaconesses works closely with the board of deacons, and together they ensure a warm and hospitable atmosphere during worship services, particularly on Sabbath. Welcoming members and visitors in a positive way and saying an appropriate word of welcome will make the worship service meaningful to regular and visiting worshippers. Greeting is not just a formal duty of deacons and deaconesses; it is a joyful witness of what is in store during the worship or Bible study hour.

Board meetings

Although there is no fixed number of required meetings of the board of deacons and deaconesses, the meetings should be scheduled and organized early in the church calendar year. Regardless of the frequency of the meetings—monthly, bimonthly, or quarterly—provision should be made for unscheduled meetings when urgent issues arise. Board meetings provide excellent opportunities to train the new deacons and deaconesses. They also provide avenues to assess, identify, and address the needs of church members.

Board meeting agendas

The agenda for board meetings typically contains the following:

- A devotional or reading of a biblical passage.
- Season of prayer.
- Brief progress report on activities voted earlier.
- Planning for future activities or projects.
- Lists or participation schedules for worship services, greeter activities, offering collection, communion service, baptisms, etc.
- General visitation planning, lists of households to be visited during the designated time period, and distribution of addresses among deacons and deaconesses.

- Review of upkeep and general care of the church premises. Although some churches may use hired help to clean and maintain the property, deacons and deaconesses may take turns to monitor such activities.
- Other items of business.
- Closing prayer.

The head deacon and deaconess, together with the head elder and pastor of the church/district, are responsible for the preparation of the agenda for board meetings. These meetings, properly conducted and carried out in a spirit of cooperation, will be a key to the success of the ministry of deacons and deaconesses.

Board meeting reports

It is important to keep accurate minutes of board meetings in the form indicated by the church clerk. These minutes should be subsequently filed with the church clerk. The church clerk is responsible for sending these minutes, along with other church business, to the appropriate church organizational entities.

Sample Board Meeting Organization Form

To Do	Person Responsible	Budget	Date/Deadline

Deacons and Deaconesses: Duty Roster

Date	Service of Humility	Lord's Supper	Other

DUTIES OF DEACONS[7]

The work of deacons involves a wide range of service of the church, including:

1. *Assistance at Services and Meetings*—Deacons are usually responsible for welcoming members and visitors as they enter the church and for assisting them, where necessary, to find seats. They also cooperate with the pastor and elders for smooth functioning of all meetings.

2. *Visitation of Members*—In many churches visitation is arranged by distributing membership by districts and assigning a deacon to each district with the expectation that he will visit each home at least once a quarter.

3. *Preparation for Baptismal Service*—Deacons make necessary preparations for baptismal services.

4. *Assistance at Communion Service*—At the celebration of the ordinance of foot-washing, the deacons or deaconesses provide everything needed for the service, such as towels, basins, water, and buckets. After the service, they see that the utensils and linen are washed and properly stored.

[7] This section is taken from the *Church Manual*, 78–79.

Remaining bread and wine should not be consumed, but disposed of in a respectful manner by deacons and deaconesses following the Lord's Supper.

5. *Care of the Sick and Aiding the Poor and Unfortunate*—Deacons and deaconesses are charged with assisting the sick, poor, and unfortunate and should keep the church informed of their needs and enlist the support of members. Money should be provided for the work from the fund for the poor and needy. The treasurer, on recommendation from the board, will pass over to the deacons or deaconesses whatever may be needed for use in needy cases.

6. *Care and Maintenance of Property*—In churches where the responsibility for the care and maintenance of church property is not assigned to a building committee, deacons and deaconesses have this responsibility.

DUTIES OF DEACONESSES[8]

Deaconesses serve the church in a wide variety of activities, including:

1. *Greeting and Visiting Guests and Members*—In many churches, deaconesses assist in greeting guests and members at meetings and in visiting members in their homes when they cannot attend services.

2. *Assistance at Baptisms*—Deaconesses ensure that female candidates are cared for both before and after the ceremony. They also give such counsel and help as may be necessary regarding suitable garments for baptism. Robes of suitable material should be provided. Where robes are used, the deaconesses should see that they are laundered and carefully stored.

3. *Arrangements for the Communion Service*—Deaconesses and deacons arrange for everything needed for this service and see that everything used is cared for afterward.

[8] This section is taken from the *Church Manual*, 79.

Before the communion service begins, deaconesses make arrangements for the communion table, including preparing the bread and wine, arranging the ordinance table, pouring the wine, placing the plates of unleavened bread, and covering the table with the linen provided for that purpose.

Deaconesses assist in the ordinance of foot washing, giving special aid to women visitors and new members.

4. *The Care of the Sick and the Poor*—Deaconesses assist deacons in caring for the sick, needy, and unfortunate.

5. *Care and Maintenance of Property*—In churches where the responsibility for the care and maintenance of church property is not assigned to a building committee, deacons and deaconesses have this responsibility.

CONCLUSION

The local church is known by its ministry to both members and the community in which it exists. As partners in the ministry of the local church, deacons and deaconesses are ordained by the local church to perform various duties essential for different functions of the local church: ministry, evangelism, Bible studies, visitation, caring for the poor, oversight of church property, etc. How well and how faithfully these functions are performed affect the growth and effectiveness of the church. "'God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.' 1 Corinthians 14:33. He requires that order and system be observed in the conduct of church affairs today no less than in the days of old. He desires His work to be carried forward with thoroughness and exactness so that He may place upon it the seal of His approval. Christian is to be united with Christian, church with church, the human instrumentality co-operating with the divine, every agency subordinate to the Holy Spirit, and all combined in giving to the world the good tidings of the grace of God" (AA 96).

CHAPTER 8
KEEPING THE HOUSE OF THE LORD: A PLACE FOR WORSHIP

"I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go into the house of the Lord'" (Ps 122:1). The words of the Psalmist remind us that there is no place of joy greater than the house of the Lord. It is where the saint and the sinner, the rich and the poor, the young and the old, the powerful and the commoner, the well and the ill come to find inner peace, to listen to words of assurance, to shout out "joyful, joyful, we adore thee," and then to wait for the benediction of the Most High for the unknown journey of days ahead.

To keep this house of God and its environs clean, neat, orderly, and to facilitate it as a place of worship is one of the essential duties of deacons and deaconesses. "System and order are manifest in all the works of God throughout the universe. Order is the law of heaven, and it should be the law of God's people on the earth" (TM 26). So it should be the work of the deacons and deaconesses—to care for the physical facilities of the church, to make the church a welcoming place, and to facilitate the church as a place of worship and fellowship.

CARING FOR THE PHYSICAL PLANT

Deacons and deaconesses, as officers of the church, have a special responsibility to care for the physical aspects of the church, from maintaining the appearance of church property to providing basic necessities that ensure a warm environment for worship and fellowship. Some of the important aspects of this work include the following:

- Keep the outward appearance of the church clean, beautiful, and inviting. The outward appearance of the church is perhaps the first thing people notice before entering the church. An unkempt yard with overgrown grass and weeds gives a poor impression of the church. We would not allow such a poor environment around our homes; how can we neglect the surroundings of our worship place?
- Attend to needed repairs, such as broken windows, leaking pipes, broken chairs or pews, inadequate lighting, poor public address system, etc.
- Have a system in place to take care of issues related to the churchyard, lawns, parking areas.
- Maintain adequate janitorial service to take care of the general needs of the church property on a regular basis both within and outside the church. Ensure restrooms are in order and adequately supplied, burnt out bulbs are replaced, pews and furniture are dusted and clean. At times, perhaps once a quarter, it may be necessary to designate a particular Sunday as the "Church Cleaning Day" and invite volunteers to contribute their services in keeping their place of worship attractive and clean. Make that a day of fun and fellowship, possibly including a simple lunch. Whole families may be encouraged to keep their worship place the best it can be.
- Ensure that fire alarm and extinguishing systems are in working order.
- Ensure that heating and cooling systems are properly maintained.
- Keep the church board or the building maintenance committee informed of anticipated major repair tasks and help plan a workable and financially feasible schedule. Such tasks include, for example, painting, paving the parking lot, roofing, replacement of accessories within the church.

Although deacons and deaconesses are responsible for maintaining and caring for the physical aspects of the church property, it is not necessary that they do all the work. Where churches are able, they may allot a budget for the upkeep of the church, and the deacons/deaconesses may take turns to supervise that the work is appropriately carried out by the contracting parties.

Coming to worship in the church is one of the most sacred opportunities believers have in manifesting their relationship to God. "To the humble, believing soul, the house of God on earth is the gate of heaven. The song of praise, the prayer, the words spoken by Christ's representatives, are God's appointed agencies to prepare a people for the church above, for that loftier worship into which there can enter nothing that defileth" (5T 491).

Deacons and deaconesses have the privilege and duty to maintain the sacredness of the "house of God" as a "gate of heaven." They can accomplish this by giving serious and planned attention to let the worshippers experience a church that is welcoming, a church that serves, and a church that leads in worship.

THE WELCOMING CHURCH

Deacons and deaconesses have the primary responsibility of making worshippers feel welcome the moment they step into church, even though pastors and elders may also join in this spiritual experience of receiving members and visitors for worship. The church should be user-friendly and its hand of fellowship should be extended to all, without distinction.

Deacons and deaconesses can build a welcoming church by making the worshippers feel at home, organizing reception teams with members assigned specific tasks, assigning specific responsibilities to specific team members, establishing support groups, and organizing for special responsibilities and activities.

Those who enter the church should feel that they are entering a warm and friendly place where their value as individuals will be recognized and their need for spiritual blessings and growth will be affirmed. Deacons and deaconesses should care for the following:

- The physical environment both outside and inside should be clean and appealing. A sense of beauty and order should mark the entry into the church by the appropriate use of flowers, a welcome desk, and program bulletins. The bulletins and a warm handshake may welcome worshippers to the blessings in store for them.
- When feasible, pastors and elders may be invited to join in the greeting of worshippers at the door.
- Make special note of visitors and show them where they may wish to be seated.
- Avoid jokes, unnecessary comments, or distractive remarks that may negatively influence visitors.
- Encourage members to be kind and courteous to visitors, help them get seated, and make them familiar with Bibles and the hymnals on the rack.
- Provide for proper ushering, particularly when the church is crowded. Even otherwise, ushering can add dignity and decorum to the services.
- Make sure each worshipper has a program bulletin. Encourage members to guide visitors on how to use the bulletin and how to participate in the service, such as in responsive Scripture reading, joining in singing, and in reverential attitude during prayer.

THE SERVING CHURCH

Although it is appropriate and expected of all church members to maintain a warm and welcoming atmosphere that will permeate

all worshippers, particularly visitors, deacons and deaconesses may set up a formal organization, with specific service responsibilities. The following table may be used as a tool for such an organization, although not all the offices may be needed in every church.

POSITION	JOB DESCRIPTION
Receptionist Coordinator	Organize and supervise the work of the receptionists
Church Elder assigned as Counselor	Support the Receptionist Coordinator and work with him or her
Church/District Pastor	Support the work of the Receptionist Coordinator
Women's Ministries Leader	Work with the Receptionist Coordinator
Personal Ministries Leader	Support and assist in training, work in conjunction with the receptionist team.
Interest Coordinator	Work together with the Receptionist Coordinator
Secretary	Be responsible for ordering materials, taking notes, and preparing reports
Receptionist	Greet at the church door or in the parking lot
Associate Receptionist	Function inside the church building
Contact Receptionist	Maintain direct contact with visitors
Deacon and Deaconess	Act as receptionists
Bible Class Leader	Greet Bible class participants
Missionary Couples	Visit those interested and give Bible studies
Prayer Groups	Pray for the visitors and their prayer requests

While the table above summarizes various activities that may be assigned to specific individuals to ensure smooth operation of

numerous church functions, the board of deacons/deaconesses may appoint specific teams responsible for regular functions. Whatever ministry the teams may engage in, each team should be well informed about its role and be trained to achieve its objective. A prayer-filled ministry, cooperation with other teams, regular performance review and evaluation, and a willingness to learn and adapt should characterize the work of all team members.

Following are some of the important teams that may be organized to make the church service-oriented, as needed and voted by the board of deacons/deaconesses.

Receptionist Team

This team is responsible for greeting worshippers and making them feel welcome. Such steps may include directing traffic in the parking lot, providing an umbrella in case of inclement weather, greeting worshippers at the door, handing out church bulletins, and brochures. If necessary guide them to appropriate places, including Sabbath School meeting places or various worship gatherings. The receptionist is perhaps the only face worshippers will see at close range, and so a genuine smile and handshake are appropriate means of true welcome.

Associate Receptionists

Associate receptionists assist their team by helping worshippers within the church—in finding suitable seats, guiding families with small children to appropriate places, being on the lookout for visitors or first-time worshippers and inviting them for a potluck, if one has been planned, or perhaps taking a particular person or family home for lunch.

Secretarial Team

The number of secretaries on the team depends on the size of the church and the flow of visitors. The team's work includes: registering first-time visitors—their names, contact information, and any particular need they may have, such as pastoral visit, study, or prayer—and entering such information in a database as well as arranging for appropriate follow-up; and maintaining an adequate supply of worship-related materials, tracts, free books, etc.

Interest Coordinator Teams

Interest coordinators are responsible for follow-up contacts with visitors who have made specific requests. Ideally such contacts should be made within a week of requests, and can be done over the phone or in a personal visit, depending on the interests expressed. Requests for pastoral visits, prayers, Bible studies, ministry to the sick, or pastoral counseling should be taken seriously and channeled through the appropriate person without much delay. Interest coordinators may also send a letter of greeting to the visitors, expressing the church's appreciation for their visit, inviting them to come again and enrich the church's worship service, and offer to be of any assistance they may need.

Support Personnel Teams

These teams consist of trained personnel specialized in visitation, intercessory prayer, Bible studies, family worships, child training, and home budget management. The church should provide needed training to persons who want to be involved in these ministries by conducting training camps, workshops, and review meetings as needed. Conferences often offer specialized workshops for those wanting to lead out in these areas. Support teams may also guide members who need special assistance in areas such as counseling,

grief management, financial advice, etc. Care should be taken that teams do not enter into areas where specialized professional training is required.

Some support teams may be formed by utilizing professionally trained personnel, within the congregation, who may wish to be engaged in such a ministry. Such persons may include doctors, nurses, health practitioners, educators, counselors, psychologists, attorneys, and others who wish to contribute to the outreach of the church to those who need help. Care should, however, be taken that any such support ministry stays within professional limits and does not go into areas of treatment that should be left to the individuals and their choice of trained professionals.

THE WORSHIPPING CHURCH

Deacons and deaconesses have a personal responsibility to ensure that the worship activity of the church proceeds smoothly in all beauty and holiness. This responsibility demands specific commitment on several levels: personal, organizational, relational, and other worship activities.

Personal Commitment

Most of the duties of the deacons and deaconesses involve personal relationships. It is therefore important that they be aware of factors that enrich such relationships and be cautious of those that diminish or strain those relations. The following may be noted:

- Dress appropriately, tastefully, and modestly. Well-groomed hair, breath-fresheners, polished shoes, and other such items that add to personal appearance enhance your decorum.
- Arrive in the church at least thirty minutes before starting time to take care of advance preparations needed for the service.

Organizational Concerns

Deacons and deaconesses have many organizational responsibilities to take care of before worshippers come to the church and even after they have settled down. It is important that all things be done in order and in time so that the study and worship activities begin on time and go on without any hindrance or delay. The following are some important points to keep in mind:

- Ensure that church entries, auditorium, platform arrangements, and public address system are ready for the congregants and the participants.
- Be well acquainted with the logistics of the church plant: location of children's departments, mothers' room, church office, kitchen and dining hall, community service, restroom, etc.
- Check to see that the church foyer and the reception area are in order and that materials commonly sought after are available at the reception desk: church bulletins, offering envelopes, Bibles, hymnals, Sabbath School study guides, witness literature, pens, information on upcoming programs in the church, visitor registration materials, special request cards, etc.
- Make sure that the auditorium is ready to facilitate worship. Are there enough Bibles, hymnals, and offering envelopes in the racks? It is embarrassing for worshippers to be searching for these when they are needed at specific times during the worship hour.
- Be prepared to answer questions worshippers, particularly visitors, may have. Who is the speaker for the day? Is there a special service for children or young people? Is there any special meeting during the Sabbath afternoon or during the week? How can a visit from the pastor or the elder be arranged for a person in need at home or to visit the sick

in the hospital? Efficiency of deacons and deaconesses is in direct proportion to how fully they are acquainted with the local church and its ministry.

- Ensure that first aid equipment and materials are available and assign personnel to take care of emergencies.
- Care for persons with special needs. Deacons and deaconesses should ensure that people with special needs are adequately cared for. They should be welcomed and embraced as an important part of the body of Christ. Churches should provide ramps for wheelchairs, personal help for physically challenged, a special place for nursing mothers, appropriate places for diaper changes, and readiness to deal with emergencies that may occur while the service is in progress.

Relational Aspects

The environment for worship begins at the door. A deacon or deaconess may be the first face worshippers and visitors see as they enter the church. You have the ability to make a first impression on a new visitor, or to warmly welcome a regular attendee or friend. Such service and friendship shown at the door and within the church can have lasting impact for the glory of God and for church growth and ministry. The following points may help build a good relational ministry within the church.

- Know the church members. Learn their names as well as you can. Nothing embarrasses a longtime church member as to be greeted at the door or in the church as though she or he is a visitor.
- Know the church officers. Be familiar with the names of the church leaders and their various functions. This includes church elders, deacons, deaconesses, Sabbath School leaders and teachers, and department leaders.

- Be tactful, patient, and hospitable. A cheerful smile, serene way of speaking, and attentive manner establish a good rapport with worshippers and visitors.
- Relate to all alike. Everyone deserves equal treatment, regardless of race, gender, religious affiliation, cultural background, economic affluence, or personal appearance.
- Allow for personal selection and choices. Let worshippers choose to sit where they wish to sit. If certain areas are reserved for a particular reason, such as child dedication or baptismal service, place a notice on the pews.
- Make visitors aware of common practices during worship service, such as switching off cell phones, special steps that precede during the Lord's Supper, etc.
- Be attentive and available. Sometimes visitors, for whatever reason, leave the service earlier than the rest of the congregation. When they leave, they should be acknowledged and thanked for their attendance. Be prepared to offer some information or assistance should they need it.
- Be discreet. Avoid gossip, criticism, and comments that could affect the worshippers negatively.
- Make every contact an occasion to create new friendship and a positive invitation for the worshipper to return again.

Worship Services

Worship is the central focus of God's people coming together in the church, and so all activities should be conducted with proper decorum and order (for general guidelines regarding expectations of deacons and deaconesses, see *Church Manual,* chapter 10). The following points will help enhance the beauty and blessings of worship services.

- Deacons and deaconesses with their families may sit in strategic places in the auditorium so that should their service be needed in a particular area, they will be ready to act.
- Guide and coordinate seating arrangements for latecomers and visitors so that all can be seated without embarrassment to themselves or to others who are already seated.
- Exercise patience, discretion, and courtesy in your efforts to maintain orderliness and reverence during the service.
- Work with the parents on the importance of keeping their children with them during the service, providing them something to do (like coloring books), in order to maintain reverence. Periodic seminars may be conducted on the importance of children and how they could be a blessing and reverential.
- Organize the collection of tithes and offering as a part of worship service. The important point is not on the "collection" aspect but on the stewardship and sacredness of tithes and offerings.
- Help the church treasurer in counting the offerings. "All general offerings not in envelopes should be counted by the treasurer in the presence of another officer, preferably a deacon, and a receipt given to such officer" (*Church Manual,* 83).
- At the end of the service, after all the worshippers leave the church, make sure the audio and video equipment is turned off and stored, turn off the lights, program the alarm system, and lock up the church. At times some individuals may stay behind to discuss certain matters pertaining to future ministry appointments. Or some may stay behind for special prayer or pastoral counseling. To care for such cases, one deacon may stay behind to see that the house of the Lord is safely closed until the wonder of worship brings God's people together again.

CONCLUSION

What is the most important characteristic of the house of the Lord that should invite us to come within its walls and experience its joy and gladness? Not the majesty of its architecture, or its lush seating, or the adornment of its outside walls or inside beauty, nor the grandeur of its pipe organ. One place may have all these and more; another may be only a hut with thatched roof and mud floor, but both claim the title, House of the Lord. The Lord's house is the place where God's people assemble for worship, for hearing of the Word, for prayer and fellowship; it is the place where we celebrate our salvation; it is the place that proclaims to the neighborhood where the Lord our God reigns and invites all who "labor and are heavy laden" to experience rest in Him (Matt 11:28). Deacons and deaconesses have the sacred responsibility to maintain the honor and dignity of the house of the Lord.

CHAPTER 9
THE BAPTISMAL SERVICE

"The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, powers infinite and omniscient, . . . are present at every baptism, to receive the candidates who have renounced the world and have received Christ into the soul temple. These candidates have entered into the family of God, and their names are inscribed in the Lamb's book of life" (6BC 1075).

So describes Ellen G. White the sacredness of the baptismal service. Every person who has renounced sin, publicly confesses Jesus as his or her personal Savior, and undergoes baptism not only becomes a member of the local church but a citizen of God's heavenly kingdom. Baptism is therefore an outward symbol of an inward change and commitment, and there is joy in heaven over every person (Luke 15:7) who earnestly and sincerely undertakes that step.

Such a sacred service as baptism should be conducted with utmost care and serious purpose. Baptism is not just a ceremony; it is an open confession and holy celebration that a person is dead to the past life of sin and is now resurrected in the name of Jesus to live a life of righteousness. Those who have a part in the baptismal preparation and service—the ones who studied with the candidate, the pastor who is going to officiate in the ceremony, the church that will accept the candidate into fellowship, and the deacons and deaconesses who will make the necessary preparation for that service—have a sacred responsibility to ensure that the service proceeds with utmost sanctity.

This section will deal only with the responsibility of deacons and deaconesses in respect to baptismal service, such as general instructions, preparation of candidates, and preparation for service.

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

Although candidates have been preparing for baptism, the experience of going under the water and coming out can lead some, especially very young and very senior candidates, to feel a little nervous or insecure. To make the service go smoothly, deacons and deaconesses may take the following steps:

- Arrange with the pastor to acquaint the candidates on the process of public examination of their acceptance of the fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and their commitment to lead a life in accordance with such beliefs. "If public examination is impractical, then candidates should be examined by the board, such as the board of elders, whose report then should be given to the church before baptism" (*Church Manual,* 45–46).
- Encourage the candidates to be relaxed and confident by assuring them that the baptizing minister is an experienced person and will handle the act of going in and coming out of the water as gently as possible.
- Do everything possible to avoid discomfort when entering the water. To prevent unexpected reactions that compromise the solemnity of the event, the deacon or deaconess should brief the candidate about the temperature and depth of water.
- Take adequate steps to care for persons with disabilities. In some cases it may be necessary for a deacon or deaconess to accompany such a person into the water. Disabilities include not only those with permanent impairments, but also those who, for example, wear a cast due to a broken arm or leg. In such

cases, candidates may be counseled to seek medical opinion on postponing the baptism until the cast or the disability is no longer an issue.

- Arrange for the church to own an adequate number of baptismal robes in different sizes. White gives some practical counsel: "The robes should be made of substantial material, of some dark color that water will not injure, and they should be weighted at the bottom. Let them be neat, well-shaped garments, made after an approved pattern. There should be no attempt at ornamentation, no ruffling or trimming. All display, whether of trimming or ornaments, is wholly out of place. When the candidates have a sense of the meaning of the ordinance, they will have no desire for personal adornment" (Ev 314).
- Arrange separate changing rooms for male and female candidates, each room equipped with the following: clothes hangers for hanging and caring for the candidate's clothes during the baptismal service, chairs or benches for candidates to be seated before their turn to enter the baptistery, footstools to facilitate putting shoes on after the ceremony, a mirror, and plastic bags or containers for wet robes.
- Arrange, where possible, a private place for the officiating pastor to enter and exit the baptistery.
- Ensure that all safety measures are in place for entering and exiting the waters. Equip the baptistery with handrails and nonslip mats. Where baptism is conducted in rivers or beaches, special safety measures should be adopted. In all cases, ensure that the privacy and modesty of all candidates are respected and protected.

PREPARATION OF CANDIDATES

Deacons or deaconesses should contact the baptismal candidates prior to baptism with the following:

- Date and time of the ceremony. If the candidate wishes to speak to the officiating pastor before the ceremony, arrange for that possibility.
- A list containing items the candidate should bring: change of clothes where needed, underwear, sandals, towel, comb, etc.
- An invitation card such as the one below that the candidate can give to friends and family members.

Come, share my joy!

After prayerful study of the Bible and self-examination of my faith and life, I have taken the most important decision in my life thus far: to acknowledge Jesus Christ as my personal Savior and accept the salvation from sin He freely offers. I wish to seal this decision by being baptized and becoming a member of His church.

The baptismal service will take place on _____ at the Seventh-day Adventist Church located at _____.

May I invite you to be present at the service, pray with me, and rejoice at this newfound experience in my life.

_____*(signed)*

PREPARATION FOR SERVICE

Duties of Deacons

- Make sure that the baptistery is filled with water and at proper temperature. If the baptism is planned outdoors, such as a river, a lake, or a beach, check on safety features a few days

ahead of the service. If necessary, arrange for one or two lifeguards, skilled in swimming and life-saving procedures.

- Check the conditions of cleanliness and safety of the access steps to the baptistery or the place of baptism.
- Make sure the microphone used by the officiating pastor is properly positioned and safely installed. Check for any electrical leakage.
- Work with deaconesses to let the candidates know about appropriate clothing for baptism. While deacons can counsel male candidates, deaconesses can work with female candidates.
- Work with deaconesses to provide appropriate and suitably sized baptismal robes for each of the candidates. Where robes are not available, request the candidates to come prepared with an appropriate change of clothes.
- After the baptismal vow, accompany male candidates to the changing rooms and assist them as necessary.
- Help male candidates in and out of the water as necessary.
- Be alert to assist the officiating pastor as may be requested or needed.
- After the ceremony, take appropriate measures to drain the baptistery.

Duties of Deaconesses

- Make sure the appearance and decoration of the church is well cared for.
- Check with female candidates beforehand regarding appropriate clothing for baptism.
- Ensure that suitably sized baptismal robes are available for each of the candidates.
- After the baptismal vow, accompany female candidates to the changing rooms and assist them as necessary.

- Help female candidates in and out of the water as necessary.
- Be alert to assist the officiating pastor as necessary or requested.
- Provide and keep at hand robes and towels for any emergencies that might arise.
- After the ceremony, collect all the robes to be washed, ironed, and stored.

CONCLUSION

The baptismal service usually ends with an appeal and a prayer. The appeal arises from the sacredness of the service itself. The sacredness does not rest in any holiness attached to the water or any magical transformation inherent in the rite. But it does rest in the fact that it is a symbol of repentance, confession, and acceptance of Jesus as personal Savior. Going through the act of baptism in itself does not wash away one's sin. Baptism is an outward act of an inward change. The act is a public confession of Jesus as one's personal Savior, and in that confession rests one's turning from the old to the new, from a life of sin to a life of righteousness, from rebellion to submission to God's will. That change of direction genuinely undertaken is a bold step leading to a new life. It is to this possibility of newness in Jesus that the conclusion of a baptismal service must appeal to. Appeal to those who are not yet baptized. Appeal to those who are considering to be baptized. Appeal to those who are touched by the service and who are spoken to by the Spirit. Appeal to those who may be thinking of rebaptism.

In response to that appeal, when hands are raised or when people stand to their feet, the pastor may invite them to give their names for study, prayer, and pastoral visit. Deacons and deaconesses should be ready to pass on the contact cards, which could be collected at the door and deposited in the church office for follow-up.

After the appeal, the officiating pastor offers a special prayer for those who were baptized that they may be recipients of the special power of the Holy Spirit in their newfound walk. The prayer would also be for those who are planning to take that step in the near future. With that affirmation, the baptismal service comes to a close. Deacons and deaconesses along with other church officials should make sure that the newly baptized are welcomed into the fellowship and greeted as the service ends.

CHAPTER 10
THE COMMUNION SERVICE

The communion service is also known as the Lord's Supper. It is an ordinance Jesus Himself instituted the day before His crucifixion. As the Passover was to be a symbol of God's liberation of His people from Egypt's slavery, so is the Lord's Supper a dynamic emblem of what Jesus did on the cross to free us from sin unto salvation. The command "Do this in remembrance of Me" carries with it a purpose: "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes" (1 Cor 11:24–26). As a result, the celebration of the Lord's Supper is a proclamation that Jesus died for our sins and that He is coming again to take us into His kingdom of glory.

Consequently, the breaking of the bread and the drinking of the wine are faith's perpetual symbols to proclaim the reality of the cross until He comes again. The moment the death of Jesus ceases to be central to the faith and life of the Christian, the moment the cross ceases to define Christian life, relationship, and hope—is that moment the gospel loses all meaning.

To prevent that moment from happening in the life of an individual or a congregation is the purpose of the Lord's Table. "The service of the Lord's Supper is just as holy today as it was when instituted by Jesus Christ. Jesus is still present when this sacred ordinance is celebrated" (*Church Manual,* 120). "It is at these, His own appointments, that Christ meets His people, and energizes them by His presence" (DA 656).

Along with bread and wine as emblems of Christ's broken body and shed blood, the communion service also provides the ordinance

of humility, also known as the foot-washing service. Christ instituted foot washing as a preparatory service for participating in the emblems of the Table. "If I then, *your* Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you" (John 13:14, 15).

"Christ was here instituting a religious service. By the act of our Lord this humiliating ceremony was made a consecrated ordinance. It was to be observed by the disciples, that they might ever keep in mind His lessons of humility and service.

"This ordinance is Christ's appointed preparation for the sacramental service. While pride, variance, and strife for supremacy are cherished, the heart cannot enter into fellowship with Christ. We are not prepared to receive the communion of His body and His blood. Therefore it was that Jesus appointed the memorial of His humiliation to be first observed" (DA 650).

If partaking of the bread and the wine is our vertical acknowledgement of and dependence on what Jesus accomplished on the cross for us, the foot-washing service is our horizontal acknowledgement of, and submission to, the demands of Christian life, cleansed from the stain of sin. "The spiritual experience that lies at the heart of foot-washing lifts it from being a common custom to being a sacred ordinance. It conveys a message of forgiveness, acceptance, assurance, and solidarity, primarily from Christ to the believer, but also between the believers themselves. This message is expressed in an atmosphere of humility" (*Church Manual,* 119).

Foot washing is a powerful symbol of harmony and unity. It provides an occasion for healing where there has been a strain, an opportunity for reconciliation, and a reaching out to establish the oneness of Christian relationship.

While pastors and elders are responsible for various aspects of administering the communion service, deacons and deaconesses

have much to do with its preliminary preparation—overseeing the foot-washing service, ensuring orderly distribution of the bread and the wine, and properly caring for the final details of the service. "Everything connected with it [the communion service] should suggest as perfect a preparation as possible." The service "is not to be performed listlessly" (Ev 277–278).

PREPARATIONS FOR THE SERVICE

The Seventh-day Adventist Church customarily celebrates the communion service once a quarter, although it may be observed at other special times, such as the conclusion of a week of prayer, new year commitment service, etc. The regular quarterly service should be held as part of the Sabbath worship hour. The service itself should be publicly announced at least a week in advance so that members can prepare themselves in a spirit of solemnity, soul-searching, and rejoicing. Ordained ministers or elders conduct the service; the role of deacons and deaconesses is to prepare the emblems, make all logistical arrangements, and serve the emblems to the waiting participants. The following are some specific aspects of which deacons and deaconesses should be aware:

- Have an organizational meeting early in the week. Begin with a season of prayer pleading for the working of the Holy Spirit among members so that an atmosphere of solemnity, unity, joy, and reconciliation may prevail during the upcoming service. Distribute responsibilities to each deacon and deaconess, so that all necessary duties are orderly cared for.
- Seventh-day Adventists observe open communion. "All who have committed their lives to the Savior may participate. Children learn the significance of the service by observing others participating. After receiving formal instruction in baptismal classes and making their commitment to Jesus in

baptism, they are thereby prepared to partake in the service themselves" (*Church Manual,* 122).

- Arrange separate areas for men and women for foot washing. "Where stairs or distance is a problem, special arrangements should be made for those with disabilities. In places where it is socially acceptable and where clothing is such that there would be no immodest appearance, separate arrangements may be made for husband and wife or parents and baptized children to share with each other in the foot-washing ceremony" (*Church Manual,* 175).
- Ensure all items needed for the service are in place: for foot washing—basins, water, towels, seating arrangement, soap for hand washing; for the communion—sufficient bread and wine; for the ordinance table—the bread and wine in proper receptacles, communion cups, covering for wine containers and bread plates, table linen; and seating arrangement for worship leaders, deacons, and deaconesses.
- Prepare the bread and wine according to instruction, and ensure that these are free of leavening and fermentation, which are symbols of sin (*Church Manual,* 120).
- Hold a rehearsal prior to the communion service with those who will participate (pastors, elders, deacons, and deaconesses) to coordinate details and make participants aware of their parts, sequence, order, and timing.

PARTICIPATING IN THE SERVICE

The first part of the worship service, preceding the communion, will follow the normal pattern of welcome, doxology, pastoral prayer, hymns, and offering. After this the pastor will present a short sermon to welcome and introduce the congregation to the challenge and joy of the communion service. As the pastor concludes the sermon, he

or she will present the significance of the foot-washing ceremony and invite the congregation to separate for this important service. From then on until the conclusion of the communion service, deacons and deaconesses have important active duties to perform, such as:

- Guide the worshippers, where necessary, to allotted rooms for the foot-washing service. Be aware of new or shy participants who may find it embarrassing to locate partners for foot washing, and help them find partners or offer to be a partner.
- Not all worshippers may leave the sanctuary for foot washing, with visitors and children remaining behind. To maintain the reverence of the hour, deacons or deaconesses may arrange for music, singing, or story-telling relevant to the worship hour.
- In the rooms where the foot washing is taking place, arrange for familiar songs to be sung by all participants, or for background music.
- Each participant, before washing the feet of their partner, may hold the feet and offer a prayer. Or both participants may pray for each other after they have concluded the washing ceremony.
- After all the participants in the allotted room have completed the ceremony, an assigned deacon or elder may encourage all to stand in a circle, hold hands, and offer a prayer. Such prayer should include thanksgiving for God's redemptive provision on the cross, for the joy of Christian fellowship, for the opportunity of unity and reconciliation, and for the hope of the soon coming of Jesus.
- With that, the foot-washing service comes to a conclusion. Participants will return to the sanctuary, join their family members, and wait for the Lord's meal.

THE SERVICE OF THE TABLE

After the worshippers return to the sanctuary from the foot-washing service, the deaconesses, deacons, and the officiating ministers and elders, properly dressed, come to the table in a prearranged procession, take their appointed places, and have a silent prayer. A hymn may be sung to set the worshipful and reverential spirit. The service proceeds as follows:

- The communion emblems on the table are covered before and after service. When everything is ready, at the nod of the presiding leader, two pre-appointed deaconesses should step forward to remove the cloth that covers the table; later when the service is over, the same persons will replace the covering.
- The officiating leader uncovers the bread and reads an appropriate text, such as 1 Corinthians 11:23, 24. The congregation remains seated with bowed heads and those at the table kneel, as an officiating leader offers a prayer of blessing on the bread.
- Rising from their knees, ministers and elders symbolically break the bread. The bread is passed on to the deacons and deaconesses in an orderly manner, who then distribute it to the congregation row by row, making sure that serving is unhurried and in order.
- When the deacons and deaconesses return to the table, ministers and elders serve them and one another. The worship leader ensures that all have been served, and then says an appropriate phrase, such as the words of Jesus in 1 Corinthians 11:24, and invites the congregation to partake of the bread.
- The leader covers the bread, uncovers the wine, and reads a passage such as 1 Corinthians 11:25, 26. The process of prayer, distribution, partaking of the wine is followed.

- The deacons and deaconesses recover the glasses and return them to the table. The deaconesses cover the table.
- Alternate distribution methods may be employed without lessening reverence of the service. The deacons and deaconesses can carry both bread and wine on the same tray and serve them at the same time. The glasses, after the wine has been taken, can be left in the racks in front of the seats to be collected later. Such measures will save time, especially in large churches.
- Conclude the communion service with an appropriate hymn. Let the worshippers leave with a joyful note that they have indeed been at the Lord's Table and look forward to the great assembly of the redeemed when the Lord Himself returns.
- As the service ends on that high note, it is customary to take up an offering for the poor. The presiding minister can announce that the offering will be taken at the exit doors of the sanctuary by deacons and deaconesses holding the offering plate.

POST-SERVICE RESPONSIBILITIES

Following the service, deacons and deaconesses should dispose of leftover bread and wine in a dignified manner. In no case should either be eaten or drunk. All the vessels, towels, linen, basins, and other materials that were used in the service should be gathered, cleaned or laundered, and stored for future use.

With the service over, the worship leaders, deacons, and deaconesses as may be needed have an important additional responsibility: serving the emblems to sick and shut-in believers who should be given an opportunity to also participate in the communion service. Appointed ministers, deacons, and deaconesses should meet together and plan to visit the homes of those involved for this special service. Where it is not practical, the foot-washing service may be omitted.

RECIPES

As those responsible for preparing the emblems of the Lord's Supper, deacons and deaconesses should remember the counsel of Ellen G. White: "Christ is still at the table on which the paschal supper has been spread. The unleavened cakes used at the Passover season are before Him. The Passover wine, untouched by fermentation, is on the table. These emblems Christ employs to represent His own unblemished sacrifice. Nothing corrupted by fermentation, the symbol of sin and death, could represent the 'Lamb without blemish and without spot.' 1 Peter 1:19" (DA 653).

"Only unfermented grape juice and unleavened bread are appropriate for use in the communion service, and great care must be exercised in providing these elements. In isolated areas where grape or raisin juice or concentrate is unavailable, the conference office will advise or assist" (*Church Manual,* 120).

Recipes for Communion Bread

(serves 50)

1 cup whole wheat flour
¼ teaspoon salt
2 teaspoons of water
¼ cup olive oil or vegetable oil

Preheat oven to 325 degrees Fahrenheit (220 degrees Celsius). Sift dry ingredients together. In a separate container whisk together wet ingredients. Then add water/oil mixture to dry ingredients. Gently mix with fork till moist. Roll out the dough to the thinness of a pie crust (rolling the dough between parchment paper makes it easier). Transfer to a lightly greased baking sheet. Using a sharp knife, score to make small squares. Then gently prick each square with a fork to prevent bubbles from forming. Bake for about 10 minutes. Check

frequently during the last three to five minutes to prevent burning. Cool and store in sealed container.

Alternate recipe
1 cup wheat flour
½ cup olive oil
Water
Salt to taste
Instructions are the same as in previous recipe.

Unfermented wine

Use good quality ripened grapes, preferably black grapes. Remove grapes from stems and wash thoroughly in warm water. Stew the grapes in a stainless steel pot with two cups of water for every cup of grapes. When the grapes have come to a boil, mash the grapes. Then strain using a cheese cloth. Return the strained grape juice to the stove and boil for about ten minutes. If the juice becomes too thick, add more water as needed. Skim off the froth. Cool and refrigerate until ready to transport to the church.

CONCLUSION

As Jesus concluded the Supper, He made a vow: "I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom" (Matt 26:29). The apostle Paul reminded the Corinthians: "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes" (1 Cor 11:26).

Both these statements give the Lord's Supper a meaning beyond what Jesus accomplished on the cross and what we must experience today. The Lord's Supper reminds us that we live as a redeemed community in the expectation of the Lord's soon return. This community of faith must ever be conscious of living and witnessing

in the interval between the historical event of the cross and the eschatological coming of the Lord. With an experience firmly rooted in the cross and the cross alone, the community anticipates the return of Christ who "was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation" (Heb 9:28).

Between the rooting and the ultimate restoration stands the link of the Lord's Supper. The Supper therefore links history, existence, and hope by constantly pointing us to the One who was, who is, and who is to come. The table of the Lord is a reminder that history has meaning and life has hope. To proclaim Jesus as that hope, as the Lord who saves, sanctifies, unifies, and is coming soon to take us home is the reason we gather at the Lord's Supper. Deacons and deaconesses should ever be mindful of that great truth.

CHAPTER 11
MINISTERING TO THE COMMUNITY

The Greek word *diakonia,* which is the root word for "deacon" and "deaconess," suggests many kinds of service. So far we have looked at the service or ministry that deacons and deaconesses render in the local church to meet the corporate and spiritual needs of the congregation as a whole. While this kind of service significantly defines the role of deacons and deaconesses in the church, we must not forget another key element of the role of the deaconate: to be involved in services that supply the needs of the individual worshipper.

In other words, the context in which deacons and deaconesses serve often defines their service and responsibility. We have already seen that the spiritual ministry of deacons and deaconesses come with specific responsibilities, such as caring for the church in its corporate and spiritual functions, looking after its physical plant and related needs, and organizing communion and baptismal services.

In addition to these important duties, deacons and deaconesses are also responsible for person-to-person ministries that make the gospel of Jesus Christ relevant to individuals in their needs, in their life situations. Such ministries include being good stewards of God's grace, caring for the poor and the needy, bereavement ministry, and visitation ministry.

STEWARDS OF GOD'S GRACE

Deacons and deaconesses are stewards and servants of God. As stewards they are expected to manage with care and responsibility what God has entrusted to them. As servants, they are expected to identify and meet the needs of God's family, thereby performing a ministry of grace. Nothing that deacons and deaconesses have—be it substance or talents, be it responsibilities or service—belongs to them. God is the owner of all, and in His grace He has called them to be "servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God" and it is "required" that they be "found faithful" (1 Cor 4:1, 2). Faithful stewardship implies not only that we are given a trust, but that we are expected to be trustworthy.

"When we accepted Christ as our Redeemer, we accepted the condition of becoming laborers together with God. We made a covenant with Him to be wholly for the Lord; as faithful stewards of the grace of Christ, to labor for the upbuilding of His kingdom in the world. Every follower of Christ stands pledged to dedicate all his powers of mind and soul and body to Him who has paid the ransom money for our souls. We engaged to be soldiers, to enter into active service, to endure trials, shame, reproach, to fight the fight of faith, following the Captain of our salvation" (2SM 124).

Of all the responsibilities God has entrusted to deacons and deaconesses, nothing is more important than being stewards of God's Word and ministry. Although pastors and elders carry the primary responsibility for feeding the sheep in the congregation, deacons and deaconesses must be sensitive that their life and ministry are not lived in a spiritual vacuum. They are stewards of God's grace, and as such their life and ministry must reflect the priorities of that stewardship. Two of the seven deacons chosen in Acts 6 were students of Scripture and effective evangelists for the gospel of Jesus. Stephen was so thoroughly immersed in Old Testament Scripture that

under the guidance of the Holy Spirit he showed the young church for the first time that Jesus had not only risen from the dead, but was "standing at the right hand of God" (Acts 7:55, 56). Likewise, Philip, chosen as a deacon, became an instrument to spread the gospel from Ethiopia on one end to Cyprus on the other.

So did the ministry of Phoebe extend beyond the common understanding of a deaconess. Paul asks the church in Rome to "receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also" (Rom 16:1, 2). Her work of a deaconess stretched beyond the word. She was a good steward of the manifold grace of God.

Therefore the challenge for today's deacons and deaconesses is that they should be:

- Stewards of God's grace and active participants in His mission.
- Stewards of God's Word and its proclaimers in word and deed. They should be like Philip, on whom was placed a burden "to enter new places, to break up fresh ground. Direction was given him by an angel who was watching for every opportunity to bring men into connection with their fellow men" (YRP 277).
- Faithful stewards of the resources of the church. They should be like the deacons mentioned in Acts, who "gave careful consideration to individual needs as well as to the general financial interests of the church, and by their prudent management and their godly example they were an important aid to their fellow officers in binding together the various interests of the church into a united whole" (AA 89). In addition, deacons have a personal and corporate responsibility: they should "do their work in the churches, by seeing that a faithful tithe is brought into the treasury" (TM 305).

CARING FOR THE POOR AND THE NEEDY

Caring for the poor and the needy is a biblical mandate. For the community of the faith, it is our duty to God. "He who has pity on the poor lends to the LORD, and He will pay back what he has given" (Prov 19:17). The psalmist describes God as One who dwells in His holy temple and is "a father of the fatherless, a defender of the widows" (Ps 68:5). To this the apostle adds a profound insight that God has given a role for the poor in this world: "Has God not chosen the poor of this world to *be* rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom?" (Jas 2:5).

To these heirs of the kingdom, the church has an obligation. Says Ellen G. White: "When the Lord's poor are neglected and forgotten or greeted with cold looks and cruel words, let the guilty one bear in mind that he is neglecting Christ in the person of His saints. Our Saviour identifies His interest with that of suffering humanity. As the heart of the parent yearns with pitying tenderness over the suffering one of her little flock, so the heart of our Redeemer sympathizes with the poorest and lowliest of His earthly children. He has placed them among us to awaken in our hearts that love which He feels toward the suffering and oppressed, and He will let His judgments fall upon anyone who wrongs, slights, or abuses them" (WM 183).

Deacons and deaconesses have a special responsibility to organize assistance to the poor and the needy within and outside the faith community. The following are helpful pointers:

- Deacons and deaconesses of today have the example of the seven deacons who were appointed to look after the needs of the poor (Acts 6), and also the example of Phoebe, a deaconess, who "was a helper of many," including the apostle Paul (Rom 16:2).
- "Deacons and deaconesses are charged with assisting the sick, poor, and unfortunate and should keep the church informed of

their needs and enlist the support of members. Money should be provided for this work from the fund for the poor and needy. The treasurer, on recommendation from the board, will pass over to the deacons or deaconesses whatever may be needed for use in needy cases" (*Church Manual*, 78).

- If possible, deacons and deaconesses can work in close cooperation with the local Adventist Community Services or Dorcas Society in gathering, storing, and packaging clothing, food, and other supplies for the needy. This work would require careful organization and management, such as identifying people who need help; assessing the type of help needed; visiting those identified; distributing food and other supplies; and implementing follow-up measures, including reports and recommendations to the church board—all of which impacts continued funding.
- Teams led by deacons and deaconesses can focus on specific care ministries. For example, a crisis ministry team serves those facing personal or family illness, bereavement, separation or divorce, family conflict, etc.; benevolence ministry develops and implements plans in response to situations that a family cannot handle on their own; an employment assistance team may direct the unemployed to counseling centers or community resource centers in an effort to help them find work.

BEREAVEMENT MINISTRY

"Jesus wept" (John 11:35). Those two words describe the tragedy, the pathos, the emotional breakdown, and the inner suffering death brings about. Even the One who is about to raise Lazarus from death, the One who is the Creator of life, breaks down in tears at the sight of emotional trauma that death causes. While we abhor death, we stand

in silence at the shadows it casts. While we mourn the loss, we live with the grieving. And as part of the family of God, we are called upon to minister to those who have suffered the loss. Although pastors and elders have their primary share in ministering the grieving, what should deacons and deaconesses do?

Visiting the Family

- Visit the family as soon as possible. This is not for any extended discussion or for any planning, but just to express your solidarity with their loss and to say that you are ready to do anything they want.
- The head deacon should check with the pastor/elder on any assistance the deaconate staff could render with reference to viewing, funeral service, graveside service. After this is cleared with the pastor/elder the concerned deaconate staff should take up necessary follow-up measures.
- The head deaconess, either herself or through one of her associates, should arrange for flowers to be sent to the home.
- Offer the family any assistance they may need from the church, such as notifying relatives and friends, answering the phone, taking the children to a member's home for a while, providing food, or cleaning the house. Whatever you offer must be in the spirit of Christian service and only with the family's approval.

Assisting in the Viewing

- Arrangements for viewing are normally done by the family and may be at the funeral home or in the church. Deacons and deaconesses need to be aware of what is being planned and be ready to be of assistance.

Assisting in the Funeral Service

- Be aware of the family's plan for the funeral, and work closely with the pastor/elder who is taking care of the service. Deacons/deaconesses should be ready to offer whatever assistance the family, the funeral director, or the pastor/elder may request. They may serve as pallbearers, ushers, or flower bearers.
- Be ready to be of any needed assistance at the graveside, particularly with the grieving members. Be on the lookout for senior citizens or children who may need some help at the graveside.
- Deaconesses may arrange or assist in the arrangement for a repast, if one is planned by the family, and can assist in food preparation. Deacons can care for other needed arrangements.

VISITATION MINISTRY

While on earth, Jesus set us an example in visiting. He visited Peter's home and healed his mother-in-law (Mark 1:29–31). At a marriage in Cana He resolved a crisis, leading His disciples to believe in Him (John 2:1–12). He visited Jairus's home and raised his daughter from death (Luke 9:49–56). He visited Mary, Martha, and Lazarus and brought salvation and resurrection to their home (Luke 10:38–42; John 11). He visited the homes of Pharisees whenever an opportunity presented itself (Luke 11:37; 14:1). His visit to Zacchaeus led to his conversion (Luke 19:1–10). His visit to a home in Emmaus redirected the faith of two disciples (Luke 24:13–32).

"Our Saviour went from house to house, healing the sick, comforting the mourners, soothing the afflicted, speaking peace to the disconsolate. He took the little children in His arms and blessed them and spoke words of hope and comfort to the weary mothers. With unfailing tenderness and gentleness, He met every form of

human woe and affliction. Not for Himself, but for others did He labor. He was the servant of all. It was His meat and drink to bring hope and strength to all with whom He came in contact" (GW 188).

Should not today's deacons and deaconesses follow His example?

Further, Christ's parable of the judgment tells us of the profound blessing of caring for the poor and visiting the sick and the imprisoned: "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I *was* naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me" (Matt 25:34–36).

The apostle James, who was involved in the ordination of the first seven deacons in Acts 6, tells us that "pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit the orphans and widows in their trouble" (Jas 1:27).

What makes visitation a part of "pure and undefiled religion"? Simply this: it conveys a powerful message that God cares for those who are sick, lonely, hurting, depressed, or grieving, and that it is possible to connect and remain connected with God. Visiting also shows that the person who is being visited—whatever his or her circumstances may be—is precious in the sight of God and to the community of faith. That God loves and His church cares is a message that ought to be conveyed to the people who are being witnessed to. "Nothing will give greater spiritual strength and a greater increase of earnestness and depth of feeling, than visiting and ministering to the sick and the desponding, helping them to see the light and to fasten their faith upon Jesus" (ChS 132).

Although visitation is the responsibility of the local church as a whole, including pastors and elders, we are here concerned with the service of the deacons and deaconesses. If they are responsible, what should they do for organizing the visitation ministry, making it

a blessing, and caring for visiting church members, new converts, those weak in faith, senior citizens, the sick and the infirm, the bereaved, and the shut-ins?

Organizing Visitation Ministry

- To have an effective ministry, one person should be appointed to be in charge of organizing all visitation. Depending on the size of the church, this person could be the pastor, pastor for visitation, an elder, or a deacon or deaconess appointed by the church board as the chairperson of the visitation committee.
- The chairperson, with the help of other deacons and deaconesses, may arrange visitation by distributing membership according to districts where people live, and assigning specific persons to each district. Visitation may also be distributed according to types of visits, such as: elderly people living independently; shut-ins; the sick in the hospital; the sick at home, especially those who are sick for a prolonged time; bereaved persons; those going through a personal or family crisis; prisoners; those who request counseling, Bible studies, pastoral visits, or special ministry needs; those about to be baptized or who have requested membership transfer, etc.
- The chairperson of the visitation ministry should maintain a register of all visitation requests, submitted either by persons who need visits or by others who may suggest those who could be benefitted by such a ministry. In either case, the person who is assigned to visit should check ahead with the person or the family whether and when such a visit can be arranged.
- The register may be prepared through several ways: having visitation request cards at the reception desk on Sabbath mornings, which may be filled in by or on behalf of those

requesting the visits and left at the table; deacons or elders receiving such requests and passing them on to the one in charge of the register; or recording phone-in requests.

- Periodically the visitation chairman should review the record with deacons and deaconesses, and assign visits to particular individuals. Care should be taken to avoid duplication of tasks and overlapping of visits. Additionally, a follow-up brief on the visits should be recorded.
- As much as possible, visits should be scheduled to save time and accommodate the convenience and plans of those visited. A visit should not be seen as being forced by over-anxious church personnel.
- As much as possible, visits should be made by two persons of the same gender, unless it is a married couple. A married couple, an elder and a trainee, or a deacon or deaconess and a mature member of the same gender make good teams.

Making the Visit a Blessing

A visitation should not be turned into a gossip session, talking about events or members or leaders in the church. No frivolous discussion should divert the primary purpose of the visit, which is intended to be a blessing, comfort, and assurance to the person and the home visited. "Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. . . There is need of coming close to the people by personal effort . . . . The poor are to be relieved, the sick cared for, the sorrowing and the bereaved comforted, the ignorant instructed, the inexperienced counseled. We are to weep with those that weep, and rejoice with those that rejoice. Accompanied by the power of persuasion, the power of prayer, the

power of the love of God, this work will not, cannot, be without fruit" (MH 143–144).

Here are seven steps for making the visit a blessing:

- **Prepare.** Pray that God will guide your words to be a blessing to the home or to the person visited. Select a short Scripture passage to share. Choose promise passages such as Psalm 46; Psalm 103:1–5; Psalm 121; Matthew 11:28–30; John 14:1–3; and Revelation 21:1–7.
- **Befriend.** Be sociable and include everyone in the family in the conversation—as much as they are willing to participate. Comment positively about the family, home, garden, etc. Listen with undivided attention as they speak of their interests.
- **Read.** After a few minutes of conversation, when a natural opening occurs, move towards a spiritual direction. If it seems like an appropriate and comfortable time, read or comment on a biblical passage. Comments should last no more than one or two minutes.
- **Ask.** Asking for prayer requests allows them to share concerns and interests. Scriptures that particularly address their concerns may be helpful at this time. However, keep in mind that the purpose of the visit is to show concern, rather than provide answers.
- **Pray.** Kneel if appropriate, and invite everyone to join you in prayer. Pray specifically for the requests and concerns just expressed. In your prayer, mention absent family members and bless the home.
- **Leave.** Leave promptly while the spiritual tone of the prayer is still felt. In most settings, thirty minutes or less is adequate time for a visitation. Leave behind something that will remind them pleasantly of your visit, such as music, something to

read, a book mark, Sabbath School study guides, last week's church bulletin, food if appropriate, or any small token. Above all, leave with a friendly goodbye.

- **Write.** After the visit, prepare a written summary of the visit, including the names of those involved. Record the family's concerns and your impressions. Recollecting these details at later visits reflects genuine interest in the family (*Seventh-day Adventist Elder's Handbook*, 124–125).

Specific Visitations

In addition to general principles of organization applicable to visitation ministry and how that ministry can be made a blessing, deacons and deaconesses should be aware of principles pertaining to seven types of visitation common in Seventh-day Adventist churches.

1. Visiting Church Members

Purpose:

- To show that the church cares for members and is open to serve their needs.
- To learn about the interests and talents of each member of the family, and how those talents can enrich the life of the church.

How to conduct the visit:

- Talk about how important the person is to God and to the church.
- Read a text from the Bible and make a short comment.
- Encourage them to attend worship services and church meetings. Remind them of the resources available to enrich their devotional and spiritual life, such as various types of literature available, daily devotional books, the Sabbath School

study guides, books of the Spirit of Prophecy, *Adventist Review*, etc.

- Invite family members to pray for the church and its ministry. End the visit with a prayer for the family and their contribution to the church.

Helpful guidelines:

- Visit the family only after scheduling the event.
- Make the visit short. A spiritually-oriented visit need not be more than about thirty minutes at the most.
- Before praying, always ask if there are any special requests.
- Keep the conversation from drifting into unproductive or peripheral issues.
- In case of a complex situation or issue, it's best to arrange for an elder or pastor to visit the family.

Suggested Bible texts to use during the visit:

Romans 8:38, 39; Philippians 3:13, 14; 4:13; Colossians 3:16, 17; 2 Peter 1:3, 4; 1 John 5:4.

2. Visiting New Converts

Purpose:

- To affirm the interest of the church in their faith and fellowship.
- To strengthen their growth in Christian experience and offer every possible assistance to achieve this objective.
- To study with them the riches of the Bible and help them to be effective witnesses.

How to conduct the visit:

- Talk about the importance of consistent church attendance.
- Encourage them regarding personal study and family worship.

- Attend and show how to conduct family worship.
- Instruct on how to keep the Sabbath.
- Read a text from the Bible and make a short comment.
- Help clarify any doctrinal or lifestyle questions they may have.
- Pray with them. Try to have the entire family present for the prayer.

Helpful guidelines:

- Visit the family only after scheduling the event.
- Make the visit short. A spiritually-oriented visit of this type need not be long.
- Before praying, always ask if there are any special requests.
- Keep the conversation from drifting into unproductive or peripheral issues.

Suggested Bible texts to use during the visit:

Psalm 23; 37:3–5; 40:1; 119:105; Philippians 4:6, 7; 1 Thessalonians 5:17; Hebrews 10:25.

3. Visiting Those Weak in the Faith

Purpose:

- To revive their faith and spiritual enthusiasm.
- To encourage them to trust in God no matter what.

How to conduct the visit:

- Talk about the power of the Bible in our spiritual life.
- Encourage them to study the Bible daily.
- Emphasize the importance of personal devotions.
- Read an encouraging Bible passage, and briefly comment on how to strengthen one's faith.
- Pray with them.

Helpful guidelines:

- Avoid judgmental or disparaging remarks. Religious intimidation never produces positive results.
- Leave behind some appropriate literature.
- Avoid questions like "Have you committed a serious sin?"
- If the person voluntarily identifies the reason for their spiritual apathy (sin, discouragement, disappointment in God or the church, etc.), try to be helpful and join in their search for spiritual meaning. Never be judgmental.

Suggested Bible texts to use during the visit:

Psalm 34:18, 19; 51:10, 12; 84:1, 2; Proverbs 2:1–5; Jeremiah 15:16; Matthew 11:28–30; Hebrews 4:15, 16; 10:25; 1 John 2:1.

4. Visiting Senior Citizens

Purpose:

- To show that the church cares for them, and has interest in their lives.
- To offer assistance, if they are in such need.
- To provide spiritual support, comfort, and instill hope in the soon return of Jesus.

How to conduct the visit:

- Talk about the good things of the past; the older a person is the more he or she may want to share of how God has led them in the past.
- If appropriate, sing some hymns of praise during the visit.
- Read some biblical passages.
- Talk about faith and perseverance in the ways of the Lord.
- Try to identify any specific needs that can be provided by the church.

Helpful guidelines:

- Speak clearly and distinctly, loud enough for them to hear.
- Highlight the importance of the experience, legacy, and wisdom of senior citizens to the family, to the church, and to society.
- If you have the opportunity to sing a hymn, ask for the person´s favorite hymn.
- Ask if they would like future visits. According to the interest shown, involve others in the visitation of the elderly.
- Find out if there is any particular way they would like to take part in church life either on Sabbath or during the week.

Suggested Bible texts to use during a visit:

Psalm 27:1; 62:5, 6; Isaiah 25:9; John 14:1–3; Hebrews 10:35; 2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 2:10; 11:15; 22:20.

5. Visiting the Sick and Infirm

Purpose:

- To show that the church cares for their well-being.
- To pray with them and call upon God for healing and strength.
- To encourage their continued trust and fellowship in God.

How to conduct the visit:

- Talk about cheerful subjects that awaken hope, faith, and peace.
- Demonstrate optimism regarding the patient's recovery.
- Read a text from Scripture.
- Do not make any pessimistic comment about their illness.
- Do not pass judgment on the professional treatment they are receiving.
- Try to identify any specific needs that can be aided by the church.

- Ask if there are any special prayer requests in addition to the recovery of his or her health.
- Pray for the restoration of the patient's health, and for the needs of the entire family.

Helpful guidelines:

- For hospital visitation, look up the visiting hours and make sure to plan the visit within the specified schedule.
- Check if the patient has any restrictions on visitation. Don't disregard the medical guidelines and rules of the hospital.
- Don't stay more than a few minutes. The patient may be waiting for or wishing the visit of other people, who may be prevented from entering while you are in the room.
- Never give the patient any kind of medical advice.
- Avoid asking detailed questions about the disease or treatment. That's for the doctors to do. Stay focused on the spiritual purpose of the visit.
- If there are other patients in the same room, offer to pray with them also.
- Leave some religious literature.
- Ask the patient if they would be interested in receiving visits by others from the church.

Suggested Bible texts to use during a visit:

John 14:16; Psalm 23; 27:1; Romans 8:26–28, 38, 39; Revelation 21:4.

6. Visiting Shut-Ins

Purpose:

- To show Christian friendship, attention, and interest.
- To minister on behalf of the local church.

How to conduct the visit:

- Talk about how they are important to God and to the church. Read a Bible text and make a short comment.
- Encourage attendance at worship service and church activities.
- If the church offers sermons on the Website or its services on streaming video, show them how it works or make arrangements for them to watch.
- If they have access to Adventist radio stations or TV channels, make sure they have a program schedule and know how to access the channels.
- Pray with them.

Helpful guidelines:

- Don't give the impression that living alone is something abnormal. There are people who live alone because of special circumstances. Some others simply choose to live that way.
- Avoid any comments about living alone or being single, if that is the case.
- Treat the person the same as you would any member of the church.

Suggested Bible texts to use during a visit:

Psalm 25:16–18; 68:4–6; 133:1; Matthew 28:29; John 14:18; Hebrews 13:5, 6.

7. Visiting During Bereavement

Arrange for this visit a few days after the funeral service. Out-of-town relatives and friends having completed their responsibility for the grieving family may have left for home. The sense of loss of a loved one comes heavy on the family that is often left to be alone. It is at this time the church, particularly deacons and deaconesses, can offer their most effective ministry.

Purpose:

- To offer them sympathy, hope, and consolation in their loss.
- To encourage them to place their faith and trust in God's hand.

How to conduct the visit:

- Talk about God's presence and how the Holy Spirit can give strength to overcome sadness and perhaps loneliness.
- Talk about God's promise that one day we will be freed from the presence of sin and death. For now, we can only believe, accept, and trust in the Lord.
- Pray, asking God to comfort the entire family.

Helpful guidelines:

- Offer to help the family with household chores.
- Offer to be of any needed assistance; if such a need is expressed, speak to the head deaconess, who may be able to arrange for such help.
- Leave a phone number and/or email address, and let them know they can contact you if they need anything.
- Note special dates in the life of the bereaved, such as a birthday, anniversary, and major holidays that have significance for family. It might do well to contact them leading up to such dates.

Suggested Bible texts to use during a visit:

Isaiah 26:3, 4; John 11:25, 26; 1 Corinthians 15:50–55; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18; Revelation 21:1–4.

CONCLUSION

The ministry of the deacons and deaconesses inside the church is as important as outside the church. While inside the church the

deaconate is busy maintaining the church property and regulating the smooth flow of all worship services and related activities, outside the church they are responsible for being good stewards of God's grace—caring for the poor and needy, visiting those in need of encouragement and comfort. Therefore, their service to the church is not only important but indispensable.

Ellen G. White's counsel on the ministry outside of the church is an encouragement to what deacons and deaconesses are to do: "Those who engage in house-to-house labor will find opportunities for ministry in many lines. They should pray for the sick, and should do all in their power to relieve them from suffering. They should work among the lowly, the poor, and the oppressed. We should pray for and with the helpless ones who have not strength of will to control the appetites that passion has degraded. Earnest, persevering effort must be made for the salvation of those in whose hearts an interest is awakened. Many can be reached only through acts of disinterested kindness. Their physical wants must first be relieved. As they see evidence of our unselfish love, it will be easier for them to believe in the love of Christ" (ChS 113–114).

CONCLUSION

"The church is God's appointed agency for the salvation of men. It was organized for service, and its mission is to carry the gospel to the world. From the beginning it has been God's plan that through His church shall be reflected to the world His fullness and His sufficiency" (AA 9).

As part of the organization of the early church, the first office the apostles created under the guidance of the Holy Spirit was that of the deacon. Acts 6 bears witness to this organization and records the result: "Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly" (Acts 6:1-7).

Consequently, deacons and later deaconesses became an important part of the ministry of the church. Their oversight of special ministries within the community of faith proved a great blessing in the strengthening of the church and in its missionary outreach. Similarly, even today the importance of the deacons and deaconesses cannot be underestimated.

From Stephen, the first deacon and first martyr (Acts 6:5; 7:59, 60), to Phoebe, the first deaconess commended by Paul to be received "in a manner worthy of the saints" (Rom 16:2), to the hundreds of thousands of deacons and deaconesses silently carrying out their ministries in churches around the world in massive tabernacles and in little house-churches, the march of the ministry and the care of God's house on this earth are in sanctified hearts and serving hands.

Through them God "requires that order and system be observed in the conduct of church affairs today no less than in the days of

old. He desires His work to be carried forward with thoroughness and exactness so that He may place upon it the seal of His approval. Christian is to be united with Christian, church with church, the human instrumentality co-operating with the divine, every agency subordinate to the Holy Spirit, and all combined in giving to the world the good tidings of the grace of God" (AA 96).

To these deacons and deaconesses, God says: "Acknowledge the God of your father, and serve him with wholehearted devotion and with a willing mind, for the LORD searches every heart and understands every motive behind the thoughts. If you seek him, he will be found by you; but if you forsake him, he will reject you forever. Consider now, for the LORD has chosen you to build a temple as a sanctuary. Be strong and do the work" (1 Chron 28:9, 10, NIV).

ABBREVIATIONS OF BOOKS

AA	Acts of the Apostles, The
AH	Adventist Home, The
1BC	Bible Commentary, The SDA, Vol. 1 (2BC for Vol. 2, etc.)
ChS	Christian Service
CL	Country Living
DA	Desire of Ages, The
Ev	Evangelism
GW	Gospel Workers
Lt	Letter, E. G. White
MB	Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing
MH	Ministry of Healing, The
PP	Patriarchs and Prophets
PK	Prophets and Kings
SD	Sons and Daughters of God
1SM	Selected Messages, Book One (2SM for Book 2, etc.)
SR	Story of Redemption, The
1T	Testimonies for the Church Vol. 1 (2T for Vol. 2, etc.)
TM	Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers
WM	Welfare Ministry
YRP	Ye Shall Receive Power

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