



REDEMPTION

CHURCH AT NEW HOPE

Position on the Office of Deacon (Servant Leaders)

The Scriptures present two leadership offices in the local church, the office of pastor/elder and deacon (1 Tim 3:1–13). The office of elder is filled by qualified men who hold the responsibility of shepherding the flock of God through the preaching of the Word of God (2 Tim 3:1–6), the care of the souls of the flock of God (1 Pt 5:2), the protection of the church (Acts 20:28–30), and the general exercise of leadership and authority in the church by their teaching, service, and godly example (Hebrews 13:17; 1 Pt 5:1–4). The office of deacon provides the flexibility of responsibility and structure that adapts to meet the practical needs and administration of the church's ministry to support the ministry of the elders.

The early church first set aside specific servants in the church to aid in the serving of tables so that the apostles could focus on the ministry of Word and prayer without unnecessarily burdensome administrative responsibilities (Acts 6:1–6). We believe the passage in Acts 6 teaches the purpose of the office of deacon, which exists to facilitate the essential practical needs of ministries and alleviate the administrative duties of the church's elders. The work of deacons focuses on a particular task presented by the elders. The elders nominate deacon candidates and are voted on by the members to provide leadership and administration to that specific ministry need.

The word deacon (δῆκονος) means "servant," which helps us understand the purpose and function of this office. Both men and women may serve the church in this office. God's Word restricts the exercise of spiritual authority to men; thus, only men can serve in the office of elder (1 Tim 2:12–15). However, because the office of deacon is not one of spiritual authority but of service, the Scriptures permit women to serve in the office of deacon. Scriptural evidence presents the likelihood that women served in such a way in the early church. In the qualifications of deacons in 1 Timothy 3:8–13, verse 11 is frequently translated, "*Their wives (γυναῖκας) likewise....*" The word γυναῖκας can also be translated as "*Women likewise....*" Though the translation of this passage is contested among biblical scholars, it is a legitimate consideration that Paul provides a specific qualification in verse 11 for women who serve in the office of deacon. Also, Paul refers to a lady named Phoebe as a deacon in the church: "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a

deacon (διάκονον) of the church at Cenchreae" (Rom 16:1). When the Biblical office of deacon is rightly practiced as a servant leader (not as an office of spiritual authority), the Scriptures provide warrant for both men and women, qualified by the characteristics of 1 Timothy 3:8–13, to serve in the office of deacon.

Yet, we understand that due to current evangelical culture and the confusion over the purpose and function of the office of deacon, many consider the idea of female deacons a subversion of the biblically assigned roles of men and women in the church. At Redemption Church at New Hope at New Hope, we affirm the goodness of God's design by creating male and female equal in worth and dignity, but differing in their roles in the home and in the local church. While our modern confusion over the office of deacon and gender has created hesitancy to open the office of deacon to women, we believe that Redemption Church at New Hope should be faithful to God's Word in the function of the office of deacon even though doing so presents challenges in communicating our convictions. We affirm that both men and women are gifts to the church, uniquely gifted by God to serve, administrate, and lead in biblically appropriate ways.

To avoid misunderstanding in applying the term *deacon* to both men and women, Redemption Church at New Hope will use the term *servant leader*. This term captures the purpose of the office of deacon without the confusing contemporary connotation of the word deacon. We have chosen to adopt the term *servant leader* to better contextualize our ministry to our city, so as not to create confusion to our biblical convictions of God's good but differing designs for men and women. The term *servant leader* guards against mischaracterization while simultaneously recognizing and encouraging both men and women in the Lord to utilize their gifts to build up the church.

While spiritual authority, teaching, and leadership reside among the elders, the office of deacon provides necessary support to the church's ministries. As our Savior said, "The greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted" (Mt 23:11–12). Redemption Church at New Hope will give thanks to God for those who choose to humble themselves and take on the position of *servant leader* who labor to support the elders and the church's ministry.