

Mercy Ministry at Grace Community Presbyterian Church

What is "mercy ministry"?

"Mercy ministry" simply refers to the meeting of human needs through deeds or actions. Mercy ministry can also be referred to as Christian charity, benevolence, or service. Mercy ministry is "ministry" because, unlike the government or man-made agencies, we are motivated in our actions by our experience of God's grace (individually and as a community of believers) and by a desire to bring glory to God, edification to one another, and testimony of God's love and rule to the world.

All Christians are called to acts of charity, love, and mercy. We are called to serve one another,¹ and our acts of service are pleasing sacrifices to God.² Further, our Lord commands us to love our neighbor as ourselves,³ and taught that our neighbor includes even our enemies.⁴ Just as God loved us when we were yet His enemies,⁵ so too are we called to love others who we may consider "undeserving". And just as God loved us enough to send His Son as our Redeemer, so too are we called to give sacrificially.

And so it is part of the calling of every believer, every household, and every church body to outdo one another in doing good.⁶

The Diaconate of GCPC has prepared this paper, and the Session of GCPC commends it, in order to guide the Deacons in their work, and to encourage all members of GCPC to do works of service.

What is a Deacon?

The word "deacon" as used in the Bible literally means a "servant." Although service and mercy is required of all believers (i.e., we are all called "to deacon"), in God's Providence and governance of His church, He established an office of service and mercy, the office of Deacon.⁷

¹ Matt. 20:25-28: "But Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

² Hebrews 13:16: "Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God."

³ Mark 12:29-31: "Jesus answered, "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

⁴ When asked "who is my neighbor", Jesus answered with the Parable of the Good Samaritan. Luke 10:25-37.

⁵ Romans 5:8: "...but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

⁶ Romans 12:9-11: "Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord."

⁷ The office of Deacon was established in the early Church, as described in Acts 6:1-6.

The office of Deacon is a permanent office in the Church, and the Bible clearly describes the qualifications required of all Deacons in 1 Tim. 3:8-13. A Deacon is not a "junior Elder" or "Elder-in-Training", as the office is distinct and one of honor, requiring wisdom and giftedness.⁸ As in every ministry of the Church, the ministry of the Deacons is always subject to the spiritual oversight of the Session.

Generally, the purposes of the office of Deacon include (a) meeting the physical needs of people, especially people in the Church,⁹ and (b) relieving the Elders of certain physical tasks in order to allow the Elders to devote more time to prayer and teaching ministry.¹⁰

What are the types of work that Deacons do?

One helpful way to categorize the work that deacons do is as follows: Mercy, Stewardship, Property, and Helps.

Mercy is the meeting of physical needs by action. Examples include helping families in economic emergencies, and visiting the sick.

Stewardship includes the promotion of liberal giving by God's people, and collecting and distributing those gifts.

Property includes making sure that the physical property of the Church is kept in good repair, and (as delegated by the Session) regulating the use of Church property.

Helps includes those task and errands necessary or advisable to the on-going functions of the Church and which provide assistance to the Elders, such as setting up equipment or ushering.

The Deacons are responsible for the discharge of these works, but are not necessarily responsible for performing all of the required tasks themselves. In fact, the Church functions best when all who are so gifted and presented with an opportunity provide their assistance to the Deacons.

Useful Resources:

The Diaconate of GCPC has developed, and the Session has approved the following enclosed materials which summarize our view of diaconal service at GCPC:

- "Biblical Principles of Diaconal Service" (a concise outline, with Scriptural references of what diaconal service by all believers in general and Deacons in particular is and is not)

⁸ 1 Tim. 3:13: "For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus."

⁹ Galatians 6:10: "So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith."

¹⁰ Acts 6:3-4: "Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

- "Suggested Guidelines and Procedures for Diaconal Service" (guidelines that all members of GCPC can use to aid in performing and receiving service)
- "GCPC Diaconal Responsibilities and Ministries" (a list of specific areas of responsibility for Diaconal ministry at GCPC)

Additionally, the following books and reports have been useful in examining the Biblical basis for mercy ministry and the office of Deacon. All officers of GCPC and anyone interested in learning about these topics are encouraged to refer to these resources.

1. "Of the Communion of Saints" in *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter XXVI (Atlanta, Ga.: Committee for Christian Education and Publications 1991) (attached).
2. "Biblical Guidelines for Mercy Ministry in the PCA" in *Minutes of the Fifteenth General Assembly* (General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America, 1987). This is a study committee report commissioned by the 14th General Assembly of the PCA and accepted by the 15th General Assembly.
3. Timothy J. Keller, *Ministries of Mercy: The Call of the Jericho Road* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 2d ed. 1997).
4. Timothy J. Keller, *Resources for Deacons: Love Expressed Through Mercy Ministries* (Lawrenceville, Ga.: Presbyterian Church in America Christian Education and Publications 1985).
5. Leonard J. Coppes, *Who Will Lead Us: A Study in the Development of Biblical Offices with Emphasis on the Diaconate* (Chattanooga, Tenn.: Pilgrim Publishing Company 1977).

Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter XXVI. Of the Communion of Saints

I. All saints, that are united to Jesus Christ their Head, by His Spirit, and by faith, have fellowship with Him in His grace, sufferings, death, resurrection, and glory: and, being united to one another in love, they have communion in each other's gifts and graces, and are obliged to the performance of such duties, public and private, as do conduce to their mutual good, both in the inward and outward man.

II. Saints by profession are bound to maintain an holy fellowship and communion in the worship of God, and in performing such other spiritual services as tend to their mutual edification; as also in relieving each other in outward things, according to their several abilities and necessities. Which communion, as God offereth opportunity, is to be extended unto all those who, in every place, call upon the name of the Lord Jesus.

III. This communion which the saints have with Christ, doth not make them in any wise partakers of the substance of His Godhead; or to be equal with Christ in any respect: either of which to affirm is impious and blasphemous. Nor doth their communion one with another, as saints, take away, or infringe the title or propriety which each man hath in his goods and possessions.

Biblical Principles of Diaconal Service

Diaconal Service IS...

1. An equitable and orderly expression of the communion of the saints.
(Acts 6:1-6; 1 Cor. 14:40; Matt. 25:31-46; John 17:22-23; Rom. 10:12-13; 2 Cor. 9:8-11; Gal. 5:13-14; Eph. 4:15-16; 1 John 3:17-18; WCF 26.1)
2. The responsibility of all believers, as encouraged and led by Deacons.
(John 13:34-35; Rom. 12:9-12; Eph. 4:15-16; Matt. 25:31-46; James 1:27; 1 Pet. 4:10-11)
3. Borne out of a heart that has experienced God's saving grace.
(1 John 4:7,11,20)
4. Evidence of love for Christ and God's people.
(John 13:34-35; John 17:22-23; 1 Cor. 13:4-7; 14:26b; 2 Cor. 9:7-11)
5. An example of Christ's service to His people.
(Matt. 20:26-28; John 13:34-35; Mark 10:43-45)
6. Spiritual at its core, to bring God glory and edify the Church.
(Rom. 11:36; Eph. 4:7-13; Phil. 2:3-4; 1 Tim. 3:8-13; 1 Pet. 5:5; Heb. 10:24)
7. Given to alleviate the visible, this-worldly needs of the members of the local congregation first, of all saints next, and unbelievers, as the Lord gives opportunity.
(Matt. 12:48-50; Matt. 25:31-46; Acts 2:44-45; 6:1-6; 11:29; 19:29; 2 Cor. 9:12-14; Gal. 6:10; 1 Thes. 4:9-10; WCF 26.2)
8. Directed by prudence, Scripture, one's calling and abilities.
(Acts 6:1-6; Gal. 6:10; James 1:27; 1 John 5:2-3)
9. Characterized by a heart-felt sympathy to the Church resulting from God's grace working upon the heart of the giver.
(Rom. 12:6-11; 2 Cor. 9:7; 1 John 3:16-18)
10. A representative ministry—first through individuals, second by other members working together, and then by the Church through officers appointed for the purpose of service.
(Luke 10:27-37; Acts 6:1-6; 1 Tim. 5:4 ,8; cf. Matt. 18:15-17)
11. Given when one who has a need humbly asks for and receives help, although one need not wait to be asked to help before providing help.
(Matt. 7:7-11; John 14:14; Acts 20:35; Eph. 4:28; James 4:2-3)

Diaconal Service IS NOT...

1. To violate anyone's privacy.
(1 Thes. 4:11; 1 Tim. 5:13)
2. Given to infringe upon or take away property rights of anyone.
(Ex. 20:15; Eph. 4:28; Acts 5:4; WCF 26.3)
3. A way to undermine one's God-given responsibilities to "bear his own load" and "work in a quiet fashion and eat their own bread."
(Gal. 6:5; 1 Thes. 4:11-12; 2 Thes. 3:12)
4. A replacement for family duties.
(1 Tim. 5:4,8)

5. Demeaning, menial, or servile in nature.
(Php. 1:1; Acts 6:1-6; 1 Tim. 3:8-13)

The office of Deacon IS NOT...

1. An office of rule.
(Acts 6:1-6; 1 Tim. 3:8-13; BCO 7-2; 9-1 through 9-3, 9-7)
2. A "stepping stone" for higher office.
(Acts 6:1-6; 1 Tim.3:13)

Suggested Guidelines and Procedures for Diaconal Service

The following are guidelines that the people of GCPC can use to better enable their service to one another.

1. a. If you see a need and can provide help (consistent with your own responsibilities and resources), take the opportunity as a calling from the Lord by His providence and ask if you can be of service.
b. If you have a need in accordance with the principles above, ask for the help of a brother or sister in Christ.
2. If you cannot do all that is required to help by yourself, seek the aid of one or two others (and if appropriate, let the Deacons know of your efforts).
3. If the matter requires more than a few people or is likely to extend over time, will require the financial resources of the congregation or the administrative services of the officers, call one of our Deacons.
4. The Deacons will assess the need and determine how the Congregation can help, review his list of those willing and able to serve in this area, and call upon a member who has previously expressed willingness to assist the Deacons in organizing help. The Deacons may assign one Deacon to take the lead in addressing the need.
5. The responsible Deacon will also call the Session (or an Elder designated by the Session) to inform them of any spiritual need attending the matter, so that the Elders can pray, and come alongside and minister to the one in need, as appropriate.
6. The one helping to organize the effort will communicate to the others on the list, arranging to help as directed by the Deacons, and report back to the responsible Deacon (or the Diaconate) what has been done.
7. The one(s) receiving help should communicate to and through the responsible Deacon (or the Diaconate) with respect to any further needs or adjustments to the help provided.

GCPC Diaconal Responsibilities and Ministries

Officers: **Andrew Caudal**
 Brion Ferratt (Chairman, Secretary)

The following is a list of specific areas of responsibility for diaconal ministry at GCPC. There are many other areas in which believers and Deacons can serve, and the following is a list of the most commonly recurring needs. Deacons are responsible for the discharge of these works, but are not necessarily responsible for performing all of the required tasks themselves. In fact, the Church functions best when all who are so gifted and presented with an opportunity provide their assistance to the Deacons

Benevolence Planning/Development

Deacon: Andrew Caudal

To consider and implement means of fulfilling the Diaconate's duty "to develop the grace of liberality in the members of the church, to devise effective methods of collecting the gifts of the people" (BCO 9-2) and to oversee offering collection, deposit and preparation of tax statements.

Bereavement

Deacon: Andrew Caudal

To lead the congregation's collective response to the needs of members who have experienced the death of a loved one, including expressions of sympathy (cards, flowers, meals, etc.) and aid with special financial needs.

Building Administration and Property Maintenance

Deacon: Brion Ferratt

To oversee building maintenance, to represent the church in matters of property, and to oversee the maintenance of other physical property of the church.

Care for Those with Special Needs During Services

Deacon: Brion Ferratt

To oversee the organization of child-care (but not Sunday School) during services or other meetings of the congregation, as requested by the Session and to address any others who may have physical needs during services or meetings (such as special seating, assistance to handicapped, etc).

Financial Emergency or Destitution

Deacon: Andrew Caudal

To direct the Church's response to the emergency financial needs of the congregation members, or the broader Christian community. To devise policies and procedures (to be approved by the Session) for providing financial assistance to others, as the Lord gives opportunity.

Housing/Hospitality

Deacon: Andrew Caudal

To make provision for a place to stay (e.g. for visiting speakers or missionaries) or to have a meal for those in need (e.g., visitors, believers temporarily destitute, those who are sick, new parents); to assist those who are in transition; to organize, support and coordinate with "greeters" for morning services on the Lord's Day.

Meeting Place Care and Development

Deacon: Brion Ferratt

To see to the care and development of the meeting place, preparation and set-up for services (e.g., to provide for and oversee the preparation of the elements for the Lord's Supper, arrangement of chairs, supplies, cleaning, etc.), clean-up after meals, furniture, and decoration; to "tear-down" and stow church property after services.

Needs of Broader Christian Community

Deacon: Andrew Caudal

To receive, recommend a response, and communicate to the Diaconate and congregation, diaconal needs of the Presbytery, from the General Assembly, or other branches of the visible church in our community or around the world.

Training

Deacon: As Assigned by Pastor

To assist the Pastor in developing potential diaconal candidates, procuring Christian education supplies, and informing the congregation of diaconal ministry in general.

Transportation

Deacon: Brion Ferratt

To organize the provision of transportation for those temporarily in need.

Visitation of Shut-ins

Deacon: Brion Ferratt

To see to the regular visitation of members who are shut-in and the provision of their this-worldly needs, including meals where appropriate.

Work Assistance

Deacon: Brion Ferratt

To assist members who are temporarily unemployed with finding work to provide for their own needs.