

The Diaconate & Women

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EMMANUEL
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH



Should There Be “Deaconesses” at EPC?

What Do Deacons Do?

It is the duty of the deacons to minister to those who are in need, to the sick, to the friendless, and to any who may be in distress. It is their duty also to develop the grace of liberality in the members of the church ... They shall have the care of the property of the congregation, both real and personal ... In the discharge of their duties the deacons are under the supervision and authority of the Session. - BCO 9.2

Key Observations

1. The first sentence is the primary Biblical definition.
2. Care for property, etc. is logical inference from the Bible.
3. Deacons are not in a position of *Authority*, but rather of *Service*.



Evidence for Deaconesses in the NT

Were There Deaconesses in the NT Church?

- Many verses in the NT show women as very important in the church as patrons and in mercy ministry.
- Rom. 16 (list); Acts 9:36 (Tabitha); 12:11-12 (Mary); 16:14-15 (Lydia); 18:18, 26 (Priscilla), etc.

Issue 1: Is Phoebe a Deaconess?

- Rom. 16:1 - Phoebe is explicitly identified as a deaconess, but often not translated that way.
- “I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a *servant* of the church at Cenchreae.”
- “servant” = **διάκονον** = “deaconess”
- Which way should it be?

Issue 2: Women or Wives?

- 1 Tim. 3:11 - Qualifications are given for females in the midst of qualifications for Deacons.
- wives = **Γυναῖκας** = women
- Likewise, Likewise, Likewise
- No qualifications are required for wives (or women) of Elders.
- Does it matter if they were wives of Deacons?

Issue 2: Women or Wives?

- 1 Tim. 3:11 - Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things.
- The word “Their” is not in the Greek. It is supplied by the translators.
- This should either be “Wives likewise ...” or “Women likewise ...”
- “Women” makes more sense without the possessive article.

Summary of NT Evidence

- Women are very active in the NT church, including specifically in Diaconal type ministry
- Phoebe is given the title of “Deaconess”
- Qualifications are given for “Female Deacons” (whether “wives” or “women”)



Evidence for Deaconesses in Church History

Deaconesses In the Early Church

- 111 A.D. - Pliny's letter to Emperor Trajan mentions women in diaconal ministry.
- 300 A.D. - Roles of the office of Deaconess were codified in the *Didaskalia Apostolorum*.
- 4th Century - John Chrysostom's daughter Olympias is a Deaconess.
- 451 A.D. - Council of Chalcedon - age requirement for the office of Deaconess lowered from 60 to 40.

Deaconesses In the Later Church

- By 1000 A.D. the office of Deaconess had disappeared from the church
- Reformation - John Calvin re-instituted the office of Deaconesses
- Post-Reformation - Dutch Reformed Churches have had Deaconesses for centuries.

Deaconesses In Conservative Presbyterianism

- BB Warfield & Charles Hodge were proponents, but it was not practiced at the time.
- Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church - left it to Session's judgement
- Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America - Deaconesses since 1888
- Korean-American Churches (PCA) - have Deaconess
- Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod - have Deaconesses - joined PCA in 1982

What Does The PCA Allow?

- Only Men Ordained as Deacons, But ...
- BCO 9-7. It is often expedient that the Session of a church should select and appoint godly men and women of the congregation to assist the deacons in caring for the sick, the widows, the orphans, the prisoners, and others who may be in any distress or need. These assistants to the deacons are not officers of the church (BCO 7-2) and, as such, are not subjects for ordination (BCO 17).

How is Clause 9-7 Practiced?

- Practices Vary by Presbytery & Church
- Some only have Male Deacons
- Some Appoint Female Assistants
Discretely
- Some Nominate and Commission
Deaconesses (technically Assistants)
- Some have no Ordained Deacons at all,
but Mercy Teams of men and women

What are Emmanuel's Needs?

- We need women participating in Diaconal ministry.
- This is particularly true for the needs of women in the church, but it is true in general.
- These women need to be visible, approachable, represent the church, and participate in and with the church leadership.

What Are We Going To Do?

- Implement as much of the Biblical model of deaconesses as possible in the PCA.
- Remain in submission to the PCA BCO as we implement this.

What is the Process?

1. Accept nomination for Deacons & Deaconesses (Deacons Assistants). [Soon!]
2. The session will train and examine all of them the same way.
3. The congregation will vote for the Deacons.
4. The session will appoint Deaconesses.
5. We will *ordain* the Deacons and *commission* the Deaconesses.
6. The Deaconesses will participate fully in the Deacon's meetings, but they will not vote as officers.



Potential Concerns

Q: Will women be taking roles that have been reserved for men cause men to default leadership?

A: No. We will not limit the number of men, or replace them with women. We need both participating in the Diaconate.

Potential Concerns

Q: Will women serving as Deaconesses put us on the slippery slope to Liberalism like the PCUSA and other mainline churches?

A: No. These churches gave up the authority of the Bible. We are implementing a Biblical model, just as many other churches that have not become liberal.

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