CALLED TO SERVE

1 Timothy 3:8-13

In 2019, Forbes Magazine reported that US organizations alone spent an estimated $166 billion on leadership training (the global amount exceeds $366 billion).[1] Clearly, our nation and our world believe in the importance of leaders. Jesus shares our world's assessment of leaders' importance. Paul wrote that Jesus "gave gifts to men" in the form of leaders, "the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers" (*Ephesians 4:7-11*). Today, we begin a search for additional deacons to serve our church family. Because we recognize leaders' impact, our elders have laid out a six-week plan to find and appoint additional deacons that begins with today's lesson. So, let's consider the office of the deacon to frame our efforts to find additional deacons to serve our church family.

Beginning considerations

- Jesus entrusts the daily governance of his church to faithful human leaders (*John 21:15-17; Ephesians 4:7-13*).
- He entrusts his leaders with a clear purpose – equipping and maturing Christians "for the work of ministry"[2] (*Ephesians 4:11-12*).
- However, other, non-spiritual needs also exist and must be met so that Jesus' leaders can fulfill their purpose (*Acts 6:1-6*). Many believe those other needs led to the development of the office of deacon.

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- Paul's instructions to Timothy about the selection of "deacons" and his greeting to the "overseers and deacons" in Philippi evidence the existence of an official role within the First Century church (*1 Timothy 3:8-13; Philippians 1:1*).
- The creation of the office of a deacon (a transliteration of the Greek word *diakonos,* which means 'to serve, minister, or help') represents a shift in the thinking of the early Christians.
    - Many people believe Acts 6 offers insights into the origin and function of the office of the deacon.
        - Because of a problem caring for widows, "seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and wisdom" were chosen to oversee the work (*Acts 6:1-6*).
        - The seven men were appointed so that the apostles could "devote [themselves] to prayer and to the ministry of the word" rather than being distracted by the need "to serve tables" (*Acts 6:2, 4*).

[1] https://www.forbes.com/sites/chriswestfall/2019/06/20/leadership-development-why-most-programs-dont-work/
[2] All quotes from the Bible come from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV Permanent Text Edition, Crossway, 2016) unless otherwise noted.

        - **Deacons attend to a church's day-to-day needs so that elders and ministers can devote themselves to spiritual caregiving and teaching.**
    - Even though the serving role of a deacon might sound 'normal' to us, many in the First Century world considered it demeaning. The word *diakonos* appears infrequently in Greek and Roman writings, in part, because those societies considered service/serving an undesirable position. For example, Plato's book *Gorgias* narrates a conversation between Socrates and several figures. In one of those conversations, one of the characters, Callicles, comments to Socrates, "*How can a man be happy if he is a slave to anybody at all?"* (Plato, *Gorgias*, 491b).
    - Similarly, *diakonos* does not appear often in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible (the word group appears only 6 times). While the Jewish people believed they had social responsibilities toward disadvantaged groups (*cf. Leviticus 19:9-18; Deuteronomy 15:7-11*), they fulfilled those responsibilities primarily through alms rather than through acts (*cf. Luke 10:30-35*).
    - Despite the infrequency of *diakonos* in Greek, Roman, and Jewish texts, the word appears often in the Greek New Testament (the word group appears 92 times). Good reason motivates the change – **Jesus taught and practiced selfless service (*Luke 12:37; 22:24-27; John 13:1-17*).**
- In 1 Timothy, Paul warned Timothy about people teaching "any different doctrine" and encouraged him to counter their influence with "sound doctrine" (*1 Timothy 1:3-11; 4:1-10*), which included appointing qualified leaders (*1 Timothy 3:1-13*). He lists two "office[s]" – elders and deacons.
    - Paul's list of qualifications for a deacon signals their importance. Deacons must:
        - Be above reproach (*v.10*)
        - Possess strong family values (*v. 12*).
        - Be respectable and self-controlled (*vv. 8, 11*).
        - Be trustworthy (not drunkards, not dishonest, not gossips, *vv. 8-9, 11*).
        - Be committed to the faith (*vv. 9, 11, 12*).
    - While Paul expects ability from deacons (*1 Timothy 3:10, 12-13*), he places a greater emphasis on their character. His focus repeats a crucial message – **proper character cultivates ability, but ability does not create character** (cf. *John 14:15; Matthew 23:23*).

Application

- Spend time praying for our current leaders and for God's guidance in finding additional deacons.
- Focus on character rather than accomplishments, Christlikeness rather than accolades.
- Commit yourself to growing in your Christlikeness so you can position yourself to be used by our church family.
- Commit to encouraging growth in others so they can grow into leaders for our church family.