

Guidelines for Leading an Effective Deacon's Meeting

Welcome to the leadership in your diaconate! You will play an important role as you shape the agenda, involve others and serve by example as you set priorities in diaconal ministry. The deacons picked you because they see strengths in you for this job. Develop those skills!

This handout will provide practical tips in the following:

- leading an effective meeting
- an appendix with
 - sample agenda
 - guidelines for secretary
 - working successfully with different people

These guidelines assist deacons in their meetings to:

1. *develop community;*
2. *develop awareness and skills in diaconal ministry;*
3. *meet goals in ministry;*
4. *intercede in prayer for others;*
5. *develop ongoing encouragement and accountability.*

1. Develop community.

a) Build a sharing time into the beginning of the meeting. It provides an opportunity to feel cared for, valued and to belong. Use icebreakers that are progressively less low key so that the group may grow in intimacy.

Questions like the following are very suitable for this time:

- *Is there something in your life for which you are thankful right now?*
- *Is there something in your life that presents a challenge right now?*

b) Prayer is a special time for the diaconate. It provides a time for praying:

- ❖ with thanks for God and His many gifts
- ❖ for God's direction on our meeting and our work
- ❖ for each other's personal/diaconal possibilities and challenges. (Take time to pray for each other without the repetition of details.)

c) It is important to hear from God's Word. He is the source of any hope and restoration that we may bring. It is His name in whom we may serve. There are many Biblical passages along with devotional materials that provide powerful inspiration to a diaconate for their calling and ministry.

2. Develop awareness and skills in diaconal ministry

One of the most important things we can do in our meetings is to deepen our understanding of the deacon's calling and generate new ministry for ourselves with the congregation and with our community.

The question is NOT "what has our diaconate done?"

The question IS **“What is our diaconate able to become?”**

- a) After a time of sharing and devotions, spend a half hour discussing a topic:
- Study together a part of “Servant Leaders”;
 - The “Charge to the Deacons” provides many of the basics of what is involved in being a deacon. Reflect on 2-3 sentences at each meeting.
 - Work through a part of “Developing a Workplan for your Diaconate”
 - Discuss the material in Partners or complete its related mini-workshop. It is best if you can take turns leading these discussions. Ask questions that will create discussion.

Good questions are open ended; good questions are personal and encourage application; and good questions are interactive.

- b) Discuss a new area of work
Perhaps you have recognized a need i.e. single parents and want to develop a new ministry in response to a need. Ask someone to introduce the discussion.

3. Meet goals in ministry

- a) Start the meeting on time; end on time.
It is tempting to wait for latecomers, but this sends a message: “Why be on time if the meeting isn’t?” If you are not able to do the work in 2-2 ½ hours, schedule another meeting. Do not drag it on. If your meetings are longer, look at whether you could spend less time on some items.

- b) Have a clear printed agenda in advance.
The chair (and secretary perhaps) should prepare this together and give it to the deacons the Sunday before the meeting. Develop an agenda that puts the important things first. (*see appendix*)

- c) Ask different people to introduce different parts of the agenda.
Arrange with deacons to introduce various parts of the meeting i.e. discussion, devotions and so on. Mark these on the agenda to highlight them.

- d) Explain the purpose of each point of the ministry agenda.
People need to know what to expect with an item:
- *for information:* a brief report for information
 - don’t drag it out
 - *for discussion:* a time for sharing thoughts
 - encourage everyone to be involved
 - set a time limit
 - who will follow it up to propose an action?
 - *for action:* a time to make decisions
 - most decisions can be by consensus(see: “If you want to make a decision by motion” below)

Set an approximate time for each item.

e) Avoid doing a lot of talking yourself.

Some people think that when they become chair that they should talk more. In fact the opposite is true. Your task is to get others to talk and keep the discussion on track and on time. It may be a good idea to offer a brief summary and then ask “Are we ready to decide?” If you are making the proposal for an action, it may be good to ask someone else to chair.

f) Making decisions

i. Ask someone to begin by making a motion – a statement of the proposed action

ii. Discuss it; avoid repeating arguments, points.

- If no agreement seems clear or more information is needed, it may be helpful to “table” it until the next meeting. That means that is the end of the discussion for now.
- If someone does not like one part of the motion, someone can suggest a change or an “amendment”. The simplest is to ask the person who made the motion whether he/she would accept the change. If not deal with the amendment first, then vote on that.
 - if it passes, the original motion includes the change
 - if does not pass, the original motion stands

iii. Repeat the motion; are we all in agreement?

You can have a voice vote or a show of hands.

4. Intercede in prayer for others

Prayers of intercession will likely come during or at the end of the meeting. It is vital to ministry to allow time for prayer for each other and “others”.

In the communal prayer time, a diaconate may use the very common experience of one person keeping track of prayer needs throughout the meeting and then mentioning them in the closing prayer.

Some other ways of talking to and experiencing God’s presence in prayer are:

- Divide into groups of three and pray for each other’s ministry or each other’s personal needs.
- Go around the group and pray for the person seated to the right of you.
- Have someone keep track of concerns or thanksgivings during the meeting and assign these areas to various people for the prayer time.
- As someone expresses a concern or a matter of thanks during the meeting, have an assigned person write it down, put it into a box or in the middle of the table, and at the end of the meeting, distribute to persons willing to remember these areas of thanks or concern.
- Try praying using a different posture eg. hold hands, stand, on bended knee and so on.
- Ask each other what God is saying to you and develop your communal listening skills.
- Singing a prayer together.

Through prayer, our love for God and our “neighbours” will grow.
Service in His Name will be multiplied. A living Jesus will be seen in us and through us.

5. Encouragement and accountability is an integral part of each meeting

People need encouragement. They also need to be responsible for something and asked to give an account for that.

a) Thank people

Say thank you – even for simple things like leading in prayer, doing minutes, etc. Sometimes it is good to use a little card for that.

b) Encourage people

Take the time to ask people not only what they did but “How was that for you?” And then offer a word of encouragement especially to newer deacons.

c) Follow up

It is really helpful for the chair to meet 1-1 with one deacon each month. Just talk over how it is going in their personal and diaconal work.

d) Tell us what you did...

If someone is responsible to follow through on a visit, an action, ask him/her to report on what happened. It can be brief and to the point. They do not have to explain *how* they did it.

The reporting on visits should be:

- for information – to let the others know that I visited (name). Be brief.
- for advice – to ask the other deacons for input on a case. Explain the situation and clearly ask for input.
- for action – to ask for action from the deacons. Present the proposal, why it should be supported and a motion, i.e. *I recommend we give \$250.00 to Family X for the next 2 months.*

e) How are we doing?

Every 3 months, review what we are committed to as a diaconate and ask whether we are following through on our commitments?

f) Reporting

- provide a report to council at least every 2 months
- provide a written report to the congregation on a regular basis in the bulletin/church newsletter. Describe what you do and how the congregation can help.

Planning the Agenda

Planning the diaconal meeting is essential. What happens in the diaconal meeting can set the tone for ministry or it can be an end to itself. A written agenda is important even in small diaconates. The agenda should reflect what is vital to the deacons and not be a collection of urgent items. The order of the agenda should reflect what is vital, important and urgent.

A Sample Agenda

- 7:45** Develop “community” with devotions
- 8:15** Develop awareness and skills of diaconal ministry with learning / discussion / assignment
- 8:45** Meet goals in ministry
- Minutes of last meeting and matters arising
 - Progress reports on current activities (update on 1-2 areas of ministry per month)
 - Note any needs related to visits/congregation
 - Any concerns/reports regarding finances
 - Any request for involvement/support not previously considered (received by telephone/mail)
- 9:45** Intercede in prayer for others (pray faithfully and pray often)
- 10:00** Farewells

Before you depart from each other, do make assignments for the next meeting.

In Acts 2:42-47, there is a description of the New Testament church and the activities which made them an effective group:

- ❖ *Met together regularly;*
- ❖ *Listened to God’s Word and each other;*
- ❖ *Prayed together;*
- ❖ *Accepted each other and used their gifts;*
- ❖ *Had a sense of purpose and mission;*
- ❖ *Cared for each other;*
- ❖ *Experienced unity together with glad and sincere hearts;*
- ❖ *Each one was important; and*
- ❖ *Others saw the life in this early church and joined.*

May our diaconates become true images of the church as Christ designed it for us! May “glad and sincere hearts” (Acts 2:46) be the experience of each deacon called to serve!!

Guidelines for Secretaries

There are many possibilities and endless opportunities for secretaries to be involved in diaconal work. However it would be helpful for the entire diaconate that these 4 items are have-tos for the role of the secretary:

- A. *records the minutes of the meetings;*
- B. *reviews the correspondence to and from the diaconate;*
- C. *retains the files and preserves the records;*
- D. *recognize items for meeting agendas.*

The diaconal secretary is the “**hub**” of the “diaconal work”; the link with the outside. Many agencies and organizations depend on the efficiency of the diaconal secretary in their communication with the deacons and the congregation.

A. Minutes

The minutes will show the time and place of each meeting, and the name of the chairperson. The names of all those present and absent are recorded, as well as the various items that were discussed.

Highlight the **actions** that are to be taken in response to decisions made. Beside the action, note the name of the person who is responsible.

Minutes should be a comprehensive narrative on the discussions and decisions of the meeting. A copy of the minutes should be sent in advance to all members for consideration and approval prior to the next meeting. The secretary should compile all the minutes that should be available at each meeting for reference.

B. Correspondence

1. The secretary should review incoming correspondence when it is received. Contact the deacons if correspondence needs immediate attention. If the mail is received at one central address i.e. the church, correspondence should be picked up at least once a week.

The secretary should pass on all materials concerning special offerings (posters, bulletin covers, inserts, personalized letters) or information items (newsletters) and agreed to by the deacons to the persons indicated, i.e. congregation, pastor, bulletin clerk, Sunday school superintendent, congregational representative.

2. The secretary should divide it into items that need priority attention. Correspondence could be sorted as follows:
 - a) Newsletters: items which are indicated as “newsletters” or pieces of information;
 - b) Offering requests: items that clearly indicate a request for an offering or donation. You will get many requests for offerings or donations. You do not have to respond favorably

to them all especially if they are new. Usually new requests should be forwarded to the treasurer for research and a recommendation,

Note:

- ❖ receipt letters (or receipts) indicating an offering has been received, should be given to the treasurer;
 - ❖ agencies/organizations requesting offerings must have “Canadian registration” (see CRC yearbook)
- c) Invitations/other requests
- ❖ invitations to specific meetings i.e. local diaconal conference, Diaconal Ministries days of encouragement, and/or community events;
 - ❖ specific services related to diaconal work; and
 - ❖ specific requests to provide information.
- d) Replies: Summarize letters, be precise, discuss the request and reply promptly. Often information requested is important. Whenever possible, reply on church stationary. (It does add credibility and respect for your reply.) The deacons and diaconate are part of the church and as such should be recognized. It may be helpful to keep copies of letters that have been sent out.

C. Files and Records

The secretary’s job does not end by making minutes of the meeting and handling the correspondence. The following may help to do efficient “housekeeping” with manageable records and files. *Past, present and future files are important for an effective diaconate.* Some suggestions are as follows:

1. Expanding file
An “expanding file” has pockets, either plain or indexed. It can be used for documents needed regularly or in the immediate future, including correspondence (important and less important). An expanding file eliminates an arm full of papers and will help you quickly refer to what you are looking for.
2. File folders/binder
The diaconate receives a variety of correspondence from denominational agencies and other organizations. In order to quickly find information, it is advisable to have for at least the major organizations and agencies a separate file folder i.e. Diaconal Ministries Canada, CRWRC, the classis diaconal conference, Salem, World Missions, Home Missions, and community projects. The secretary should from time to time review the files and keep only those items that have historical or organizational value. Once you have set up a filing system, it takes some discipline to keep it “on track”.
3. File Cabinet
A letter size file cabinet is helpful to keep the records and the files of the diaconate. As files are accumulating, arrangements should be made with the church office to keep past files in a safe place in the church building. It is not necessary for a secretary to have all the past files from a diaconate at home.

How long are files kept? The documents, that have historic or organizational value i.e. minutes, should be kept as part of the church records.

4. Agenda

The secretary should review each diaconal meeting agenda with the president. Precious time can be saved with items such as correspondence, reports, requests and others if the chairperson is informed of upcoming matters brought to the attention of the deacons.

The secretary should inform the bulletin clerk of the date and time of each deacon's meeting. The congregation should not only know that council or consistory meets, but also that the deacons have regular meetings. It is important for diaconal ministry that deacons meet regularly at set times.

5. Secretary change

For effective continuity, it is important that the outgoing secretary spends time with the new secretary to explain what needs to be done and how to do it.

When there is a change of secretary, it is very important that anyone who communicates with the diaconate is notified immediately. This would prevent any interruption or delay in receiving important materials for ministry.