

**The  
Deacon  
Handbook**



## **What is a Deacon?**

The office of deacon is a historic office of the Presbyterian Church (USA). In the New Testament, deacons were appointed to care for the distribution of food and other necessities to the poor and needy members of the church (Acts 6:1-6). In Romans 16:1, both women and men served the church as deacons. Other references to deacons are included in Philippians 1:1 and 1 Timothy 3:8-13.

The *Book of Order* of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) describes the office of deacon as one of sympathy, witness and service after the example of Jesus Christ. It states the duty of deacons, first, is to minister to those who are in need, to the sick, and the friendless and to any who may be in distress both within and beyond the community of faith. (G-6:0401-0402).

The *Book of Order* also states that a deacon should be a person of spiritual character, honest reputation, exemplary life, brotherly and sisterly love, warm sympathies, and sound judgment.

At Three Chopt Presbyterian Church (TCPC), the Board of Deacons was reinstated as an active ministry in the spring of 1989. There are currently 24 deacons each serving a three-year term and one “youth deacon” serving an twelve month term. The size of the Board of Deacons can only be changed with congregational approval.

## **The Deacon’s Mission**

The Board of Deacons of TCPC is a body of believers called to ministry and servanthood by Jesus Christ. This call includes ministry to the congregation as a whole, our cluster members, our fellow deacons, and to the community.

By the grace of God, we are one body with many members having gifts that differ according to the grace given us. We are called by God and elected by the members to serve under the authority of scripture and the Session of TCPC.

Acknowledging that the Holy Spirit empowers us to this ministry of compassion and human concern, we seek to serve, not to be served.

Ours is a ministry that seeks to serve through developing compassion, care, and communication throughout the congregation.

The primary purpose of the Board of Deacons is to assist the pastors in the pastoral care and nurture needs of the congregation and the community. The Session of TCPC has also given the Board of Deacons responsibility for helping communicate pastoral concerns to the congregation.

## What is a Cluster?

Cluster ministry is a vehicle for ministry and service to the congregation. Each member of the Board of Deacons is assigned to be the leader of one cluster. The members of the Board of Deacons are also considered a “cluster” and are ministered to by the Moderator.

At TCPC, we support each member of the congregation by aligning them with a cluster. Normally this is based on a member’s life stage but other criteria may be used to best serve member needs. Members always have the choice to change clusters or self-align with a cluster of their choice. The deacon, with the pastors, will serve as the household’s primary contact with the church for purposes of pastoral care. A deacon may or may not be in the same life stage as the cluster they are assigned to lead.

Through letters, e-mails, phone calls, other means of communication and personal contacts, it is hoped that a relationship will develop between the deacon and each cluster household. It is also hoped that through the ministry of deacons that relationships will develop between households in the congregation. The relationship between deacons and clusters and the mutual relationships between members will serve the households of each cluster in times of celebration such as births, marriages and graduations; and sadness, such as illness, death or job loss.

## Your Responsibilities as a Deacon

As a deacon, you will have specific responsibilities and many possible things to do! Consider your three-year term as a “journey”. You have just begun your journey as a deacon and you grow, experience, and learn throughout your term! Of course, being a deacon does not exclude you from taking part in other activities within the life of the church. Many deacons serve on various committees and programs.

### Member of the Board of Deacons (Diaconate)

*As a member you are expected to:*

- Attend the meetings of the Diaconate, as called by the moderator but meeting at least quarterly.
- Communicate pastoral concerns to other deacons and enlist their help as needed.
- Communicate pastoral concerns to your cluster and enlist their help as needed to offer care to those in need.
- Develop a relationship with each household in your cluster, and use the most suitable means to communicate important pastoral care needs and concerns to them.
- Contact the households in your cluster at least three times a year, in addition to communicating congregational needs and concerns.

- Pray for the members of your cluster as well as all members of the church family, give of your time and talents, and share in the nurture, fellowship and mission of the congregation.
- Attend Session meetings when new members join, and if possible meet them after worship when introduced. Contact should be made within two weeks after joining to help the new member become connected and involved in the life of the church. (Information is available from M & E to assist you.)
- Attend and support New Member dinners when new members in your cluster are invited.
- Attend the fall and spring church officer retreats and/or retreats organized solely for the Diaconate, for spiritual growth, fellowship, planning and goal setting.
- Keep accurate information on your cluster households.
- Help the deacon who is assigned to your cluster at the end of your term by providing information about each cluster household.
- Attend the annual Diaconate and Session joint meeting as required by the Book of Order.
- Present the Prayer of Dedication and help serve Holy Communion during Worship as assigned by Worship Committee.

*You may also be asked to:*

- Represent the Diaconate at a Session Meeting
- Lead a devotional during a Diaconate Meeting.
- Serve on a Congregational Nominating Committee as the deacon representative.
- Provide refreshments for Diaconate meeting.

**When a Member Dies and the funeral or memorial service is to be held at the church.**

The Pastor is responsible for arranging the service for the deceased. The Pastor should be made aware of any family requests and should share any appropriate information with the Deacon and the Funeral Coordinator. The Pastor and Deacon will determine which of them will contact the head Funeral Coordinator.

**The Deacon** should have an established relationship with the family. Therefore, the Deacon contacts the family to determine how the church can assist the family. The Deacon can call upon other members of the cluster or church. The Deacon should gather information from the family that is needed by the Funeral Coordinator, using the Check List in *The Deacon's Handbook*. The head Funeral Coordinator will assign a funeral coordinator for the service. The Deacon should:

1. Make certain the Moderator of the Diaconate, Funeral Coordinator, Clerk of Session, and church staff know of the death immediately, as well as members of their cluster;

2. Determine if out-of-town family members need to be met at the airport / train and / or whether any additional vehicles are needed for the service
3. Check to determine if child care is needed at home during the services, making arrangements if needed (i.e. call a baby sitter)
4. Ask if a house sitter is needed during the service to insure the home's safety.
5. Arrange for food to feed the family, as needed, and for food to be received at the home.

### **Your Role as a Cluster Leader**

Each deacon is an individual with his or her own God-given talents, spiritual gifts, and abilities. Because of this, there are many different ways to fulfill your basic responsibilities as a cluster leader. Please remember there is no “wrong” or “right” way to be a deacon; you must find, develop and use your own gifts to serve.

All you need to remember is that your primary responsibility as a deacon is the pastoral care and nurture of the households in your cluster. Prayerfully ask yourself, “How am I going to fulfill this responsibility?”

#### ***The Deacon/Cluster Household Relationship***

To provide pastoral care, the deacon must be aware of the need for pastoral care. Often the concern or rejoicing will be communicated by the household directly to the pastor or church office. The deacon will be told by either the pastor, church secretary, or the Diaconate Moderator.

It is important, however, that each church member feel comfortable in communicating a pastoral concern or rejoicing directly to his or her deacon. For this to happen, the member must have a relationship with the deacon. The member must know that they can talk confidentially and will receive support in their time of need or rejoicing. To provide pastoral care, it is essential the deacons establish and strengthen the deacon/cluster household relationship during the three-year term.

#### **The First Meeting**

How do you begin any relationship? You have to somehow “meet” the person and introduce yourself. “Meeting” may not be face-to-face at first, but some other form of contact. Deacons begin new relationships whenever new members join their clusters. You must meet your new members when they join TCPC. But a newly installed deacon has a whole group of existing households to try to get to know all at once! The previous deacon of that cluster will be a tremendous asset.

Your first “meeting” of a household should include an introduction of yourself as their deacon. The meeting may be a letter written to each household, a telephone call letting people know that you are their deacon or it may be a short conversation before or after church. As the deacon, you are free to choose the method that works best for you and your cluster.

New deacons will be provided with an updated list of the households in their cluster that will help in their “introduction”. Use the member’s pictures in the photo directory, or ask other deacons, pastor or staff to introduce you to a member you do not know. **Be sure to always wear your name tag as a member may be looking for you too!**

Each deacon will be told when the new members are joining the church and being assigned to their cluster. The information is also available from the church secretary. On occasion a member will move and require reassignment to a new cluster. The deacon of the old cluster as well as the new cluster will be notified of the changes.

### ***Strengthening the Deacon/Cluster Relationship***

Building bonds between the deacon and the cluster involves regular contact. ***The deacon should contact the members of the cluster a minimum of three times yearly.*** Some suggestions for these contacts are personal visits, telephone call, letters or cards. Holidays or church wide events are a great time to contact your households. Making contact “just to check in” or to follow up on a prayer concern listed in the bulletin can be an excellent way to keep the lines of communication open. You may want to keep a record of your contacts to help you remember concerns or new information.

### ***Relationship between Cluster households***

When there is a pastoral concern or need within your cluster, it is important that you feel able to call on the help of the other cluster households. Other groups within the church may also be available to help (i.e. Choir, Trailblazers, Men’s Group) but the primary support group is often the cluster.

For someone to support someone else in a time of need, it helps if they know each other. A first step may be to give each cluster household a list of the entire cluster. It should include names (adults, youth and children), addresses, telephone numbers, e-mail addresses (if available). The list will be a good reference for all of you. Update your lists as needed, and get corrected copies to each household. Each household will be able to see who their neighbors are in the TCPC family.

The term, “cluster gathering” is used to describe an activity when the deacon and the cluster households get together. This may be a social event or activity that may include more than one cluster. In the past, “cluster gatherings” have worked for some and not for others. Some suggestions are: picnics, holiday parties, sporting events, after-church lunch (pot luck or at a restaurant), providing a cookie fellowship after service, providing and/or serving a meal for CARITAS, participating in Habitat for Humanity mission project.

### **How the Deacons Communicate Concerns**

- Prayer Concerns List in Sunday bulletin/ announcement during service  
Names are printed each week based on information from both deacons and the members. It is important to follow up periodically with the member to check the status of the person(s) listed.
- Deacon communicates with the households within the cluster  
The deacon decides. When one of the members of the cluster has a pastoral concern that is the time to notify the other households in the cluster. You may be asking only for prayer, or such things as meals, rides, cards, calls or visits, or childcare. If confidentially is requested this call is deferred.
- Calling of other church groups the member may be involved in  
This is important. Other groups in the church (i.e. Choir, Trailblazers, and youth groups) will want to help, and the deacon is the “coordinator” so efforts are not duplicated.

### ***Communicating with the Entire Congregation***

When there is a sudden, unexpected death or another kind of event that the congregation needs to know about, deacons will be asked to help communicate this news to the congregation. The pastors will initiate this process with the Moderator of the Board of Deacons.

There is no one right way to communicate news of this kind to your cluster. In some instances e-mail may be appropriate, while in other instances a phone call or even a visit might be best. You may also find it best to use different methods to communicate with different households in your cluster. In the event of an unexpected death, most households in your cluster may be fine hearing about it through e-mail. However, if some members of your cluster are family, neighbors, close friends or coworkers with the deceased a phone call may be more appropriate. The better you know your cluster households and their relationships with others in the congregation, the easier it will be for you to determine the best means of communicating difficult news to them.

## **Deacons in the Good Times Too!**

The discussions above used the terms “concern” and “need” often, but remember that you can be there for the rejoicing too! Birthdays, anniversaries, births, adoptions, baptisms, graduations, weddings, and holidays are all wonderful times to reach out to your cluster members.

At TCPC, a rose is placed in the sanctuary to honor the birth of a new baby or the adoption of a child. The deacon for that household is responsible for making sure that the family receives the rose after that Sunday’s worship services.

### **Providing Pastoral Care and Nurture**

The primary responsibility of the deacon is the pastoral care and nurture of their cluster. Providing pastoral care and nurture will require two-way communications between the deacon and each cluster household.

#### ***Learning about a Concern***

Knowing and recognizing when a special need exists in the congregation is an important first step for every deacon. When a concern becomes known, you should personally call the household to offer help and comfort. If the church staff have not heard of the concern, you should call and inform the staff.

***Never assume that the church staff is aware of the concern!*** As the pastoral staff learns about concerns, these will be communicated to church officers so that both staff and deacons are able to provide pastoral care.

#### **Deacon for Youth**

In 1996, the congregation of TCPC approved the expansion of the Board of Deacons to include representation from the youth of the congregation on the Board of Deacons. This representative is known as the “deacon for youth.”

The deacon for youth has the same responsibilities as other deacons, except that they are focused on caring for youth. The deacon for youth works in collaboration with the Youth Director to establish pastoral care for youth

### **Diaconate Officers**

There are two elected officer positions on the Board of Deacons: Moderator and Vice-Moderator

The Session will appoint a Diaconate Officer Nominating Committee [Committee]. It will include two members of the rising third year class; two members of the rising second year class; and one member of the new or rising first year class. An elder appointed by the Administration & Personnel Ministry Team will convene and moderate the Committee. The moderator will have no vote in the nominating process. The moderator will present the nominees to a called or stated Diaconate meeting. The rising first year members may vote for their officers. Members whose terms are ending will not vote, but will have the privilege of the floor. Members of the Committee are eligible for nomination to office. There must be opportunity for nominations “from the floor” at the meeting. Deacons from the incoming, but not yet serving, class will be eligible for these offices. Officers may be elected to concurrent terms.

## **RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE OFFICERS**

### ***Moderator***

The primary task of the moderator will be to ensure that deacons are serving their clusters well and to be sure the deacons have the resources and support they need. In between meetings of the full deaconate the moderator shall keep all deacons informed of the pastoral care needs of the church and of the needs and opportunities of ministry teams so that deacons can share this information with their clusters. This may be done through electronic newsletters, with accommodations made to deacons who do not have e-mail. The moderator shall work with pastors and the clerk of session to plan for the annual meeting of the deaconate with session.

### ***Vice-Moderator***

The vice moderator shall be responsible for assigning deacons to clusters and for ensuring that each member is in an appropriate cluster, including new members. Cluster assignments shall be reviewed once per year and church members shall be given the opportunity to move to a different cluster during this review if they so choose. The vice moderator shall be responsible for taking minutes at deaconate meetings and working with the clerk of session to ensure these minutes are submitted in a timely manner for the session to review and adopt. The vice moderator shall take on the responsibilities of moderator when the moderator is unavailable.

### ***Annual Review***

Recognizing changing dynamics and needs, an annual review of the board of deacons responsibilities is appropriate. The review, to be conducted each January, will include clusters, work of the deacons, deacon meetings, and deacon leadership, including the process of officer election. Members of the board of deacons and the Administration Ministry Team will conduct the review. They may submit proposed revisions or complete changes to the session for approval.

## **Policies and Procedures**

As with any large group, the Board of Deacons needs to follow particular policies and procedures for efficient and smooth operation. The following items are important to insure the success of our ministry throughout the church body.

### ***Attendance***

Your attendance is expected at meetings of the Board of Deacons. You need to notify the Moderator if you will be unable to attend. Minutes or a summary of your meeting, including a record of attendance, is submitted to the session following each meeting.

### ***Backup Deacon***

A “backup deacon” is a person(s) who has agreed to be a substitute in the event that the deacon is out of town for more than three days and something happens which requires communication with the cluster. These times will include vacations, out-of-town business commitments, mission trips and such. This will not be necessary for three-day weekends. It is the deacon’s responsibility to inform the Moderator when he or she will be out of town and who the backup will be for that period of time. The moderator will notify the backup if any action needs to be taken.

Your backup deacon does not have to be an ordained deacon but it is helpful if they are a member of your cluster if possible. Another excellent choice is the previous deacon for the cluster! You may also ask one of the active deacons to assist you. Often this arrangement is a mutual agreement to ‘cover each other’ when away. The person must be willing to make phone calls in the event of a pastoral concern that cannot wait until the deacon returns. It is possible to utilize more than one backup deacon. The backup deacon should not be a spouse. You will need to provide the backup deacon with a current list of your cluster households.

### ***Deacon Representative at Session Meeting***

As the representative from the Board of Deacons, you are expected to:

During the Session meeting present a brief summary of recent actions and/or activities of the Board of Deacons

Present a summary of the Session meeting at the next Deacons meeting.

If you were not been present at the last meeting of the Board of Deacons you must obtain a copy of the minutes of the meeting or communicate with the Moderator prior to the Session meeting.

## ***Participation***

Along with the monthly meetings, the Board of Deacons is responsible for and involved in a wide variety of events in the life of the church. Your participation is essential for this ministry to develop care and communication throughout the congregation. This may be as simple as providing a devotion for a meeting, helping to serve communion (in worship or homebound) or agreeing to be a backup deacon. It may be organizing your cluster for special events, sponsoring a cookie fellowship or working at a blood drive. As an active and enthusiastic deacon you will become a leader for helping all the members of TCPC become involved.

## ***Care for Deacons***

The work of the deacon is sometimes difficult. We are fortunate to often be some of the first to know of new babies and engagements. We are also most likely the first group to learn of tragedy, illness and difficulties. And because we are human, we can at times become overwhelmed. It is very important for the deacon to communicate *their* concerns and blessings. The role of deacon is not a counselor, not a hired social worker or nurse even if that may be their professional vocation. The deacon is a fellow member of the Three Chopt Presbyterian church family, a Christian caregiver and a friend. Remember to allow the Board of Deacons to serve you in your personal life as you care for the members of your cluster.

## **Deacons and Ministry Teams**

Deacons are encouraged to work with ministry teams, particularly those involved with programs of the congregation. Uniting deacons to ministry teams will help align the work of deacons with the work of elders. Their primary role in ministry teams will be to serve as a link between ministry teams and the congregation through deacon clusters. If ministry teams have specific needs or opportunities the deacon(s) serving on that team shall convey these things to the board of deacons, who shall convey this information to their clusters. When a deacon becomes aware of a need or desire in the congregation, - for example, adults concerned about caring for aging parents or several people expressing an interest in helping elderly people through home maintenance - this deacon shall convey this information to the relevant ministry team so the ministry team can address this issue.

## **Deacon and New Members**

When people joining the church begin attending the Inquirer's Class these new members will be assigned a deacon by the Vice Moderator. Deacons who have new members assigned to their clusters are encourage to visit an Inquirer's Class to meet the new members of their cluster and are also encourage to attend the session meetings that receive people into membership. Deacons who have been assigned new members are also asked to attend the New Member dinners.