

## Justification of Ordained Office of Deacon Restricted to Qualified Males<sup>1</sup>

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### Introduction

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Synod of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (ARPC) considered proposals to open all offices to women, in addition to several other significant changes in the ARPC Form of Government (FOG).<sup>2</sup> Concerning offices, the 1971 Synod finalized on keeping the restriction to qualified males for the offices of minister and elders. But it allowed “persons” to be elected to the office of deacon, with the footnote that “circumstances of the local congregation shall require each session to determine the meaning of the word persons.”<sup>3</sup>

At the 1971 Synod, each chapter of the FOG was voted on separately; all chapters were approved.<sup>4</sup> This Synod-approved FOG still needed to be approved by the Presbyteries by a two-thirds majority. The vote again was per FOG chapter. All chapters were easily approved by the Presbyteries except the deacon chapter. It passed 154 to 73; 152 votes were needed for the required two-thirds majority.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the

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<sup>1</sup> This essay was originally appended to and in support of a memorial (i.e., overture) concerning changing the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church Form of Government to restrict the ordained office of Deacon to men. The memorial was presented to and approved by First Presbytery on October 13, 2020. Both the memorial and this essay are scheduled to be presented to the General Synod in the summer of 2021.

<sup>2</sup> For a description of the various proposals and associated arguments during these years, see Lowery Ware and James W. Gettys, *The Second Century: A History of the Associated Reformed Presbyterians: 1882–1982* (Charlotte: Washburn, 1981), 322–28, 380–88.

<sup>3</sup> *1971 Minutes of Synod*, 926, 928; *Standards of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church* (1976), FOG VII.A.2, pp.183–184.

<sup>4</sup> *1971 Minutes of Synod*, 732–34.

<sup>5</sup> For presbytery votes per chapter, see *1972 Minutes of Synod*, 4; and Ware and Gettys, *The Second Century*, 506 n. 50. (Chapter VII is the deacons chapter.)

changes to the FOG became official in 1972<sup>6</sup> and were eventually published in 1976 along with the other ARPC documents.<sup>7</sup>

No changes were made to the FOG relative to the deacon wording and footnote until June 2014. Finalized in June 2014, Synod/Presbyteries approved a change of the language, but the substance was similar.

Unless otherwise determined by the Session, the Diaconate shall be chosen from male members of that congregation. The Session of each congregation shall determine whether women can serve as deacons in their own particular congregation. In either case, the Church shall not neglect the raising up of qualified men to serve in this position (FOG 5.4).

Hence, since 1972, the ARPC has allowed the local session to determine whether the local diaconate is composed of only qualified males, or a mixed-gender diaconate of qualified persons. The ARPC has never allowed two separate diaconates, one male and one female.

The purpose of the attached memorial is to humbly ask the ARPC to move in a pastorally-sensitive manner toward restricting the ordained diaconate to only qualified males. The purpose of this Justification is to make the case for the male restriction. The justification is founded on two broad areas: (1) the detailed exegesis of several deacon-related biblical passages and (2) an understanding of authority relative to Presbyterian ordained offices, and more specifically, the recognition of some level of authority in the ordained office of deacon, which then connects to authority passages such as 1 Timothy 2:12. For some, broad area # 1 settles the debate for a male diaconate; for others, it is the combination of the two broad areas that argues for a male diaconate; and of course, for many of our ARPC brethren, they favor deaconesses explicitly or favor allowing the local session to decide due to lack of scriptural clarity on this issue.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> 1972 *Minutes of Synod*, 4.

<sup>7</sup> The ARPC *Standards* (1976) were published with the familiar rust-colored cover in a flexible format. From 1972 until 1976, the proposed FOG in the 1971 *Minutes of Synod* (pp. 912–956) sufficed as the acting FOG (1972 *Minutes of Synod*, 4).

<sup>8</sup> The 2003 “Women in the Life of the Church” position paper from Second Presbytery has a brief discussion of “Women in the Diaconate.” It summarized the then existing theological lay-of-the-land in the ARPC. “There is some diversity of opinion (rooted in different exegetical conclusions regarding particular texts and in somewhat differing theologies of office and ministry) within the church on this matter, but we believe that both positions can be advocated in a manner that honors and affirms the full authority of Scripture; and the confessional standards of the church. Given the fact and character

In addition to the two broad areas above, this Justification will briefly survey the early church as to deaconesses for completeness and to determine if this may secondarily aid in the understanding of specific Scriptural passages and an overall theology of the diaconate.<sup>9</sup> This Justification will conclude that the extant early-church information is a m bag that is not particularly useful for any side in this debate.

Before moving to the two broad areas and then the early church, a Greek-level linguistic discussion will be provided that concerns the English nouns and verb related to “deacon.” This is to aid the English-only readers and is especially necessitated because of the broad semantic range of the Greek *diakon-* word group that is reflected in the variety of word choices in the major English translations.<sup>10</sup> In addition, part of the traditional Presbyterian view that the office of deacon is a service-oriented office is connected to this.

Finally, it is noted that the Westminster Standards (WCF, WLC, WSC) do not include the word “deacon” nor any discussion of the diaconate. For that matter, there is also no mention of the session.<sup>11</sup>

### **Greek-Level Linguistic Discussion of *Diakon-* Word Group**

The *diakon-* word group in the NT consists of three words, *diakonos*, *diakonia*, and *diakoneō*.<sup>12</sup> First, some brief definitions before getting to the nuances: *Diakonos* is a noun-agent usually translated as “servant,” and if in a technical context, “deacon.”

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of this diversity of opinion, we believe that the current policy is one which promotes the peace and purity of the church, and that it should be continued” (2003 Minutes, 194). This position paper was adopted in 2005 (ARP Minutes of Synod, 83, 85).

<sup>9</sup> Canonical information is an *infallible* aid to interpreting other areas of the canon. Non-canonical information is a *fallible secondary* aid (cf. WCF 1.9–10).

<sup>10</sup> “In all controversies of religion, the Church is finally to appeal to [the original languages]” (WCF 1.8).

<sup>11</sup> The reason for this is that the Westminster Assembly also produced *The Form of Presbyterian Church-Government and of Ordination of Ministers*. The word “minister,” however, is included in the Westminster Standards at WCF 15.1, 27.4, and 28.2. The Westminster Standards do contain a chapter on “Of Synods and Councils” (WCF 31).

<sup>12</sup> The *diakon-* word group only occurs seven times in the LXX; Esth. 1:10; 2:2; 6:3, 5; Prov. 10:4; 1 Macc. 11:58; 4 Macc. 9:17. All LXX references in this Justification are by chapter and verse of standard English translations. The word group is rare in the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha. It does occur several times in the Testament of Job; see especially the many good deeds (“service,” *diakonia*, *diakoneō*) that Job does for the poor (T. Job 9–15).

*Diakonia* is an abstract noun usually translated as “service” or “ministry.” *Diakoneō* is a verb usually translated as “to serve” or “to minister.”<sup>13</sup> To add some confusion for an English-only reader, there are several other Greek words that have overlapping semantic ranges with the *diakon-* words and are often translated the same way.<sup>14</sup>

The *diakon-* word group is used in many verses that connect leadership to service; these two are heartwarmingly intertwined. The preeminent statement concerns our Lord. “The Son of Man came not to be served (*diakoneō*), but to serve (*diakoneō*) and give his life as a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28//Mark 10:45; cf. Luke 22:27, Rom. 15:8).<sup>15</sup> Christ said to the twelve, “If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant (*diakonos*) of all” (Mark 9:35; cf. Matt. 20:26; 23:11; Mark 10:43; Luke 22:26; Eph. 4:12). Paul often referred to his apostolic calling as *diakonia*, usually translated as “ministry” (e.g., Acts 12:25; Rom. 11:13; 2 Cor. 6:3; 1 Tim. 1:12).

In addition to the connection between leadership and service, all Christians are encouraged to consider their lives as a life of service to Christ and to others. Christ said, “If anyone serves (*diakoneō*) me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant (*diakonos*) be also” (John 12:26). Peter remarks, “As each has received a gift, use it to serve (*diakoneō*) one another, as good stewards (*oikonomos*) of God’s varied grace” (1 Pet. 4:10; cf. 1 Pet. 4:11; Heb. 6:10). Christ commends the church at Thyatira, “I know your works, your love and faith and service (*diakonia*) and patient endurance” (Rev. 2:19).

The above shows the wonderful general use of the *diakon-* word group that highlights service in all Christian endeavors. In addition to this general use, there is a more specific use connected to serving meals and financially helping others. In the Gospels especially, the *diakon-* word group is used for serving meals (e.g., Matt. 8:15; Mark 1:31; Luke 8:3; 10:40; 22:27; John 2:9). To give one example, “They gave a dinner for him [Jesus] there. Martha served (*diakoneō*), and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him” (John 12:2). Several times the *diakon-* word group refers to aiding physical needs and providing food, material, and money. Here the English translations are appropriately creative. For example, “So the disciples determined, every one according to his ability to send relief (*diakonia*) to the brothers in Judea” (Acts 11:29). “Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod’s household manager (*epitropos*), and Susanna, and many others,

<sup>13</sup> For standard lexical treatments, see BDAG, 229–31; LSJ, 398; LSJ/Supplement, 88; and Silva ed., *NIDNTTE*, 1:701–5.

<sup>14</sup> E.g., *doulos*, *douleuō*, *therapōn*, *therapeuō*, *hypēretēs*, *hypēreteō*, *leitourgos*, *leitourgia*, *leitourgeō*, *oikonomos*, *oikonomia*, *oikonomeō*, *epitropos*.

<sup>15</sup> Unless otherwise noted, English Bible translations are from the ESV.

who *provided* (*diakoneō*) for them out of their means” (Luke 8:3). “We take this course so that no one should blame us about this generous gift [i.e., money] that is *being administered* (*diakoneō*) by us . . . the *ministry* (*diakonia*) to the saints” (2 Cor. 8:20; 9:1). Yes, this use of the *diakon-* word group has overlap with the office of deacon. Another possible specific use is as “emissary” or “envoy” or “courier,” more on this below at Romans 16:1–2 discussion.

There is one more linguistic oddity. The noun *diakonos* is the same whether referring to a male or a female servant.<sup>16</sup> As to gender, context normally makes it clear. To ensure a reference to a feminine servant, the writer may add the feminine article *hē* or the feminine participle *ousa* (e.g., Rom. 16:1).

In sum, the *diakon-* word group is used in the NT with the general meaning of “service” or “ministry.” It is wonderfully connected in many verses to leadership, a servant-leader, including our Lord. Also, all Christians are to consider their life as serving Christ and others. Finally, there is in many verses an emphasis on literally serving, especially at meals, and aiding others’ physical needs. In the above discussion, I have purposely bracketed out the deacon-related verses more pertinent to this Justification.

### **Exegesis of Specific Deacon-Related Biblical Passages**

Which biblical verses are pertinent to this study? For the office and qualifications pertaining to the office of deacon, FOG 5.4 references 1 Timothy 3:8–13. The ARPC Directory of Public Worship (DPW) 7.a in a discussion of “Ordinations and Installations” notes that Christ has given “deacons to serve” and references Acts 6:1–6, Philippians 1:1, and 1 Timothy 3:8–13.<sup>17</sup> These three texts are the primary ones in any general discussion related to the office of deacon and are listed specifically in the ARPC *Standards*. Why these three? Philippians 1:1 and 1 Timothy 3:8–13 are the only two texts that clearly use the noun *diakonos* in the technical sense as “deacon.” Acts 6:1–6, while using the verb *diakoneō* and the abstract noun *diakonia*, is considered the founding of the office of deacon. Of these three, only Acts 6 provides much information as to the function of the diaconate. To round out our understanding of the office and its functions, in addition to our specific question about women, other

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<sup>16</sup> This is true at the time of the writing of the NT. By the AD 325 Council of Nicea, the feminine *diakonissa* is in use (Canon 19).

<sup>17</sup> Similarly, the initial 1799 ARPC *Standards* reference Acts 6:1–4, Phil. 1:1, and 1 Tim. 3:8 (*The Constitution and Standards of the Associate Reformed Church in North-America* [New York: T & J Swords, 1799], I.IV.1–2, p. 478. The Westminster Assembly’s *The Form of Church-Government* (1645) in the chapter “Deacons” has the same references as the 1799 *Standards*.

texts need to be considered. They include Romans 12:7–8; 16:1–2, 1 Corinthians 12:28, 1 Timothy 2:12, and 5:3–16.

### *Philippians 1:1*

Paul and Timothy address this letter “to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi with the overseers (*episkopos*) and deacons (*diakonos*).” Because it is paired with “overseers,”<sup>18</sup> this is a clear indication that here *diakonos* is used as a technical term to refer to an office. Hence, the vast majority of English Bibles appropriately translate as “deacons” rather than “servants” or “ministers” to make this point.<sup>19</sup> This verse relates to our study in simply confirming that there is an office of deacon and noting that it is one of the “ordinary and perpetual” offices.<sup>20</sup> Note, nothing is said of its function.

### *Romans 12:7–8*

In Romans 12:3–8, Paul includes the metaphor of the body having many parts that perform different functions. With some rhetorical flair, he lists seven different gifts (*charisma*) that are given by the grace (*charis*) of God. Obviously, this is not an exhaustive list. Many in the Reformed tradition have seen the gifts listed in Romans 12:7–8 as gifts that are split between the officers, elders/ministers (word gifts) and deacons (serving-physical-needs gifts).<sup>21</sup> The deacon-oriented gifts would be “serving”

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<sup>18</sup> For Presbyterians, “overseers” would be ministers and elders, or as some term it, ruling and teaching elders.

<sup>19</sup> Exceptions are the Roman Catholic NAB (“ministers”) and the mainline CEB (“servants”).

<sup>20</sup> The Reformed tradition makes a distinction between “ordinary and perpetual” (e.g., deacons) and “extraordinary” (e.g., apostles) offices. See Westminster Assembly’s *The Form of Church-Government* (1645) in the chapter “Of the Officers of the Church,” 1799 ARPC *Standards* I.II.3, p. 474, and FOG 2.9, 5.1, 6.1.

<sup>21</sup> So John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul The Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians*, trans. Ross Mackenzie (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 267–70; and John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959, 1965), 2:121–27. Charles Hodge is similar, although he allows that some of the same gifts are both for the officers, and secondarily, for all church members (*A Commentary on Romans*, Geneva Commentaries [Carlisle: Banner of Truth, 1972 {1864}], 387–93). C. E. B. Cranfield substantially follows Calvin (*The Epistle to the Romans*, ICC, 2 vols. [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975, 1979], 2:621–28). Frank Thielman takes an opposite tact. He sees all the gifts listed except for the final one as relating to word gifts (*Romans*, ZECNT 6 [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018], 575–78). The critical scholar Robert Jewett interprets *diakonia* as “service, especially serving meals”; however, he does

(*diakonia*), “the one who contributes,” and the “one who does acts of mercy.” Whether the gifts listed are specifically only for the officers, or simply a general listing of gifts, or some combination, it is clear that the triune God gifts individuals in the church to perform, among other things, ministries to aid physical needs, and some of these individuals would be ordained deacons.<sup>22</sup> Thus Romans 12:7–8 adds to our understanding of the functions of the diaconate.

As is well known, Calvin interprets ‘the one who contributes’ as not from one’s own property, but the deacons in charge of distributing church funds. Further, he understands “the one who does acts of mercy” as “widows and other ministers” who took care of the sick.<sup>23</sup> Later he referred to this as “two kinds of deacons.”<sup>24</sup> That is, Calvin recommends two levels of deacons: male deacons who distributed the funds, and female deacons who devoted themselves to taking care of the poor. He also references the widows of 1 Timothy 5 in conjunction with the female deacons.<sup>25</sup> It is rare to find someone who follows Calvin’s exegesis here, but his view of female deacons was/is influential.

#### *1 Corinthians 12:28*

Similar to Romans 12:3–8, Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:27–31 again uses the body metaphor with its different parts to discuss various offices and gifts that God gave the church. This concludes a longer discussion relating the Holy Spirit, gifts, and the personified body (1 Cor. 12:4–26).

Our concern is with “helping” (*antilēmpsis*) and “administrating” (*kybernēsis*) from 1 Corinthians 12:28. Interestingly, of the eight offices and gifts listed in 1 Corinthians 12:28, six are rhetorically repeated in the next verse, except “helping” and

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not see it as an office because he does not think there were any offices in Pauline churches until about AD 100 (*Romans: A Commentary*, Hermeneia [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007], 745, 748).

<sup>22</sup> One interesting angle here is “the one who leads” (*proistēmi*). This is the same verb used for both the elders and deacons in ruling/managing their households (1 Tim. 3:5, 12; cf. 1 Thess. 5:12–13). Since “the one who leads” is between two “deacon” type gifts, some take it as referring to deacon ruling/management. So e.g., Cranfield, *Romans*, 2:625–27.

<sup>23</sup> Calvin, *Romans and Thessalonians*, 270.

<sup>24</sup> John Calvin, *The First Epistle of Paul The Apostle to the Corinthians*, trans. John W. Fraser (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 272.

<sup>25</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 4.3.9 (cf. 4.13.19).

“administrating.” This gives the impression that they are more “ordinary.” As most agree, “helping” relates to physical needs<sup>26</sup> and “administering”<sup>27</sup> relates to ruling in the church. Some connect these two explicitly to the offices of deacons and elders, respectively.<sup>28</sup> Many connect “administering” directly to the office of elder,<sup>29</sup> and are less sure about “helping” as only referring to those in the office of deacon. Again, whether “helping” is specifically related only to those in the office of deacon or not, God gifts his church to take care of the physical needs in Christ’s body, and ordained deacons have some of these gifts. Thus, as with Romans 12:7–8, we learn something of the functions of the diaconate.

### Acts 6:1–6

Acts 6:1–6 narrates an internal dispute within the church. The church at this point is still composed primarily of ethnic Jews, although with different linguistic backgrounds. The primarily Greek-speaking Jews (“Hellenists”) had a complaint against the primarily Aramaic-speaking Jews (“Hebrews”) concerning the Hellenistic widows’ physical needs.<sup>30</sup> They “were being neglected in the daily distribution (*diakonia*).” Apparently, linguistic and probably cultural factors hindered the distribution process.

<sup>26</sup> The noun *antilēmpsis* only occurs here in the NT, although six times in the “Protestant” LXX (e.g., Pss. 22:19; 89:18). For the verb cognate *antilambanomai*, see Luke 1:54, Acts 20:35, and 1 Tim. 6:2.

<sup>27</sup> “Administering” is a metaphorical use of a piloting/steering a boat. The cognate noun-agent *kybernētēs* is literally a pilot in Acts 27:11 and Rev. 18:17. Etymologically, this word group is related to the English “to govern.”

<sup>28</sup> So e.g., Calvin, *1 Corinthians*, 271–72. Cambridge Platform 7.3 explicitly connects “helping” to the office of deacon (*Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr., 4 vols. [Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2008–2014], 4:390).

<sup>29</sup> For those with a three-office view, “administrating” (*kybernēsis*) is usually related specifically to (ruling) elders as distinct from ministers. So e.g., Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians*, Geneva (Carlisle: Banner of Truth, 1974), 262; and Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941), 586.

<sup>30</sup> Concern for widows is a significant biblical theme, e.g., Deut. 10:2; 14:29; 24:17; 26:12, Ps. 68:5, Jer. 7:6; 22:3, Mal. 3:5, Luke 7:11–17, 1 Tim. 5:3–16, Jas. 1:27. Rabbinical works do mention a community fund for the poor and various rules surrounding this, e.g., m. Peah 5:4, 8:7; t. Megillah 2:15; b. Megillah 27a; b. Baba Batra 8a–9a.

Up to this point in the church, the twelve Apostles are directly involved in physical aid and financial matters related to the church (Acts 4:34–35; 5:2). Given the complaint, the Apostles direct that “seven men (*anēr*)” be chosen by the church body “to serve (*diakoneō*) tables” in order that the Apostles can concentrate on the “ministry (*diakonia*) of the word.” The church then chooses seven, and the apostles “prayed and laid their hands on them,” that is, the Apostles ordained the seven (cf. Acts 13:3, 1 Tim. 4:14; 5:22, 2 Tim. 1:6).

This text is foundational for the diaconate. First some linguistic comments: Although the word “deacon”/“servant” (*diakonos*) is not here, the cognate *diakonia* is used for the physical aid to the widows (Acts 6:1). Here *diakonia* is translated as “distribution” (ESV) or “ministration” (KJV), as opposed to the more generic “service” or “ministry.” Further, the cognate verb *diakoneō* is used in the expression “to serve tables” (Acts 6:2). With the use of the *diakon-* word group in many NT contexts of serving meals, the previous administrative duties that the Apostles had for physical and financial aspects of the church, and the just mentioned widows’ situation; the idiom “to serve tables” here clearly relates to physical and financial aspects with an emphasis on helping those in material need. Another interesting linguistic twist is that the Apostles’ preaching is termed “ministry (*diakonia*) of the word” (Acts 6:4). With “of the word,” it is clear that *diakonia* here does not refer to physical needs but preaching. Hence, the same word *diakonia* is used in Acts 6:1–6 for a ministry of physical needs and a ministry of preaching.

It is fairly uniform throughout church history to see Acts 6:1–6 as the founding of the office of deacon.<sup>31</sup> This conclusion is quite uniform in the Reformed

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<sup>31</sup> So e.g., Irenaeus (AD 130–200) refers to both Nicolas and Stephen as “one of the seven first ordained to the diaconate by the apostles” (*Against Heresies* 1.26.3, 3.12.10, 4.15.1 [ANF, 1:352, 434, 480]); and Eusebius (AD 260–340) connects Philip and Stephen to the diaconate (*Ecclesiastical History* 2.1.10). John Chrysostom (AD 347–407) is a well-known exception. He believes the seven were ordained for a special purpose, but not as deacons. This conclusion is connected to his view that deacons directly serve under bishops (“Homily 14 of Acts” [NPNF<sup>1</sup>, 11:90–91]).

world<sup>32</sup> and part of the ARPC.<sup>33</sup> Seeing Acts 6:1–6 as the institution of the office of deacon is justified. (1) As noted above, although the word *diakonos* is not used, two cognates are (*diakonia*, *diakoneō*). (2) The seven’s task matches diaconal concerns. (3) The laying-on-of-hands/ordination, the specific instructions as to the choosing, and the qualifications (cf. 1 Tim. 3:8–13) all point to an ordained office consistent with the diaconate (cf. 1 Tim. 3:1–13). (4) If this is not the institution of the office of deacon, where/when is it? Clearly, by the time Paul writes Philippians, the office exists.

Some have pushed back by (1) noting that two of the seven, Stephen and Philip, have word-ministry gifts (Acts 6:8–7:53; 11:19; 8:4–13, 26–40; 21:8; 22:20) and (2) monetary gifts for the poor are given to the Jerusalem elders, not deacons, in Acts 11:30.<sup>34</sup> The response is that (1) as the New Covenant church is in its beginning stages, it is not unusual for some deacons to have and exercise other gifts simultaneously; and (2) it is not unusual to give a monetary gift initially to the elders before it is distributed as they are the designated rulers.

With the conclusion that Acts 6:1–6 refers to the office of deacon, the issue of women in the diaconate comes to the fore. The congregation was instructed to choose seven men (*anēr*). The Greek *anēr* refers to male as opposed to female and is not generic man/mankind (often *anthrōpos*). It is noted that males were chosen despite the immediate need being for widows/women. For many, the requirement to choose

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<sup>32</sup> Calvin says concerning the diaconate, “Their origin, institution, and office are described by Luke in Acts” (*Institutes* 4.3.9). So also e.g., Wilhelmus à Brakel, *The Christian’s Reasonable Service*, trans. Bartel Elshout, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 1992–1995), 2:149; Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1992–1997), 3:229; Geerhardus Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, trans. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., 5 vols. (Bellingham: Lexham, 2012–2016), 5:61; Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 587; and Cornelis Van Dam, *The Deacon: Biblical Foundations for Today’s Ministry of Mercy* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2016), 47–59. The Reformed confessional tradition also consistently supports this. So Confession of Tarcia and Torda 21, 24 (*Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr., 4 vols. [Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2008–2014], 2:738, 741); Belgic Confession 30; French Confession 29; Cambridge Platform 7.3 (*Reformed Confession of the 16th and 17th*, 4:390); Second London Baptist Confession 26.9 (*Reformed Confession of the 16th and 17th*, 4:563); and Westminster Assembly’s *The Form of Church-Government* “Deacons” and “Touching the Doctrine of Ordination.” Edmund Clowney sees it differently. Acts 6 “marks the first division of office in the church of the New Covenant, and that the choosing of the seven provided for eldership as well as the diaconate” (*The Church*, *Contours of Christian Theology* [Downers Grove, InterVarsity, 1995], 213).

<sup>33</sup> 1799 ARPC *Standards* I.IV.2 and ARPC DPW 7.a.

<sup>34</sup> Many critical scholars believe that church offices did not begin to exist until around AD 100. This is usually based on a very low view of the historical accuracy of Acts and seeing 1 Timothy and Titus as non-Pauline. No response is given here to these views.

males settles the question of women deacons in favor of a male-only ordained diaconate.<sup>35</sup>

*1 Timothy 5:3–16*

Widows are the topic in 1 Timothy 5:3–16. Three groups are discussed: families of widows (5:4, 7–8, 16a), younger (some impious) widows (5:6, 11–13, 14–15), and “true” widows (5:5, 9–10, 16b). The main thrust is to ensure widows are materially provided for by assigning responsibility for this.

If a widow (younger or older) has living biological and in-law family members (1 Tim. 5:4, 8), it is their responsibility to take care of her material needs. For a younger widow with no living family, it is counseled that she should remarry (1 Tim. 5:11, 14). Although, Paul does not say so, it is assumed that the corporate church would *temporarily* take care of her assuming she was godly.

What about older widows with no family who are “left all alone” (1 Tim. 5:4)? Paul terms them “true” widows (1 Tim. 5:3, 4, 16).<sup>36</sup> In addition to no family, he gives three more qualifications in 1 Timothy 5:9: (1) sixty-years and older,<sup>37</sup> (2) faithful wife to one husband at a time (cf. 1 Tim. 3:2, 12), and (3) godly and known for good works. If these three are met, “let the widow be enrolled” (1 Tim. 5:9). That is, the church corporate *permanently* takes on her material care. Note, no jobs are assigned to an enrolled widow, although it is implied she would be praying (1 Tim. 5:5).<sup>38</sup>

Some scholars assume the enrolled widows here as being assigned jobs and/or an organized arm of the church. Often based on seeing 1 Timothy as non-Pauline and

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<sup>35</sup> Eusebius quotes a letter from Cornelius, bishop of Rome, who gives a list of those in the synod of Rome. “One bishop . . . forty-six presbyters, *seven deacons*, seven sub-deacons, forty-two acolytes, fifty-two exorcists, readers, and door-keepers, above fifteen hundred widows and persons in distress” (*Ecclesiastical History* 6.43.11, emphasis mine). Possibly, this synod took the number seven from Acts 6:3 as a moral requirement.

<sup>36</sup> Most likely this a pun. “Widow” (*chēra*) is a cognate to the verb “to be bereft of” (*chēroō*) (LSJ, 1990). That is, a true widow is one who is not simply bereft of husband, but one who is also bereft of other family members and finances; she is “truly” bereft of everything.

<sup>37</sup> Given the minimal medical services and nutritional realities in the first century AD, sixty-years old might match today’s seventy or eighty.

<sup>38</sup> The very early Apostolic Fathers have several widow comments. “Widows are to be prudent in the faith of the Lord, praying ceaselessly for all . . . knowing that they are an altar of God” (Polycarp, *To the Philippians* 4:3). “Let not widows be neglected; you be their provider” (Ignatius, *To Polycarp* 4:1). And the perplexing statement, “I greet . . . the virgins/young-women who are called widows” (Ignatius, *To the Smyrnaeans* 13:1).

late, these views are admittedly related to third-fourth-century AD church-order assumptions read backwards into the first century AD<sup>39</sup> and/or “patriarchal” accusations that the writer of 1 Timothy wanted to assert male dominance over women freed-up by the Christian message. On the other hand, some conservatives do see the enrolled widows as an unordained group “employed” by the church.<sup>40</sup> However, the required minimal age and no explicit listing of any jobs in 1 Timothy 5:3–16 argue against these widows being employees or an unordained organized group.<sup>41</sup>

Concerning our topic, 1 Timothy 5:3–16 is another example of God’s concern for the materially disadvantaged within the church. Families of widows in the church were the first line of defense (cf. Isa. 58:7). Apparently, for younger godly widows who needed help, the corporate church *temporarily* helped. However, for “true” and godly widows, the corporate church was to take *permanent* responsibility. One assumes that the responsibility for these enrolled widows would rest with the deacons;<sup>42</sup> and depending on the nature of required personal care (e.g., washing the body), the responsibility may partially be assigned to the wives/women mentioned in 1 Timothy 3:11. There is no biblical evidence that the enrolled widows were some kind of official or unordained board with responsibilities.

<sup>39</sup> *Didascalia of the Apostles* 15 commands that widows “should be subject to the bishops and the deacons . . . they should not visit anyone in order to eat or drink or to fast with anyone, or to receive anything from anyone, or to lay the hand on and pray over anyone without the bishop or the deacon instructing her to do so” (translation from Lawrence J. Johnson, *Worship in the Early Church: An Anthology of Historical Sources*, 4 vols. [Collegeville: Liturgical, 2009], 1:234). On the other hand, *Apostolic Traditions* 10 has a reduced role for the widow. “When widows are appointed, she is not ordained . . . because she has no liturgical function . . . the widow, however, is appointed for prayer, which is the common task of all” (translation Johnson, *Worship in the Early Church*, 203). The *Apostolic Constitutions* commands that the bishop be “a lover of the widow”; that the church support godly widows (2.2.3, [ANF 7:397]); and that godly widows “are not ordained [but] chosen into the order of widows” (8.25 [ANF 7:493]). There is no discussion of whether she has jobs or not.

<sup>40</sup> So e.g., William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Pastoral Epistles*, NTC (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1957), 167, 173. Cornelis Van Dam, “The evidence can best be interpreted as pointing to a special unordained diaconal widow group in the church” (*The Deacon: Biblical Foundation for Today’s Ministry of Mercy* [Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2016], 86).

<sup>41</sup> The list of five good works in 1 Tim. 5:10 describes typical good works that the “true” widow has done in her life, not her job description. Note all five are in the past tense (aorist).

<sup>42</sup> From AD 150 is a report of deacons stealing from widows. “Those deacons (*diakonos*) have spots who minister (*diakoneō*) badly, and steal from living widows and orphans, and make gain for themselves from the ministry (*diakonia*)” (Shepherd of Hermas, Similitude 26:2).

*1 Timothy 3:8–13*

Similar to Philippians 1:1, 1 Timothy 3:1–13 explicitly includes both the offices of overseer (elder) and deacon, but unlike Philippians, there is an extended discussion of both.<sup>43</sup> First Timothy 3:8–13 concerns the office of deacon and concentrates primarily on the qualifications as opposed to the duties. Although, the duties are strongly implied in the office’s name *diakonos*.<sup>44</sup> They are weakly implied by either the specific qualifications or lack of them compared to the bishops/elders (e.g., no comment about being able to teach, 1 Tim. 3:9).

As to the flow of 1 Timothy 3:8–13, male “deacons” and their qualifications are discussed in 3:8–10; then 3:11 apparently breaks the flow to discuss the qualifications of the “wives” or “women”; 3:12 picks up again on the qualifications of male “deacons”; and the section is completed by 3:13 with an encouragement for those in the office.<sup>45</sup> For this study, 1 Timothy 3:11 is the focus.

In 1 Timothy 3:11, the plural of the Greek word *gynē* is used. With no context, *gynē* can equally mean “wife” or “woman.” There are four basic options here. Opting here for “wives” is straightforward—(1) the unordained wife of an ordained male deacon. Opting for “women” then has three sub-options: (2) ordained deaconesses that are part of one mixed-gender diaconate board, which is functionally the current ARPC view for some sessions; (3) ordained deaconesses that are a separate female diaconate board that dealt exclusively with women, which was apparently somewhat common in the third-to-fourth centuries AD;<sup>46</sup> and (4) unordained women who assist the ordained male diaconate and may include the above wives.

“Wives” (# 1 option above) is the best interpretation for 1 Timothy 3:11. Favoring this are the following considerations: (1) The word *diakonos* is not used. (2) In the most immediate context of 1 Timothy 3:2 and 3:12, *gynē* clearly means “wife.” (3) If “women,” then the marital status is not given even though it is given for the overseer (1 Tim. 3:2), the male deacon (1 Tim. 3:12), and the enrolled widow (1 Tim.

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<sup>43</sup> Titus 1:5–9 has extended discussion of bishop/elder but nothing concerning deacons. Most likely this is because the church in Crete was newly organized.

<sup>44</sup> *Diakonos* in 1 Tim. 3:8 and 3:11 is properly translated as “deacon” and clearly means those in the official office. *Diakoneō* in 1 Tim. 3:10 and 3:13 is properly translated as “serve as deacon” (ESV) or “use the office of a deacon” (KJV).

<sup>45</sup> This ending encouragement matches the beginning encouragement for overseer/elder (1 Tim. 3:1).

<sup>46</sup> See Excursus below.

5:5, 9).<sup>47</sup> (4) Since part of deacon responsibilities may include caring for sick women, wives of deacons have an important role, which is not true to the same extent for a wife of an overseer. This explains why there are not explicit qualifications for the wife of an overseer as opposed to the wife of deacon.<sup>48</sup> (5) If ordained deaconesses, then the flow is male deacons (1 Tim. 3:8–10) followed by deaconesses (3:11), but then very awkwardly back to male deacons in 3:12. “Wives” significantly reduces this awkwardness if 3:11 is seen as an aspect of male deacon qualifications. (6) The “likewise” (*hōsautōs*) adverb in 1 Timothy 3:11 best indicates similar Christian character as opposed to a similar office (cf. 1 Tim. 2:9; 3:8; 5:25). (7) The qualification for male deacons to “manag[e] their children and households well” (1 Tim 3:12; cf. 1 Tim 3:4–5 and Titus 1:6) on the surface is incompatible with a married deaconess. (8) “Wife” is clearly consistent with “not to exercise authority over a man” (1 Tim. 2:12). Based on certain views of 1 Timothy 2:12 and the authority invested in an ordained office, ordained deaconesses would not be consistent (see discussion below).

### *Romans 16:1–2*

After a discussion of his travel plans (Rom. 15:22–33) and immediately before the long “greetings” section (Rom. 16:3–16), Paul includes a commendation of Phoebe so that as she arrives in Rome, the Roman church will “welcome her” and “help her in whatever she may need from [them]” (Rom 16:1–2). Most likely, Phoebe is the one who actually delivers Paul’s letter to the Roman church. In addition to delivering the letter, the actual reason and/or business that Phoebe has in Rome, if any other, is not stated.

Phoebe is clearly a Christian. Paul refers to her as his “sister” and as a “saint.” He notes that she is a *prostatis* of many including himself. *Prostatis* may be translated as “patron” (ESV) or “helper” (KJV) and most likely refers at least to financial help.

For our study, the key comment is that Phoebe is also called a “*diakonos* of the church at Cenchreae.”<sup>49</sup> Does *diakonos* here mean (1) “servant” in a broad sense; or more specifically either (2) ordained “deaconess”; or (3) “emissary”/“courier”?<sup>50</sup> For

<sup>47</sup> Some argue that the marital status is not given because these women must be unmarried and/or virgins (e.g., Jerome D. Quinn and William C. Wacker, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy: A New Translation with Notes and Commentary*, ECC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000], 285–87).

<sup>48</sup> Calvin does see *gynē* as referring to both overseer and deacon “wives” based apparently on “also” (*kai*) in 1 Tim. 3:10.

<sup>49</sup> Cenchreae is a port city a few miles from Corinth. Paul wrote Romans while in Corinth.

<sup>50</sup> A few critical commentators even see her as the pastor/leader of the Cenchreaen church, e.g., Jewett, *Romans*, 944–45.

those who favor ordained deaconesses, this is a very important text as it would confirm that women may be ordained deaconesses. Although, there still would be the question of whether this is a mixed-gender diaconate board or part of a separate female-only ordained diaconate that has different and more restricted duties. If # 1 or # 3 are correct, then this text would confirm that there is no example of an ordained deaconess in the NT.

First, an explanation of the “emissary”/“courier” view. This view begins with the *diakon-* word group. It emphasizes that the starting generic meaning is simply that one is an authorized messenger from a “boss” giving a message to or performing an action for another party in behalf of the boss. Although it has been well known that secular Greek literature includes this nuance,<sup>51</sup> some scholars are now pressing that it is more significant in the NT than has previously been realized (e.g., 2 Cor. 3:1–3).<sup>52</sup> This view notes the contextual clues of Phoebe’s delivering a letter. Given the new linguistic emphasis, it concludes that *diakonos* here means that Phoebe is authorized by Paul and the Cenchreaen/Corinthian churches as an emissary to deliver the letter, and that *diakonos* is unrelated to being an ordained deaconess.<sup>53</sup> Although this view is plausible, it puts too much weight on an overly subtle linguistic analysis.

Arguments in favor of Phoebe’s being a “servant” in a broad sense as opposed to an ordained “deaconess” are as follows: (1) *Diakonos* is used twenty-nine times in the NT. Virtually all agree that twenty-five of these are servant either in a broad sense or a food-serving sense. Three are clearly the office of deacon (Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim 3:8, 12). One would have to argue that *diakonos* in Romans 16:1 is the only one of the twenty-nine occurrences where it is not clear and still means the office. (2) In Romans itself, *diakonos* is used in to refer to a government official as “God’s servant” (13:4, twice) and to Christ as a “servant” (15:8). (3) In Romans 12:8, deacon type functions and offices are discussed but the term *diakonos* is not used. (4) Phoebe’s being a wealthy women and helping various church members in her home area (Cenchreae/Corinth) including

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<sup>51</sup> LSJ has “messenger” as one of its options for *diakonos* (p. 398).

<sup>52</sup> The older view of the generic meaning was to serve/help by taking care of someone’s physical needs. As opposed to the early BAGD (pp. 229–31), the later BDAG sees the generic meaning of *diakoneō* as “to render service in a variety of ways either at someone’s behest or voluntarily and frequently with the suggestion of movement” (p. 229). This relatively new lexical emphasis on “go-between,” “emissary,” and one “commissioned” has been spurred on (overly so) by John N. Collins (*Diakonia: Re-Interpreting the Ancient Sources* [New York: OUP, 1990], 77, 217, 227). Although, all agree that context is the best way to interpret specific instances.

<sup>53</sup> So Collins, *Diakonia*, 224–26 and Clarence DeWitt “Jimmy” Agan III, “Deacons, Deaconesses, and Denominational Discussions: Romans 16:1 as a Test Case,” *Presbyterion* 34 (2008): 93–108, esp. 106–8.

Paul along with traveling would easily fit within a broad view of servant. Although being wealthy and helping others' physical needs is also compatible with the deacon office. (5) The comment that Phoebe is a "patron of many" is possibly not congruent with being an ordained deaconess at the Cenchreaen church. She seems to be doing this as an individual, in fact, she may be *the* significant monetary supporter "of many," some of whom may not be from the Cenchreaen church. (6) It is plausible, although not likely, that Paul is only referring to her being an emissary from the church for the purpose of carrying the letter. It is more likely that a broad use of *diakonos* fits as this would have been one of the many services Phoebe provided for Christians at her home church and elsewhere.

### *Summary of Exegesis Section*

As to the positive conclusions, Acts 6:1–6, Philippians 1:1, and 1 Timothy 3:8–13 are the three primary verses that together indicate that the office (with ordination) of deacon exists; it is to concentrate on material needs, especially for the poor; *and the office is only open to qualified males*. Romans 12:7–8 and 1 Corinthians 12:28 confirm God's intention for the church to have concern for material needs and may in fact also refer to the office of deacon. First Timothy 5:3–16 discusses widows and is another confirmation of the proper concern for material needs.

As to the negative conclusions, the enrolled widows of 1 Timothy 5:9–10 are not a functioning group with responsibilities. In Romans 16:1–2 and 1 Timothy 3:11, neither Phoebe (*diakonos*) nor "wives" (*gynē*) are ordained deaconesses.

### **Authority of the Diaconate and 1 Timothy 2:12**

For most Presbyterians who favor a male-only diaconate, the above exegetical arguments are sufficient. Some add an additional component related to the authority inherent in any office, including the office of deacon, which would limit the office to only qualified males based on 1 Timothy 2:12 and elsewhere. While others, still favoring a male-only diaconate, do not agree to this argument as applied to deacons, but they would agree to it as applied to elders.

The following is a brief outline of the authority-of-the-diaconate argument from a Presbyterian polity perspective. Christ exercises his power over the church in a variety of ways, and one being through the offices. Speaking of the spiritual power of the church given by Christ, Turretin states, "Every office or function or ministry bespeaks power, and to whomsoever any office is committed, *to him is given the right and*

power to act according to that office.”<sup>54</sup> As to the authority and power invested in the two perpetual offices of the church, it is admitted that there is a distinction between the session and the diaconate. In fact, in the ARPC, the diaconate is “under the supervision and authority of the [s]ession” (FOG 5.17) and it is an “office of sympathy and service after the example of Christ” (FOG 5.1).<sup>55</sup> Even so, although less than the session and subservient to it, the diaconate has some level of authority and power within its prescribed functions.<sup>56</sup> Just because it is an office of “service,” this does not necessarily mean there is no level of authority. As noted above in the *diakon-* word-group linguistic discussion, leadership and service are intertwined in Christ’s church.

Given some level of authority for the diaconate, the question of the application of Paul’s injunction concerning a woman not “to teach or to exercise authority over a man” (1 Tim. 2:12) comes to the fore, especially since it is just a few verses before the extended discussion of overseers and deacons (1 Tim. 3:1–13). In 1 Timothy 2:12, it is clear to most in the ARPC that Paul’s injunction extends to authorized teaching and authorized ruling by the session. But does it also extend to other official authority structures in the church such as the diaconate? In support of this might be 1 Timothy

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<sup>54</sup> Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 3:276, emphasis mine. For a discussion of spiritual power, see Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, trans. John Vriend, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003–2008), 4:417–29. Bavinck calls the diaconate the “power of mercy” (4:427).

<sup>55</sup> In the ARPC, the session is primarily “charged with spiritual oversight and governance” (FOG 6.5). The diaconate is primarily “responsible for the congregation’s ministry to those in material need or distress . . . , encouraging the practice of total stewardship, . . . and care of the general property” (FOG 5.5, 6, 8). Part of the deacon vow from the 1799 *ARP Standards* includes, “Do you promise to attend to the necessities of the poor, with Christian meekness and tenderness, and to manage all such temporalities of the church as may be committed to your care with diligence and fidelity, according to the directions which, from time to time, may be given to you by the Session” (p. 484). In his magnificent defense of Presbyterian polity, James Bannerman has little to say about the office of deacon. Apparently this is so because he discusses more significant differences concerning the office of elder amidst Presbyterians, Prelates, and Congregationalists. He confirms that the office of deacon is “divinely instituted” and mentions with no explanation that it is an “inferior office” (*The Church of Christ: A Treatise on the Nature, Powers, Ordinances, Discipline, and Government of the Christian Church* [Carlisle: Banner of Truth, 2015 {1869}], 781, 819–21).

<sup>56</sup> Currently in the ARPC, the vows the congregation makes as part of the ordination of the elders and deacons are exactly the same and include “obedience.” The Theological and Social Concerns Committee in 2020 is proposing to delete “obedience” from the deacon vow because “it removes the potential misunderstanding that deacons have the same type of authority as the elders do in the local church” (Index 24). The 1799 *ARP Standards* do not have congregational vows related to the ordination of elders and deacons. The Westminster *Form of Presbyterian Church-Government* does not include elder or deacon vows nor the congregational response.

3:12. Here, the qualifications for male deacons include “husband of one wife, managing their children and their households well.” Is one of the implications of this verse that the deacon has to exhibit authority properly in his managing relative to his diaconate duties, or does it simply imply being a good manager with no authority implications? The former is more likely. If so, this would well correlate with extending the “authority” of 1 Timothy 2:12 to the diaconate. Hence, women would not be eligible for the office of deacon because it includes some level of authority that would occasionally be exercised over men.<sup>57</sup>

### Excursus: Deaconesses in the Early Church

By the late first and in the second century AD, irrespective of the gender question, the office of deacon was firmly entrenched in the “Apostolic” church as evidenced by numerous extant sources from that time (e.g., 1 Clement 42:4; Ignatius, *To the Philadelphians* 1:1; Shepherd of Hermas, Vision 5:1; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 1.26.3). These sources also indicate that the deacon was subject to the bishop and elders (e.g., Ignatius, *To the Magnesians* 2:1; Polycarp, *To the Philippians* 5:3). There is little as to the office’s function excepting a few comments noting the deacons help with communion (Ignatius, *To the Trallians* 2:3; Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 67 [ANF, 1:86]) and aid in distributing funds (Didache 15:1; Shepherd of Hermas, Similitude 9.26.2).

As to gender, up through the second century AD there is only one comment in the Christian sources. It clearly says bishops and deacons are to be “men” (*anēr*) (Didache 15:1). There is, however, a Latin-language non-Christian source. Pliny (the Younger), Roman governor of Bithynia (part of modern Turkey), exchanges letters with the Emperor Trajan in AD 112. One letter is famous as it discusses Christians’ being executed for not reverencing the Emperor’s statue (*Letters of Pliny* Book 10, Letter 96). Pliny notes that he tortured for information two “maids/slave-women (*ancilla*), whom they [other Christians] call female-servants/deaconesses (*ministra*).” Given Pliny’s broad misunderstanding of Christianity and that this text is in Latin, one should not put much weight on his *ministra* comment to confirm that there were ordained deaconesses in this part of Turkey at such an early date as opposed to simply acknowledging that these two women had a designated role in the church.

Although the transition is murky, the office of deacon becomes somewhat clearer in the third and fourth centuries AD.<sup>58</sup> The primary evidence includes three

<sup>57</sup> E.g., the deacons decide that a group of men from the church cannot turn a section of the church property into a football field, or an individual deacon works with parents who refuse to support their children (cf. 2 Thess. 3:10, 1 Tim. 5:8).

<sup>58</sup> The standard academic work on the history of deaconesses is Aimé Georges Martimort, *Deaconesses: An Historical Study*, trans. K. D. Whitehead (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986). With slightly different

books of church order that contain unacknowledged quotes of each other. Our best guess as to dates are *Didascalia of the Apostles* (third century AD), *Apostolic Traditions*<sup>59</sup> (third to fourth century AD), and the *Apostolic Constitutions* (late four century AD). The *Apostolic Traditions* does not refer to deaconesses;<sup>60</sup> however, the *Didascalia of the Apostles* and *Apostolic Constitutions* do. These two sources show clearly two separate ordained deacon-type offices, male deacons and female deacons.<sup>61</sup> The male deacon is directly under the bishop, and his office appears to be a stepping stone to being a bishop. The deaconess is also under the bishop, but she is restricted to helping women and does not have the broad duties of a male deacon (*Apostolic Constitutions* 8.28 [ANF 7:494]).

Several times a rationale is given for why deaconesses are needed. Broadly, it refers to the appropriateness of male and females in certain situations. It was normal for deacons or deaconesses to help with baptisms. When women were baptized, only deaconesses would help. “It is not fitting that a women be seen by men” (*Didascalia* 16), and “deaconesses minister to the presbyters in the baptizing of women, *on account of decency*” (*Apostolic Constitutions* 8.28 [ANF, 7:494], emphasis mine).<sup>62</sup> Also, in visiting homes, deaconesses need to visit women believers “on account of unbelievers” (*Apostolic Constitutions* 3.15 [ANF, 7:431]), and more specifically, a deaconess is needed to help and bathe a sick woman believer (*Didascalia* 16).

Ordained deaconesses began disappearing in approximately the sixth century AD in the western Church and twelfth century AD in the eastern. Historians usually cite two reasons: governments and/or monastic centers taking over the care of the poor and sick, and reduction in adult baptisms.

One pertinent point for this study from this Excursus is that there were two gender-separate ordained deacon bodies in at least part of the church during the third and fourth centuries AD and no example of a mixed-gender diaconate. The ordained

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conclusions, also see John Wijngaards, *Women Deacons in the Early Church: Historical Texts and Contemporary Debates* (New York: Herder & Herder / Crossroad, 2002).

<sup>59</sup> At one time, it was thought that Hippolytus wrote this.

<sup>60</sup> One would expect a discussion of deaconesses between *Apostolic Traditions* 8 (“Deacons”) and 9 (“Confessors”). In the AD 325 Council of Nicea, Canon 19, deaconesses are mentioned but they are not to be ordained [ANF, 14:40]. In the AD 451 Council of Chalcedon, Canon 13, deaconesses may be ordained but not until age forty [ANF, 14:279].

<sup>61</sup> See *Didascalia of the Apostles* 16 and *Apostolic Constitutions* 2.26, 3.15, 3.19, 8.19–20. As to dignity of the offices, the bishop is like God the Father; the deacon, Christ; and the deaconesses, the Holy Spirit (*Didascalia of the Apostles*, 9; *Apostolic Constitutions* 2.26 [ANF, 7:410]).

<sup>62</sup> Although there is no mention of deaconesses, *Apostolic Traditions* 21 requires the removal of clothing for the one being baptized.

deaconesses had restricted responsibilities compared to the male counterparts. This point of church history does not support either those in the ARPC who favor the current mixed-gender diaconate nor those who favor a male-only diaconate.

As to the necessity of women needed in some personal situations, this Excursus supports the general point. This correlates equally as well with the interpretations of “wife,” or ordained “deaconesses,” or unordained “women” for 1 Timothy 3:11.

## **Conclusion**

The current ARPC FOG allows the local session to opt for an ordained mixed-gender diaconate; otherwise the ordained diaconate is male. The primary biblical texts related to the office of deacon are Acts 6:1–6, Philippians 1:1, and 1 Timothy 3:8–13. Other relevant texts are Romans 12:8–9; 12:1–2, 1 Corinthians 12:28, and 1 Timothy 2:12; 5:3–16. After evaluating these, this Justification concludes that these texts confirm that only qualified males are eligible for the diaconate. For completeness and a possible secondary aid for biblical interpretation, a brief Excursus related to deaconesses in the early church is included. It concludes that the extant historical documents on the whole support neither a mixed-gender diaconate nor a male-only diaconate. Given the above scriptural conclusions and since the “supreme Judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined . . . is the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture” (WSC 1.10), the attached memorial humbly recommends that the ARPC move in a pastorally sensitive manner toward restricting the ordained office of deacons to only males.