

DEACON AND DEACONESS

A MINISTRY DESCRIPTION FOR LOCAL CHURCH LEADERS

Introduction

As Jesus gives insight into the nature of His church using the symbol of the body in I Corinthians 12, so it is that when we join the Church we become “members” of the body of Christ and are equipped for specific functions by the Holy Spirit. God wills that the various “body parts” (members) function effectively toward the common goal of the church: making disciples of Jesus Christ.

It is an erroneous concept that the clergy have a “sacred calling” and the general membership only a “secular calling.” This concept impedes the progress of the church by leading some to believe their contributions are less important. In fact, the New Testament teaches that all members of the body of Christ are ministers of Jesus Christ. There are necessary differences in function, but the status of all leaders is the same.

You have been called to function as a deacon or deaconess in your congregation. The God who calls is able to sustain you as you cooperate with Him.

While in many instances the work of the deacon and deaconess overlap, distinctions will be described. Though deacons have traditionally been men and deaconesses have been women, in some Adventist churches today both men and women serve in both roles. We derive both English titles from the same New Testament Greek word.

Duties of the Deacon and Deaconess

The ministry to which a person is called when he or she becomes a deacon or deaconess includes the following duties:

1. *Greeting and ushering.* Especially in smaller congregations, the deacon and deaconess will serve as greeters and ushers for the services held in the church. They will also help the pastor and other event leaders maintain the smooth operation of church meetings.
2. *Upkeep of church property.* They will take responsibility for the care and upkeep of church property, including the oversight or actual doing of the janitorial work, repairs, grounds maintenance, interior decorating and small renovations.
3. *Security.* They will care for the security of those in attendance at church activities, always vigilant for the comfort and safety of all persons. This includes opening the church building(s) before meetings and locking the facility at the conclusion of activities.
4. *Visitation.* They will join with the pastor and elders in visiting church members. Some churches assign a geographic area or certain number of members for deacons and deaconesses in teams of two or three to visit.
5. *Assisting with the baptismal ceremony.* The traditional roles for this service are described below.

The deacons will

- Prepare and fill the pool.
- Assist male candidates.
- Do the physical labor related to the service.

The deaconesses will

- Prepare the robes for all who are participating.
- Assist female candidates.
- Launder and store robes, towels, etc., after the ceremony.

6. *Assisting with the communion service.* The traditional roles for this service are described below.

The deacons will

- Provide the physical arrangements, such as placing the communion table.

Place the towels, basins and water in the appropriate rooms for use in the ordinance of humility.

Dispense water and basins for the men during the Ordinance of Humility, giving particular attention to visitors, new members, and the aged.

The deaconesses will

Prepare the bread and grape juice.

Arrange the emblems and covering on the table.

Dispense water and basins for the women during the ordinance of humility, giving attention and assistance to visitors, new members, and the aged.

Clean and store the linens and serving pieces used in communion.

It is appropriate for either deacons or deaconesses, who have been ordained, to assist in distributing the emblems and uncovering and recovering the table during the service.

7. *Caring for the congregation.* In many churches an unwritten tradition gives the women who serve as deaconesses or deacons the responsibility of organizing hot meals for any church family that experiences a death or other tragedy. This may mean simply taking food to the home or, in some cases, the serving of an entire meal to family and guests after a funeral. Often the planning of wedding and baby showers is also done by this group. This is an important aspect of a caring ministry in the congregation.

Resource Materials

The following resources are recommended for your ministry. You can purchase these by calling AdventSource (800-328-0525), the Adventist Book Center (800-765-6955) or your local Christian bookstore.

A New Frontier: Every Believer A Minister, by Rex D. Edwards.

Blinded by the Light, by Phil Dunham with Maylan Schurch. The author presents seven steps to apostasy, 16 questions for evaluating independent ministries, 11 ways to deal with liberal teachers in the church, seven mistakes made by breakaway congregations, and 10 statements by "new light" teachers that should serve as early warning signals.

Expect Great Things: How to Be a Happy, Growing Christian, by Richard O'Ffill. A template for successful Christian living, with the goal of being like Jesus.

Follow Me: How to Walk With Jesus, by Miraslov Kis. With sensitive sketches of people whose lives were transformed when they met Jesus, the author gives us new eyes, and then explores the implications of following Jesus.

How to Make a Friendly Call, by Willard D. Callender. (1982, Judson Press).

Let My People Go: Empowering Laity for Ministry, by Lindgren and Shawchuck. (1980, Abingdon Press).

Lifestyles of the Remnant, by Keavin Hayden. The author takes another look at church standards, taking them out of the context of legalism or orthodoxy—presents much needed principles.

No More Broken Places, by Carolyn Rathbun Sutton. This book about Nehemiah and his wall is interwoven with stories from the author's life and divorce, plus wise and wonderful advice on living the Christian life.

Problem Solvers and Soul Winners, by Vincent E. White.

The Deacon At Work, by F.A. Agar. (1987, Judson Press).

The Emerging Role of the Deacon, by Charles Deweese. (1979, Broadman Press).

The Work of the Deacon and Deaconess, by Harold Nichols. (1986, Judson Press).

Visit AdventSource On-Line at www.adventsource.org for a complete list of the latest resources available for local church leaders. You can place an order or request a catalog by calling 1-800-328-0525.

For information about additional resources and answers to your questions call the Adventist Plusline at 1-800-732-7587 or visit them on-line at www.plusline.org.