

## **Deacon Selection and Ordination**

Two of the most important events in the life of most churches are the election and the ordination of deacons. Churches using the rotation system elect a certain number of deacons each year. Others add deacons to the deacon body periodically when it seems wise to increase the number, or when deacons are lost by sickness, death, moving to other churches, and for other reasons. In every church this can be a meaningful experience if proper care is exercised. Since the deacons are meant to be spiritual leaders in the church, they should be as carefully selected as the pastor and church staff members. Few churches ever develop effectiveness above and beyond the vision and dedication of the pastor and deacons.

### **The Election of Deacons**

Several guidelines will be helpful as a church goes about electing the deacons who will serve. When these guidelines are observed, the whole church will be blessed; and the deacons will become increasingly effective in their service. In fact, every church would profit by including these guidelines in its constitution and bylaws. Where there is no such document, the church should officially adopt a set of guidelines for electing deacons, including qualifications, ratio of deacons to families (ideally, one deacon to each ten resident families), duties, and election procedures.

Some churches have their own distinctive way of electing deacons. Each church should use election procedures that meet its own needs, but every church should be sure that the method chosen will provide deacons not only biblically qualified but also deeply committed to the task of the deaconship.

Some churches prefer to ask the church nominating committee to nominate the number of deacons needed. One month before the deacon election, a special nomination ballot is printed in the church's weekly bulletin or newsletter. Each church member is asked to use this ballot to nominate one person. The nominating committee then collects these ballots. After careful consideration of all the nominees, the nominating committee presents a slate of deacons to the church for approval.

Before presenting the deacon nominees to the church, the committee should screen each person, using the qualifications for deacons which the church has adopted. Each person being nominated is given the opportunity, before his name is presented, to accept or decline without having to explain his reasons if he declines.

Other churches prefer to work through a special committee rather than through the church nominating committee. The special committee, called the deacon screening committee or the deacon election committee, may be composed of five or more members elected by the church. The committee is instructed to screen all persons nominated by the church members and present a full slate of deacons, the number to be elected, to the church for approval.

Another Method of electing deacons combines nomination by the entire church and screening of nominees by a special deacon election committee. This deacon election committee is nominated by the church nominating committee and elected by the church. It is usually composed of one or more deacons rotating off the active deacon body, several church members at large, and the pastor. The deacon chairman may also serve on the committee.

A list of all church members eligible to serve as deacons is mailed to every church member one or two months prior to the election. The qualifications of deacons may be included: with the nomination list or published in the church bulletin. Each church member is asked to mark the names of persons he would like to nominate, up to the number of deacons to be elected. The deacon election committee, or nominating committee, then screens those nominated, beginning with the ones receiving the highest number of nominations. The screening process is for the purpose of determining whether each person is qualified and if he will serve if elected. A ballot is then prepared from those receiving the most nominations and who are qualified, with twice as many names as the number of deacons to be elected. These ballots are then mailed to the members who are asked to vote for the number of deacons needed within the next two weeks. The committee then collects the ballots and the number receiving the highest number of votes are elected. Some churches prefer to eliminate the second ballot in the procedure. They feel that this will eliminate the possibility of a popularity contest or a feeling of competition.

Whatever plan is used, embarrassing runoffs should be avoided if at all possible.

No matter what procedure is used, the election should be by written, secret ballot. When the committee announces the names of those who have been elected, the number of votes each receives should never be mentioned.

There is no one way of electing deacons that is best for all churches. Whatever method is used, the members should be informed about the procedures. They should also be informed about the qualifications of the persons needed as deacons and be encouraged to reflect these in their voting. The election of deacons should be a meaningful spiritual experience that strengthens the fellowship of the church.

Those who are nominated should be introduced to the congregation. This is especially helpful in larger churches where members might not be adequately acquainted with all the nominees. Photographs and biographical sketches printed in the church bulletin will be helpful.

## Ordination of Deacons

The ordination service, though not required for deacons, can be a meaningful service for newly elected deacons and their families. The service does not give a deacon mystical power or authority. It does give the church an opportunity to express confidence in a person's spiritual qualities and his devotion to God and his church. When all newly elected deacons have already been ordained, an installation service can be a meaningful experience for the entire church. Many times a combination installation and ordination service is most appropriate.

When a church elects deacons who need to be ordained, the deacon election committee or a special deacon ordination committee should arrange for their ordination. Some churches may prefer to delegate this responsibility to the pastor, deacon chairman, or a committee of other deacons. The ordination usually occurs one or two months before the new deacons take office. The ordination events usually include an examination of the deacons to be ordained and the ordination service itself.

If the church plans an examination of the deacons to be ordained, a decision must be made about who will do the examining. Some churches prefer to confine the examination to the screening of the prospective deacons to determine if they are qualified and willing to serve. Other churches assemble an examining council and invite all ordained ministers and deacons in the church and in neighboring churches to serve on it. Still other churches invite only the ordained ministers and deacons in the membership of the church.

Whatever the method, the examining of the prospective deacons should be done at least a week prior to the ordination service. This will avoid embarrassment and delay if some do not qualify. It will also avoid making the examination a mere formality.

The agenda for the ordination service will vary from one church to another. Most ordination services will include most of the following items:

Prelude

Congregational singing Prayer

Offering

Introduction of deacons to be ordained  
(Members of each family may also be recognized.)

Testimonies by deacons to be ordained  
(Some churches include a questioning period.)

Special music

Ordination sermon by pastor or an invited guest

Invitation

Charge to deacons to be ordained

Charge to church (if desired)

Laying on of hands by all ordained deacons and ministers

(Some churches invited all members of the church to participate.)

Presentation of gifts to deacons being ordained

(a Bible, or The Ministry of the Deacon, or some other appropriate gift)

Prayer Of dedication

Benediction

Reception for newly ordained deacons and their families

(All active deacons and their families may be honored at this time.)

Whatever the agenda, the ordination service should be a time of worship by the people of God. It should also be a time of prayer and a new commitment to Christ and to the work of the church. It can be a time of encouragement to all the deacons as the church gives them assurance of acceptance and complete support as spiritual leaders. It can be a time when the whole church strengthens the bonds of unity and fellowship as the body of Christ.