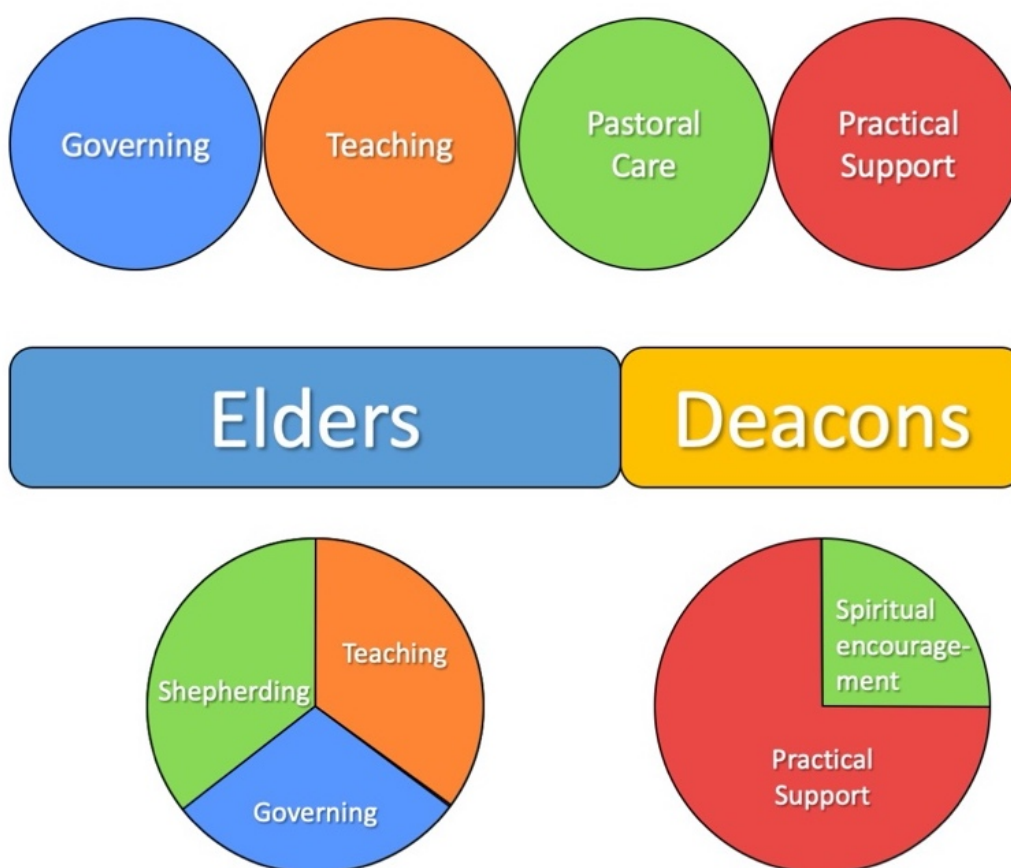


What is a Deacon?

Deacon is a role of service that's found in the Bible. Paul mentions deacons alongside elders when speaking about the positions of servant leadership in the local church.¹ Deacons are concerned with caring for the practical needs of others, particularly those who are poor, sick, lonely or suffering in some other way.² They are not general ministry leaders, coordinators or administrators. For example, it would not be a deacon's role to run the church resource library, to coordinate the church fete, or to administrate room bookings. Their ministry is one of mercy and therefore fits within the Mercy area at DPC. Not everyone who is part of our existing Mercy Team is a deacon but all deacons are part of that team.

We can view elders as holding a particular office in the church and the deacons holding another office, so it is important to understand the differences. The elders have a governing and teaching role which enables them to shepherd the congregation. The deacons have the necessary authority to fulfil their role but their office is not one of governance. Rather, they have been set apart by the church to serve on their behalf and they will need to manage finances, deal with sensitive information and organise people as needed. There is also an element of pastoral care involved in the work of deacons but it is more focused in the realm of spiritual encouragement.



¹ Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1-13

² Acts 6:1-7; 1 Timothy 3:8-13, esp. v10 where Paul uses a verb that usually means to meet practical needs (cf. Luke 8:3; Acts 19:22); Romans 16:1-2 where Phoebe's role as a deacon is related to her deeds as a benefactor.

Deacons are focused primarily on serving those in their local church by equipping and mobilising Christians to engage in acts of practical ministry in their own homes and church.³ This is done through gathering resources, coordinating efforts and dealing with situations beyond the capacity of the congregation. Secondly, deacons will minister to the needs of those in the wider community.

This office is open to suitably qualified men and women with an emphasis on exemplary character and spiritual maturity. While giftedness is important, it is secondary. Furthermore, as an official church office, those who hold it are required to make certain vows, including a level of commitment to the Presbyterian Church of Australia's doctrine and church structure.

Deacons are gathered into what is called a diaconate so that they can coordinate their ministry. They do not have monthly meetings but meet as necessary. They do not receive and administer the church's financial offerings or the church's assets as this is the role of the board of management. Here's a way to understand the differences between the various bodies at DPC.

- The session, made up of elders, has a ministry of **shepherding**
- The diaconate, made up of deacons, has a ministry of **serving**
- The board of management, made up of managers, has a ministry of **stewardship**

For more information on the nature and role of deacons, check out our sermons from 2020. They are available on the DPC website, podcast and YouTube channel.

- Deacons #1 - Deacons Have a Ministry of Practical Help (Acts 6:1-7)
 - <https://darebin-pc.squarespace.com/sermons/2020/8/30/acts-61-7-deacons-have-a-ministry-of-practical-help>
- Deacons #2 - Who Can Serve as a Deacon? (1 Timothy 3:8-13)
 - <https://darebin-pc.squarespace.com/sermons/2020/9/6/deacons-2-who-can-serve-as-a-deacon-1-timothy-38-13>

³ Galatians 6:10; 1 Timothy 5:4, 8.

Presbyterian Church of Victoria (PCV) Code

Section Eight ... Diaconal Ministry

3.40 Diaconal ministry

- 3.40.1 The diaconate is an office of mercy, with a ministry distinct from that of elders or managers.
- 3.40.2 The diaconate is to promote, according to biblical guidelines and as resources permit, the material well-being first of the poor and needy within the local body of believers, secondly of other believers, and finally of all humanity.
- 3.40.3 A session may resolve to establish a diaconal ministry in a congregation under its jurisdiction and if so it also determines how many deacons are to be elected.
- 3.40.4 Deacons are elected by communicants of the congregations in which they are to serve by a manner of election determined by the session.
- 3.40.5 Any person who has been a communicant of the congregation for at least one year, and is aged at least 21 years is eligible for election as a deacon in that congregation. A person who has served as a deacon in one congregation does not do so in another congregation unless so elected in that congregation.
- 3.40.6 A session must count the votes cast in the election, and in deciding who is to be elected must follow the order of the voters' preference, first satisfying itself that each of the persons indicated by this choice has demonstrated a commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ and a giftedness for diaconal ministry within the life of the congregation. Insofar as it is so satisfied it records this by resolution.
- 3.40.7 After this resolution the session must:
 - a) by formal motion declare elected those with whom it is satisfied, up to a number not exceeding the number required;
 - b) make public announcement of the names of the deacons-elect arranged in alphabetical order.
- 3.40.8 After such public announcement the persons elected, must, if they have not already done so, first complete a course of training set by the session and must then, after answering the questions prescribed by the General Assembly of Australia (see PCA 'Code', 6.7), be set apart for their ministry by prayer during public worship.
- 3.40.9 A deacon serves for a three year term and is then eligible for re-election for the same term. However, any term may be reduced by session:
 - a) if the deacon resigns in writing addressed to it or ceases to be a communicant of the congregation; or
 - b) if it determines that the deacon has become mentally unsound; or
 - c) if it determines that the deacon has ceased to demonstrate a commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ and a giftedness for diaconal ministry within the life of the congregation.
- 3.40.10 Deacons must report on their activities to the session both regularly and also as required by session, and be available to assist elders as required.
- 3.40.11 Where there is more than one deacon, they must be formed into a diaconal care team for mutual prayer, support and communication. The meetings of this team are chaired by the minister or, if he is unable to do so, by an elder or deacon appointed by him.
- 3.40.12 The ministry of diaconal care is funded by the board. If any employment agreement is entered into it should, if possible, be in a form approved by the Board of Investment and Finance.

General Assembly of Australia (GAA) Code

6.7 The Ordination or Induction of Deacons

Questions for the Congregation

1. (i) Do you, the Communicants and adherents of this Congregation, now confirm the election of these brethren (or this brother) to the office of Deacon in this Congregation?
2. (ii) And do you promise to render them (or him) all due respect and encouragement in the discharge of their (or his) office?

Be pleased to signify your assent by holding up the right hand.

Questions for the Deacons-Elect

- (i) "Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only rule of faith and practice?"
- (ii) Do you own and accept the Westminster Confession of Faith, as amended by the General Assembly, and read in the light of the Declaratory Statement contained in the Basis of Union adopted by this Church on the 24th day of July, 1901, as an exhibition of the sense in which you understand the Holy Scriptures and as a confession of your faith; and do you engage firmly and constantly to adhere thereto, and to the utmost of your power to assert, maintain and defend the same?
- (iii) Do you own and accept the purity of worship as practised in this Church?
- (iv) Do you own the Presbyterian form of government to be founded on the Word of God and agreeable thereto; and do you promise that through the grace of God you will firmly and constantly adhere to, and to the utmost of your power, in your station, assert, maintain and defend the same?
- (v) Do you adhere to the acceptance of the call of this Congregation to exercise among them the office of Deacon?
- (vi) All these things you profess and promise, through grace, as you shall be answerable at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ?