

Liberty University
John W. Rawlings School of Divinity

**Applying Biblical Teaching to Resolve Power Struggles Between the Pastor and Deacons in
a Southern Baptist Church**

Submitted to Dr. R. Peter Mason

In fulfillment of the requirements for the completion of
the Doctor of Ministry Degree

Department of Christian Leadership and Church Ministries

by

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THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

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As the Body of Christ, each person within the church must know their role and responsibility, especially the leadership. The Bible teaches that there are pastors, elders, and bishops referring to one office who have been given the authority to shepherd, or lead as it were, the church. The Bible teaches that deacons are an integral part of the church. They are to be servants in the church and minister to the needs of the congregation. The purpose of this project lies in the misconceptions surrounding the roles and biblical responsibilities of both deacons and pastors. Many churches simply follow a pattern of tradition rather than God's Word concerning pastors and deacons. That misconception often leads to power struggles between the pastor and deacons, resulting in church dissension and pastoral dismissal. This is an ever-growing problem among Southern Baptist churches, causing many churches to plateau and close their doors for good. This project examines the responsibilities of pastors and deacons through the lens of the Scripture. By looking at the responsibilities from a Scriptural standpoint, it is the goal to provide adequate teaching and biblical knowledge regarding pastors and deacons to stymie future power struggles in Southern Baptist churches. The research performed and the data gleaned will be used to hopefully build community and unity among the deacons, pastors, and the church body. This unity will strengthen the church and allow the church to follow its God-given mission and vision.

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Pastor/Elder/Bishop, Deacon, biblical roles

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Abbreviations

CFCC	<i>Christ First Community Church</i>
DFM	<i>Deacon Family Ministry</i>
DMIN	<i>Doctor of Ministry</i>

Chapter 1

Introduction

Pastor. Who is the pastor? Better yet, what is the pastor's role in the church? We hear the term pastor and automatically think of the "preacher down at the church." The term pastor conjures up images of one who stands behind the pulpit and proclaims the Word of God. Some think of a man in a suit and tie visiting shut-ins in their homes, the elderly in nursing homes, and the sick in hospitals and present at every surgery and funeral. The Apostle Paul, in his letter to the church at Philippi, addresses the saints together with the overseers and deacons.¹ (Phil 1:1b). In this context, Paul is addressing the overseers of the church, those who watch over the church, preach, and teach. The *deacons*, those who serve, are those men who have been chosen to take care of the practical needs of the church. They are to follow the original office of servanthood created in Acts 6.

Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, gives us a list of gifts that are given to the church. He tells us in chapter 4 verses 11-12, "But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift...And he gave...and some pastors and teachers."² Paul continues by telling us that each gift is required for the building up, or the maturity of the saints. The pastor, then, is a minister who is gifted to build up, to train, and to mature the body of Christ. In their book, *On Being Pastor*, Derek Prime and Alistair Begg write, "'Pastor' can equally be translated 'shepherd...'. The gift of pastors and teachers is described in the context of God's ultimate

¹ Phil 1:1 (NKJV).

²Eph 4:11 (NKJV).

purpose of personal maturity in Christ for redeemed mankind.”³ The pastor is not *just* the preacher or the man visiting everyone. The biblical notion of the office of pastor is that he is the *shepherd* of the flock. However, there is a disconnect in the flock as to who the shepherd really is, or what he is to do.

In the 20th Century, a common thought began to be woven among smaller rural Southern Baptist churches in the south. A power struggle developed between the pastor and lay leaders within those churches based on a misconception of the duties that lay leaders should perform and a lack of biblical knowledge distinguishing the true shepherd of the church. The obvious shepherd of the church is Jesus Christ, but He has also called *pastors* to serve as His *undershepherds*. The misconception is that the pastor is simply to preach and visit while the lay leaders, particularly deacons, lead the church as shepherds. The executive board mentality that many deacons have adopted has created a schism within those small to mid-sized Baptist churches. The psalmist exclaims, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for the brethren to dwell together in unity!”⁴ (Psalm 133:1). The church should be in one mind, one spirit, and in one accord on all things so that unity can and will prevail.

According to the Word of God, all born again believers in Christ have been spiritually gifted to accomplish the work of God in the local church.⁵ This writer has a passion to provide a church where people can experience a life-altering experience with God. A place where the doors are open to people from all backgrounds, races, cultures, genders, and economic status, regardless of where they are on their spiritual journey. Every local church should strive to be a

³ Derek J. Prime and Alistair Begg, *On Being Pastor* (Chicago, ILL: Moody Publishers, 2004), 31.

⁴ Ps 133:1 (NKJV).

⁵ C. Peter Wagner, *Discover Your Spiritual Gifts: The Easy-to-Use Guide That Helps You Identify and Understand Your Unique God-Given Spiritual Gifts* (Chosen Books, 2012), 3.

life-giving, Christ-centered, Bible-based, kingdom-focused, and Spirit-led church. The writer holds the view that it is the overarching goal for a local church to infuse life with God's love. The writer believes that to infuse this love of God, the church should be biblically grounded and structured in every area, especially the leadership.

The writer believes that every church should have a Christ-honoring vision to follow the Great Commission to reach and teach people to become faithful disciples of Christ. It is the writer's belief that to be successful in its God-given potential, church leadership must be faithful and fruitful followers of Christ and share the gospel with those around them. The mission of a church and its leadership should be to love God, love others, and to share the gospel. With this understanding in mind, the leadership of the church should also understand the mission and vision of their roles according to the Scripture.

The Ministry Context

Christ First Community Church (CFCC) is located in Maryville, Tennessee. Maryville is the county seat of Blount County and it is located in Eastern Tennessee. The church itself is located within five miles of Maryville College and Pellissippi State College. The church is relocating to an area of Maryville that has seen a tremendous amount of growth within the last two years. The new location is situated between two large subdivisions, a middle-income apartment complex and a new 350 unit apartment complex being built. This location will be in the center of three large high schools and many opportunities to serve and minister to those students. Blount County is located at the foothills of the Great Smoky Mountains, bordering Loudon, Knox, and Sevier Counties. Those three counties combined include around 300,000 people. The church is centrally located and is easily accessible from any of those bordering

counties. East Tennessee is part of the Bible belt, and Maryville has several older, established churches. However, most of those churches are declining or plateaued.

Demographics

The latest census projections place Maryville at around 31,000 people, 25% are 18 and under, 18% are 65 and older.⁶ Women make up 53% of the population.⁷ Maryville is not extremely diverse with almost 93% of the population being white and only 2% African American.⁸ Most of the population has at least a high school diploma or GED with 35% of the population holding a Bachelor's degree or higher. According to the latest census information, 11% of Maryville is impoverished while the median income in Maryville is around \$61,000.⁹ CFCC has used this data as insight into the effectiveness of ministry efforts and opportunities to evangelize our community.

Church History

CFCC was a new church start and met for the first time on June 7, 2020. A group of 32 people asked this writer for assistance in starting this church and after much prayer and fasting, the writer agreed to serve as the church's first pastor. The church has continued to organize and build its foundation since then and has successfully completed all of the requirements to join the Tennessee Baptist Convention and the Southern Baptist Convention. The church, since its inception, has continued to grow. There are two currently awaiting baptism, and a local church has agreed to allow the church to use their baptistry. A baby dedication was performed in June as

⁶ "Maryville City, Tennessee," Census Bureau, accessed September 10, 2021, <http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/maryvillecitytennessee>.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

the church moved into its new facility. CFCC now averages around 15 every Sunday morning. Because of COVID, the church has not yet started Sunday School, but they are meeting on Wednesday nights for Bible study. The church has moved into a new space to allow more ministry opportunities, and now that COVID rules are being relaxed, CFCC will continue reaching out and evangelizing the surrounding community.

The church had a grand opening event with food trucks, singing, and special evangelistic preaching. Water bottles were labeled with the church name, address, and a plan of salvation. On the day of the grand opening, members gave those water bottles to anyone attending the service and those purchasing from the food trucks. Other ministries with which the church is involved include care baskets placed in the Blount Memorial Hospital ICU and surgical waiting rooms with the church name, address, and II Corinthians 1 attached, canvassing the area subdivisions and apartment complexes with small care packages including water and snacks, outreach to two high schools, including feeding the softball, baseball, and football teams, and plans to bring in more youth and begin a children's ministry and student ministry. All church members must be committed to participating for these ministries to take place and flourish.

The CFCC congregation consists of young, middle, and older adults. Most of the congregation is between 45 and 60 with a few in their late 70s. The church has proactive plans to bring in more youth and begin a student ministry. A sweet spirit of fellowship remains among those who have decided to stay and move the church forward. They are united in creating the church to be a body of faithful and obedient Christ followers aspiring to be the church that God has commissioned it to be.

The problem and purpose of this project comes from the beginning of CFCC. The people who formed CFCC a year ago came from a small, rural, Southern Baptist church where infighting had been all too common, even suffering a split some thirty years ago. The church never recovered and pastor after pastor was dismissed or asked to leave. Some pastors were not asked to leave but conditions were such that it was impossible for them to stay. The church had a powerful deacon *board* that *ran* the church. They made all the decisions, and the pastor was just “the preacher.” As it was told to this writer, the deacons at the former church even made the decision to buy coal to heat the church. They decided when to buy, from where to buy, and how much to buy. Now then, purchasing coal does not seem to be a huge issue in and of itself. However, when you couple that with the deacon board making *all* decisions, that begins to become problematic, even dictatorial.

Since the writer began this project, a schism developed within the church that resulted in a spiritual battle. The spiritual battle confirmed the further need for this project. The battle that ensued may have been prevented if the biblical foundation of leadership had been laid and applied to the situation. The writer had no inclination that this difficult situation would have or could have presented itself during the writing and research of this project. However, God has proven faithful and has further illustrated the absolute need for the biblical teaching of correct theological leadership in the church.

The power struggle that just ended illustrates the importance of being a biblically rooted church. Part of the power struggle that took place at CFCC resulted because there was a disregard for the office of pastor. The pastor should never be harassed by 6 ½ hours of text messages and phone calls. If the church had spiritual insight and biblical knowledge of who and

what the pastor is, the power struggles, confrontations, and hurtful criticisms would not happen, or be very minimal at best. The blatant disregard for the pastor unfortunately depicts a disrespect for God Himself. There seems to be very little reverence for God in the church today and that can be seen in the way His shepherds are being treated. The lack of reverence for God is also displayed in the lack of biblical knowledge in church leadership. It also illustrates the importance of God-designed leadership for the church rather than man's design or tradition. The resulting struggle is a systemic problem dating back many years; one that shows a blatant disregard and disrespect for the office/calling of the pastor. Social media postings, multiple text messages and phone calls that result in nothing more than a barrage of personal attacks on the pastor. The writer is reminded of what Jesus said in the Gospel of John, "The thief cometh not but for to steal, to kill, and to destroy."¹⁰

Church Polity

Currently, after this last battle, CFCC has only two deacons. The current deacons were previously ordained and were made active at CFCC by the recommendation of the pastor to the church. Their role comes directly from Acts 6 and their qualifications from I Timothy 3. The word for deacon (*diakonos*) translates to English as servant. This indicates the appropriate attitude and role of one called to the diaconate. Deacons serve Christ by serving His church. Benjamin Merkle writes, "The seven men chosen in Acts 6, while not specifically called deacons, provide the closest parallel to the Christian office."¹¹ Coming from a tradition where the deacons acted more as an executive board rather than a ministry, it has been a new experience for

¹⁰ John 10:10 (KJV).

¹¹ Benjamin L. Merkle, *40 Questions About Elders and Deacons* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2008), 232.

those deacons to no longer be in charge. The constitution of CFCC describes the deacons as both a servant's and ministerial role to work with the pastor.

When the time comes for CFCC to actually ordain more deacons, or to possibly make deacons active, the responsibility goes to the pastor and current deacons. There is much prayer and consideration regarding a candidate or candidates, but the first thing to consider, does the individual qualify? The first question should be, is the candidate spiritually mature? We will follow the qualifications given to us in I Timothy 3. Once the candidate is chosen by the pastor and the current, active deacons, they will bring the individual before the church to be approved by the church body. Some of the deacons have questions about the process of electing new deacons. When the new process was originally discussed, the deacons came mostly from the tradition where the church nominated three or four men and the top two men were chosen. The explanation and answer to their concern is, the deacon is a spiritual office in the church and should not be taken lightly or as a political move. At various and sundry times, the process to ordain or choose a deacon can resemble a beauty contest or a political primary. There is some hesitation from the current deacons and they have expressed their disdain for the process because they have all been a part of a process where the church nominates 3 men and the top two "vote-getters" are chosen as deacons. This process allows for some to be chosen who are not servant-minded or spiritually mature. This writer has pastored churches where the deacons chosen in the past were chosen because of their profession, bank account, or how much land they owned. By the pastor and deacons choosing a nominee, hopefully the above-mentioned scenario can be avoided. As this project unfolds, there is hope that the deacons will be more positive and willing to take on the role of a servant and become a ministry instead of an executive board. With the

proper biblical knowledge, training, and willingness to participate in the deacon family ministry, the prayerful hope is that the current deacons will submit, and any potential deacons will be trained in advanced for their ministry role.

Problem Presented

The problem is that there is a power struggle between the pastor and deacons in Southern Baptist Churches. This problem will inevitably lead to a decrease in pastoral tenure, harmony, and church growth. In his book *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, Thom Rainer writes, “many good leaders are leaving churches before they reach their prime leadership years at a church.”¹² It is Rainer’s contention that such conflicts and power struggles within the church result in pastors leaving the church before vital changes can be made. The church cannot continue to sustain the fluctuation of pastors every two to three years. Rainer continues, “pastors came and went at a pace of every two to three years, especially in the two decades leading to the deaths of the churches.”¹³ The power struggles between pastors and lay-leaders have become more and more commonplace in small to mid-size churches. This struggle has become detrimental to so many rural East Tennessee churches that many have been forced to close their doors for good.

The importance of this problem lies in the number of churches that have plateaued, declined, and died. In Baptist associations all over East Tennessee, churches are closing and disbanding. In talking to former pastors and Directors of Mission, most say the reason for the decline and death of the church was a conflict between the pastor and an influential individual or group in the congregation. Rainer presents a time frame for pastoral tenure and conflict, contending that years two-three are times of conflict and challenge. Rainer says, “The spiritual

¹² Thom S. Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church* (Nashville, TN: B & H, 2014), 55.

¹³ Ibid.

health of the pastor and the church will likely determine the severity of the conflicts and challenges.”¹⁴ If the spiritual health is not where it needs to be, there will likely be a severing of the pastor, by his own will or the will of the church.

Because of the power struggle that led to this adverse situation at CFCC, the numbers were very much Gideon-like. The church, at its highest peak, ran close to 40. Because of this unfortunate series of events, the church now runs 15 most Sundays. This drastic drop in attendance was the direct result of this power struggle and defiance toward the office of pastor. The problem is tangible, and the result is tragic. However, the problem can be avoided if the people of the church would ground themselves in the Biblical guidelines of leadership and grow in the Word of God.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this DMIN action research project is to enable Christ First Community Church to find unity through understanding the biblical roles of the leadership, specifically the pastor and deacons. This leadership relationship is beneficial for the church and it is imperative to find this balance. The Apostle Peter instructs pastors, “Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly.”¹⁵ (1 Peter 5:2). Pastors have a biblical mandate to shepherd the flock that God has given them. However, those shepherds are to do so willingly and eagerly. The Scripture also teaches that other positions have been created in the church to aid the pastors and serve the flock. Therefore, the purpose of this project is to find that equilibrium that must exist between the pastor and the others whom God has specifically named to complement his leadership. If the

¹⁴ Thom S. Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church* (Nashville, TN: B & H, 2014), 59.

¹⁵ 1 Pet 5:2 (NKJV).

church is to be “endeavoring to keep the unity of the bond of peace,” as Paul teaches in Ephesians 4:3, the leadership relationship must be maintained for a long pastoral tenure, growth of the church, and a spirit of unity.

G. Lloyd Rediger says a healthy church has three dynamics, “worship, openness, and witness.”¹⁶ If the health of the church is affected adversely through a power struggle, worship will no longer be powerful, the witness of the church will become muted, and the openness will be closed. Rediger defines the term openness as “a natural readiness to listen to other people and perspectives, and to seek out information and creative options...less parochialism and less defensiveness.”¹⁷ It is important to research such divisions and interruptions that may exist or arise within the church leadership and to analyze when and where such disputations occur, and just as important, *why* they occur.

Basic Assumptions

Everyone has personal presuppositions concerning a deacon and pastor relationship. No matter the church, denomination, or setting, leaders will always have conflict in the church. Conflict may come from an influential church member, an overbearing pastor, or a cynical deacon who has allowed his spiritual milk to sour. The assumption is that those presuppositions will continue and that deacons will still have their own ideology concerning their place in the church. Even though CFCC will begin a series of Bible studies with the deacons concerning their biblical role, there will still be the occasional; *well that's how we have always done it*.

Another basic assumption is that some of the pervading attitudes will be lessened once the deacon family ministry is fully implemented. This ministry will take the focus of the

¹⁶ G. Lloyd Rediger, *Clergy Killers* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 185.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 188.

deacons' meetings and steer the meetings toward serving people and not just finances and facilities. Standing committees will work in unison with the pastor to conduct any business that may need to be addressed by the leadership and then bring it before the body. A six-part sermon-series (Lessons on Leadership) will be brought before the entire church looking specifically at servant-leadership, the roles of pastors and deacons, and examples of Godly pastors and deacons found in the Scripture will hopefully guide the church to a biblical understanding of leadership.

Glossary

Gospel-Centered. Gospel-Centered - A gospel-centered church understands the gospel. William Tyndale said, “*Evangelion* (what we call ‘the gospel’ is a Greek word signifying good, merry, glad, and joyful news that makes a man’s heart glad and makes him sing, dance, and leap for joy.”¹⁸ In preaching and teaching, the aim is to emphasize the gospel repeatedly. The Apostle Paul declares the Gospel as, “...Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures...he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.”¹⁹ (1 Cor 15:3-4). Authors Steve Timmis and Tim Chester define gospel-centered as, “...much more than simply evangelism. It is about shaping the whole of our church life and activities by the content of and imperatives of the gospel.”²⁰

The Gospel-centered church will teach and train the leadership according to their biblical roles. The leadership will understand that they have been called and chosen to serve according to the commandment of God and not the tradition of men. CFCC endeavors to avoid legalism and

¹⁸William Tyndale, *A Pathway into the Holy Scripture* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1848), 8.

¹⁹1 Cor 15:3-4 (KJV).

²⁰ Steve Timmis and Tim Chester, *Gospel Centered Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: The Good Book Company, 2007), 1.

encourage transformation through the power of the gospel. A local church that values the gospel and has at its core is a church that emphasizes the gospel over and above tradition or denominational influence. The gospel is presented in singing, preaching, and teaching. CFCC has the plan of salvation on business cards, Facebook page, brochures, and website.

Congregationalism. CFCC believes that Scripture supports a pastor-led and congregation-ruled church governance structure known as congregationalism. This means that the entire membership makes certain decisions within the life of the local church together. Calling a pastor, buying property, electing deacons, calling staff, building projects, and salary matters would all require congregational input and approval. Jonathan Leeman contends, “Congregationalism does not want to diminish the specialness of the pastoral office, It just wants to add another office: member.”²¹

Ministry. Dan Hotchkiss defines ministry as “the rest of what a congregation does – the daily work of building a community, managing resources, and transforming lives.”²² The ministry encompasses anyone involved in the success of the church. Anyone involved in teaching, singing, cleaning, ushering, playing instruments, and keeping nursery is involved in ministry.

Deacon. According to John Hammett, the term deacon “is the universal term for this office, the word *diakonos* and related terms in the New Testament are much more often

²¹ Jonathan Leeman, *Don't Fire Your Church Members* (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2016), 2.

²² Dan Hotchkiss, *Governance and Ministry* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 50.

translated by terms like servant.”²³ The deacon then, is a servant within the church and is to help the pastor with the physical duties of ministry.

Lay leader. A lay leader is a member in a church leadership role who is not compensated by the church for their service.²⁴ The term laity or lay leadership will indicate non-clergy or non-employed church leaders in various ministries across the church.

Pastor/Elder/Bishop. Jim Wilson writes, “...pastors have leadership responsibilities, and...they require personal gravitas to fulfill their responsibilities.”²⁵ A pastor is a spiritual leader of the flock that God has given him. The term pastor comes from the word used for shepherd, denoting the special care of leading and feeding that the pastor has for the flock of God. Wilson contends, “...the biblical writers drew an analogy between the two professions that speaks to the devotion and character of congregational leaders and the nature of their work.”²⁶ The pastor is to know, feed, and lead the flock that God has given him. Pastor or Shepherd (*poimen*). Overseer or Bishop (*episkopos*). and Elder (*presbuteros*) are three terms that are used interchangeably in the New Testament to designate the same office. Pastor describes the teaching and leading ministry, overseer describes the care for the people, and elder describes the spiritual maturity of the primary leadership role in the church. Therefore, they will be used in this project to refer to the person traditionally referred to in the Baptist church as “Pastor,” or “Preacher.”

It should be noted that Philippians 1: 1 and 1 Timothy 3: 1-13 each present two church offices, “bishop” and “deacon.” Consequently, the writings of the earliest church Fathers

²³ John S. Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2019), 221.

²⁴ Hotchkiss, *Governance and Ministry*, 189.

²⁵ Jim L. Wilson, *Pastoral Ministry* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015), 4.

²⁶Ibid., 3.

coincide with this model of church government. St. Clement of Rome, writing c. 90-100 AD., spoke of only two officers, “bishops” and “deacons.”²⁷ Polycarp, who had been a personal friend of the Apostle John, wrote to the church at Philippi (as Paul had done some sixty years earlier) and recognized only two offices. He says to the young men of the church, “Wherefore it is right to abstain from all these things, submitting yourselves to the presbyters [elders] and deacons as to God and Christ.”²⁸ The earliest writings concerning church officers, apart from the Bible itself, give evidence of there being just two offices in the New Testament church.

Similarly, Southern Baptists have traditionally recognized these same two offices in the church. For instance, the *Second London Confession*, a highly influential English Baptist confession published in 1677, states, “... to be continued to the end of the World, are Bishops or Elders and Deacons.”²⁹ This same doctrine was carried over to Southern Baptist life, as indicated by *The Baptist Faith and Message*. Concerning the Church, this confession states, “Its Scriptural officers are pastors and deacons.”³⁰ Southern Baptist church polity appears to be in line with both the Scriptural model of church government and the practice of the earliest churches of the post New Testament era.

Paul recognized two offices in the church, as shown above, but often used three terms interchangeably to signify the first office. These are *presbuteros* (translated "elder" or "presbyter"), *episkopos* (translated "bishop" or "overseer"), and *poimen* (translated "pastor" or

²⁷J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians* (Lynn, Mass.: Hendrickson Pub., Inc., 1981), 98.

²⁸J. H. Bernard, *The Pastoral Epistles*, in *The Cambridge Greek Testament for Schools and Colleges*, [gen. ed. I. I. S. Perowne] (Cambridge: University Press, 1906), lxvii, n. 1.

²⁹William L. Lumpkin, “Second London Confession, Chapter XXVI: Of the Church, 8,” in *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1969), 287.

³⁰Article VI. The Church,” in *The Baptist Faith and Message*, A Statement adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention, May 9, 1963 (Nashville: The Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1963), 13.

"shepherd"). What is true of Paul and his terminology will also prove to be true of the other New Testament writers. The following evidence then is given to substantiate that these three terms are used interchangeably throughout the New Testament to signify one and the same office.

First, Paul made the following plea to the leaders of the church at Ephesus: From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church. And when they had come to him, he said to them: Therefore, take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. (Acts 20:17-18, 28)³¹

Thus, it is evident that Paul used all three terms in reference to the same group of men. Likewise, Apostle Paul's comments to Titus are instructive in Titus 1:5-7, 9: "... appoint elders in every city as I commanded you--if a man is blameless...For a bishop must be blameless...holding fast the faithful word...." Here, the terms "elder" and "bishop" are used alternately. Though the word "shepherd" or "pastor" is not used specifically in this verse, the idea of shepherding is certainly present. The phrase, "holding fast the faithful word," indicates they were to fulfill the pastoral function of feeding the sheep. Again, Paul determines that the primary leaders of the church in 1 Timothy are both "bishop" (3:1) and "elder" (5:17, 19). In similar fashion, the Apostle Peter admonishes the churches by commanding the following: "The elders who are among you I exhort...Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers."³² (1 Peter 5: 1a, 2a).

In each of these passages it is easy to see that the terms elder, overseer, and shepherd are used interchangeably. Consequently, various theologians have recognized that one office is being described by these three terms. Commenting on Acts 20: 17, 28, Henry Thiessen states, "Here

³¹Acts 20:17-18, 28 (KJV).

³² 1 Pet 5:1-2 (NKJV).

we have the terms elders, overseers, and pastors all used of the same men.”³³ He further remarks, “These three terms denote one and the same office in the New Testament.”³⁴ Gerald Cowen, commenting on the same passage in Acts, observes that, “Luke . . . addresses the elders of the church at Ephesus and calls them ‘overseers’ (bishops) of the flock. In addition, he tells these ‘elderbishops’ that they are to ‘pastor’ the church of God, thus indicating that the terms pastor, elder, and bishop all signify the same office.”³⁵

Limitations

The researcher will gain a general understanding of how and why power struggles occur between the pastor and deacons in a Southern Baptist Church. Since all of the researcher’s contacts are Southern Baptists, all of the respondents will be Southern Baptists. More extensive research in other denominations to see if there are differences in the perceptions of church leadership would also prove to be an interesting study. In addition, this study will not look at how race affects the understanding of church leadership roles. CFCC is all Caucasian and therefore, race cannot be a contributing factor. Various years of experience among the deacons cannot be taken into account as all three men have been deacons for over thirty years. The impact of higher education cannot be analyzed because all three men have no higher than a high school education. However, there are some in the congregation who have a college education and their views on leadership roles will be considered.

³³Henry C. Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, rev. by Vernon D. Doerksen (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), 320.

³⁴*Ibid.*

³⁵Gerald Cowen, "The Bishop," *Sermon Starters from the Greek New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1985), 56.

Those within the congregation to be interviewed and surveyed will all be over 18 years of age and members of CFCC. All of the members of CFCC are Southern Baptist and this project will only focus on that particular denomination. However, as the researcher was writing this section, there was a struggle taking place within the church and raged for three months resulting in almost half of the congregation leaving, thereby reducing the number of those who will be surveyed. The number will be reduced to about 15 people, all of which will be surveyed and interviewed. The two deacons that remained are in complete agreement that this project must be completed and implemented.

Delimitations

This project does not seek to exhaust all facets of leadership within secular or biblical understandings. The researcher will discuss aspects of leadership within the functions of Christ First Community Church and how those functions parallel the biblical definitions of church leadership. The study of leadership power struggles will not go beyond that of CFCC, nor expand across all possibilities of laity involvement within the local church. The lay leaders discussed will be primarily the CFCC deacons. The group studied will come from the current deacons. The research will examine the biblical knowledge of church leadership as it is given in the Scripture. The researcher will look at spiritual maturity and knowledge of CFCC membership before and after a significant six-part leadership sermon series. The research will identify any problems that need to be addressed concerning leadership and move to resolve any areas that do not correlate with the Scriptural teaching of church leadership. It is the goal of this writer that CFCC's leadership match God's design for His church. This project will not give an entire strategy to combat leadership power struggles, but rather concentrate on the foundational

elements of relationship between the pastor and deacons within the existing church structure. Those foundational elements of leadership that will be explored will originate from and be found in the Scripture. The biblical definitions of pastor and deacon will be explored and applied to Christ First Community Church for the purpose of educating the leaders and congregants alike.

Thesis Statement

If CFCC can find a biblical balance between the pastor's leadership and the leadership of the laymen, then the church will prosper, pastoral tenure will increase, and unity will be enjoyed. Finding this biblical balance is of utmost importance. People are prone to allowing outside influences affect their beliefs and thoughts. In his book *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times*, Peter L. Steinke says, "...anxiety has a strangling affect, depleting people's energy, disturbing their thinking, and dividing their loyalties."³⁶ Without a biblical foundation, those people can become volatile in the church and create power struggles. Steinke continues by saying, "Anxiety is an automatic reaction 'to a threat, real or imagined.'"³⁷ Pastors and deacons can become over-anxious and begin to perceive *imagined* threats therefore, escalating problems that are not there. The church needs to have a biblical knowledge of leadership roles to prevent confusion and chaos.

Even if the church finds this biblical balance and basis for the leadership roles, that does not mean the church will not find itself in conflict at various and sundry times. Kenneth Gangel and Samuel Canine contend, "As long as we live in this earthly body, conflict must be

³⁶Peter L. Steinke, *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 3.

³⁷Ibid.

considered as a normal part of our day-to-day living.”³⁸ A biblical knowledge will deter problems on the front-end and give the leaders the spiritual discernment to respond in a spiritual manner. Scott Sauls said, “...if Christians don’t go *first* in offering a gentle answer to those who oppose us, can we ever expect those who oppose us to make a similar move?”³⁹ Proverbs 15:1 teaches us, “A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”⁴⁰

³⁸Kenneth O. Gangel and Samuel A. Canine, *Communication and Conflict Management* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2002), 129.

³⁹Scott Sauls, *A Gentle Answer* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Publishers, 2020), 95.

⁴⁰ Prov 15:1 (NKJV).

Chapter 2

Conceptual Framework

Literature Review

The literature review for this project utilized numerous sources dealing with the subjects of pastoral theology, examples of leadership, and conflict management. However, even though the resources were relevant, many of those resources were ten years of age or older. The power struggle between the pastor and deacons have resulted in many churches to become stagnant and dying. Some churches have had such struggles and the scars are so deep that there is no other conclusion but to completely close the doors for good. This literature review will examine five themes: (1) the pastor's role, (2) the deacon's role, (3) unity among leaders, (4) pastoral competence, (5) pastoral incompetence.

The Pastor's Role

The Apostle Peter wrote, "Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly."⁴¹ (1 Pet 5:2). Pastoral roles vary greatly from one section of the United States to the other. However, God's Word has not changed when it speaks of the pastor/shepherd. Peter gives us this exhortation that we are to behave as shepherds, overseeing the flock, not out of necessity, but rather out of a willingness to serve that which God has given us. A pastor knowing his biblical role will prevent many conflicts in the church because he will understand what and where his ministry lies. He will also understand that the people he is leading are the people of God. Those people are not his

⁴¹ 1 Pet 5:2 (NKJV).

and it is not his empire to control. In his book *The Shepherd Leader*, Timothy Z. Witmer gives us several key elements and roles the pastor must have to effectively shepherd the flock:

Knowing the Flock

Witmer says that one of the key roles a pastor must have is knowing the flock of God. The pastor who knows his flock is a pastor who is taking the time to form relationships with God's people. He is creating a bond with other brothers and sisters in Christ, a bond that is positive and constructive within the church. Witmer says this, "It is our restored, loving relationship with the Lord that flows over into transforming our relationships with other people, particularly those who are also a part of his flock."⁴² The pastor who knows his people is a pastor who is concerned about his people. Witmer contends, "Knowing *who* is in your flock and knowing those for whom you are accountable is where shepherding begins."⁴³ Knowing the flock denotes a certain intimacy that must be present between the pastor and his people. Deron J. Biles notes that pastors have authority, but when it comes to a congregation following the pastor, the intimacy of the pastor with the flock means much more than eloquence or prestige. "Eloquent preachers may be admired, but faithful pastors are loved. Serving as pastor involves more intimate connection with the sheep."⁴⁴ *Knowing* them is being *interested* in them. Knowing the flock is much more than just *being lords over them*.⁴⁵ (1 Peter 5:3).

⁴²Timothy Z. Witmer, *The Shepherd Leader: Achieving Effective Shepherding in Your Church* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2010), 109.

⁴³Ibid., 110.

⁴⁴Deron J. Biles, *Pastoral Ministry: The Ministry of a Shepherd* (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2017), 8.

⁴⁵ 1 Pet 5:3 (NKJV).

Feeding the Flock

Isaiah says that God will *feed His flock*.⁴⁶ (Isa 40:11). The word *feed* is the Hebrew word *rawaw* and it means “to tend a flock, to pasture it, [by extension] to associate with as a friend.”⁴⁷ The task of feeding the flock is not exclusively teaching and preaching edifying sermons. Feeding the flock is also an activity of caring for the sheep by knowing they need sustenance. Truly, a pastor must always preach and teach what the Holy Spirit gives and leads. However, you cannot edify your congregation if you do not know them. Feeding is a part of knowing. Dogs need to be fed, they enjoy a dental treat once in a while, but the dog needs nutrition that is not found in dental treats alone. God’s exhortation is to know His sheep well enough to know what they need at specific times. The expression, “people don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care” aptly applies to pastoral leadership. Pastoral leadership feeds the flock. The twenty-third Psalm is a picture of the Shepherd that tends to his flock. The Psalmist tells us that He will lead us to green pastures and beside still waters and that we will not want.⁴⁸ The Psalmist is teaching us that the pastor should be to his flock as the Great Shepherd is to His flock. The pastor should feed his flock. Witmer writes, “Provision is the second fundamental human need that is met by our shepherd.”⁴⁹ The pastor should be “a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”⁵⁰ R. Peter Mason writes, “The leader must know

⁴⁶ Isa 40:11 (NKJV).

⁴⁷ James Strong. *The New Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2003).

⁴⁸ Ps 23 (NKJV).

⁴⁹ Timothy Z. Witmer, *The Shepherd Leader: Achieving Effective Shepherding in Your Church* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2010), 140.

⁵⁰ 2 Tim 2:15 (NKJV).

God's Word and be able to pass on those biblical truths in an understandable way to others."⁵¹ The obligation of the pastor is to "Preach the Word! Be ready in season and out of season; convince, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine."⁵² (1 Tim 4:2). The shepherd does not dispense theological theory and discourse to starving sheep. Rather, the shepherd *feeds* the sheep the biblical truths in a way that can be absorbed and *digested*. New Christians need the milk of God's Word. (1 Pet 2:2). Mature saints of God need the meat of God's Word. (1 Cor 3:2).

It is Andrew Purves contention that part of the pastoral ministry is that of preaching and pastoral care. He says, "Where such pastoral work is lacking in some way, the true church does not exist with health, for then the evildoer will work without reprimand, members will not be protected, and sinners will not personally be led to repentance...."⁵³ Just as sheep need shepherds to lead them to proper nutrients and sustenance, the spiritual flock needs the pastor/shepherd to lead them to proper spiritual sustenance that is found in the Word of God. Jim L. Wilson writes in his book, *Pastoral Ministry in the Real World*, "Endemic in that authority is the responsibility pastors have to keep watch over the souls of God's people and give account to God for their work (Heb 13:17)."⁵⁴ The conflicts that arise within the church are usually caused by carnal Christians or Christians who have not been properly fed spiritually. The Apostle Paul teaches, "Casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing

⁵¹ R. Peter Mason and Dino Pedrone, *Mentoring the Next Generation: Making a Lasting Difference* (Xulon Press, 2012).

⁵² 1 Tim 4:2 (NKJV).

⁵³ Andrew Purves, *Reconstructing Pastoral Theology: A Christological Foundation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 160.

⁵⁴ Jim L. Wilson, *Pastoral Ministry in the Real World* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015), 187.

every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.”⁵⁵ (2 Cor 10:5). The pastor must guard himself from such conflicts and struggles by rightly dividing the word of truth to his congregants. The pastor must know and feed his flock to guard against any potential conflicts or adversaries.

The Apostle Paul clearly presents the ability to teach as a requirement for a bishop (1 Tim 3:2). There are some who may question, is there a distinction between pastor and teacher, or is Paul saying that the role of pastor is both pastor/teacher? Marvin R. Vincent offers an interesting fact concerning the classification of pastor and teacher being the same,

Pastors or *shepherds*. The verb ποιμαίνω *to tend as a shepherd*, is often used in this sense. See on 1 Pet 5:2; Matt. 2:6. The omission of the article from teachers seems to indicate that pastors and teachers are included under one class. [Ephesians 4:11-12]. The two belong together. No man is fit to be a pastor who cannot also teach, and the teacher needs the knowledge which pastoral experience gives.⁵⁶

Part of the feeding process takes place when the pastor teaches and preaches the Word of God. Teaching the Word is a strenuous process. It takes a great deal of time for a pastor to be prepared to rightly divide the Word of Truth. The writer believes the deacon is to help the pastor guard this time-consuming process of sermon preparation by shouldering some of the servant responsibilities, ministering to the needs of the flock so the pastor can study, pray, and prepare. The writer believes this because of the deacon *prototype* that is given in Acts 6. The first seven men were chosen to help the Apostles so that they could be about teaching and praying.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ 2 Cor 10:5 (NKJV).

⁵⁶Marvin Richardson Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, vol. 3 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1887), 390.

⁵⁷Acts 6:2 (NKJV).

Paul exhorts young Timothy about the importance of teaching by the pastor. Paul says, “Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity. Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine”⁵⁸ (1 Timothy 4:12-13). In verse 13, Paul exhorts Timothy to give attention to public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching doctrine. Merkel argues, “The importance of solid, gospel teaching in the church is vital to the church’s existence. The Word must be preached, and it is the task of the elders to preach that Word.”⁵⁹ The pastor is called by and from God to teach the Word in a way that will empower God’s people to live as faithful disciples of Jesus Christ (Jer. 3:15; Acts 20:20-21; 28-31; Eph. 4:11-12; Tit. 1:9).

Leading the Flock

The psalmist writes, “He led forth His own people like sheep and guided them in the wilderness like a flock.”⁶⁰ (Ps 78:52). Pastoral leadership is never fun, and it is never easy. However, if the pastor is to lead the flock, he must lead as Jesus leads through the Holy Spirit. Jesus tells us, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”⁶¹ (Mark 10:45). Some of the literature that was researched, spoke of pastors and leaders who were both controlling and driven by something other than the Holy Spirit. This type of leader tends to be the harbinger of power struggles and conflicts between lay-leaders and staff members. Joseph M. Stowell had this to say, “Leaders who self-identify as leaders will get annoyed when people don’t treat them as such... Annoyed when someone down

⁵⁸1 Tim 4: 12-13 (NKJV).

⁵⁹ Benjamin L. Merkle, *40 Questions About Elders and Deacons*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2008), 93.

⁶⁰Ps 78:52 (NASB).

⁶¹ Mark 10:45 (KJV).

the food chain seems to be more popular than they are.”⁶² Stowell’s contention is that many leaders in churches today are more outcome-driven than they are character-driven. He also argues that many pastors and church leaders have a CEO mindset that is not conducive to ministry. Stowell says, “Leaders take the first steps toward failure when they begin to assume that they are smart enough or skilled enough to succeed at what they do on their own.”⁶³ Stowell’s argument is that leadership should be redefined to prevent such conflicts and disasters from taking place in the church.

According to Paul and Peter, a pastor is to provide exemplary leadership.⁶⁴ Paul states that a man must “rule well his own household” if he is to be considered for the office of pastor. Paul asks, “For if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?”⁶⁵ This analogy explains the level of authority the pastor is to have in the local church: he is to lead and care for the church just as a husband and father is to lead and care for his family.⁶⁶

According to Alexander Strauch, a local body of believers needs leadership to guide and guard them along the way of the Lord. He asserts, “A congregation needs leadership, management, governance, guidance, counsel, and vision.”⁶⁷ Many areas of leadership are needed. A pastor must lead in the areas of administration. Organizing the Bylaws and Constitution of the new church plant takes godly wisdom and leadership. In the areas of

⁶²Joseph M. Stowell, *Redefining Leadership* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 58.

⁶³Ibid., 59.

⁶⁴ 1 Tim 3:5; 1 Pet 5:1–5 (NKJV).

⁶⁵ 1 Tim 3:5 (NKJV).

⁶⁶ Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership* (Colorado Springs, CO: Lewis and Roth Publishers, 2003), 26.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

establishing and implementing a budget, the pastor is to provide guidance. In the areas of helping to select qualified, skilled, talented, and gifted lay leaders, the pastor is to provide appropriate instruction. Pastoral leadership is vital throughout the phases of a new church plant, a re-established church, and an established church that wishes to follow the guidelines that God has set forth.

Rick Warren has famously categorized the purposes of the church as prayer, evangelism, discipleship, ministry, and worship. He claims for a church to be healthy, each one of these five functions must be present so that the church maintains its vibrancy.⁶⁸ The pastor of the church, must make it clear from the beginning that the identity of this congregation will be bound up in accomplishing these purposes. Without the leadership of the pastor, ideas will compete about the church's identity and purposes among those who join, and the church will be headed for failure. Without biblical knowledge of pastoral leadership, the church will descend into chaos and confusion, and power struggles will begin to take shape and ultimately lead to the demise of that local congregation.

Some may disagree on how much leadership a pastor should provide in each of Warren's five church functions. However, leadership comes from the top down, not the opposite. Churches will fail when deacons and the congregation do not allow the pastor to provide the necessary leadership. Strauch asserts, "The eldership must clarify direction and beliefs for the flock. It must set goals, make decisions, give direction, correct failures, affect change, and motivate people. It must evaluate, plan, and govern. Elders, then, must be problem solvers, managers of people,

⁶⁸ Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 5.

planners and thinkers.”⁶⁹ It is to be understood that the terms *elder*, *bishop* and *pastor* are synonymous from the Acts 20 passage; therefore, it can be surmised that Strauch is referring to the pastor when he discusses the leadership of the church.

A pastor does not have the right to demand that his congregation submit to him as lord over the church.⁷⁰ The apostle Peter states this clearly:

The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.⁷¹

A pastor is to lead by example. Biblical leadership is humble, servant leadership and Jesus left us the greatest example of leadership.⁷² (Phil 3:5–8).

A pastor is not called to be a dictator. Robert Anderson explains, “A leader is not someone who whips his people from behind, urging them to get or keep going. He is someone who goes in front, setting the pace and inviting his people to follow.”⁷³ The writer believes there are times when the deacon, lay leaders, and congregation may not understand and be fully aware biblically of how the church is to function appropriately. The pastor provides effective leadership by carefully teaching the church’s purposes, equipping the members to exercise their gifts and employ their talents to help fulfill those purposes, and encouraging the flock to follow him as pastor, he follows the Holy Spirit.

⁶⁹Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: The Complete New Testament* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2003), 344.

⁷⁰ 1 Pet 5:3 (NKJV).

⁷¹ 1 Pet 5:1–5 (NKJV).

⁷² Phil 3:5-8 (NKJV).

⁷³ Robert C. Anderson, *The Effective Pastor: A Practical Guide to the Ministry* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1985), 4.

In *The Good Book on Leadership*, authors John Borek, Danny Lovett, and Elmer Towns agree with Stowell that leadership should be redefined,⁷⁴ however, we have been given this *new* leadership model by Christ Himself in Mark 9:35. Jesus said, “If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all.”⁷⁵ This *new* leader is what theologians would call a servant-leader. Borek, Lovett, and Towns write, “Servant leaders are those who recognize that the real secret of leadership is found in identifying the needs of others and ministering to them.”⁷⁶ Within servant leadership, the leader becomes the follower and therefore leads as while led by the Holy Spirit. Thus, the servant-leader follows Jesus’ teaching in Mark 10:45 by declaring that he has not come to be served but to serve. Stowell’s assertion is “Leading by following insulates all of us from these kinds of failures...As long as we lead surrendered to the will, ways, and wisdom of Jesus, becoming an effective leader is well within our grasp.”⁷⁷ Jim L. Wilson concurs with the conclusions concerning servant-leadership. He states, “leadership includes serving others...ministry is participating with God and cooperating with His people in serving others to meet their needs.”⁷⁸ True leadership must follow the example that Paul set forth for us in much of the New Testament. Don Howell adds, “Servant-leaders are not visionaries...Rather they are faithful stewards of the divine mandate...to evangelize and to teach, to pioneer and to pastor.”⁷⁹

⁷⁴ John Borek, Danny Lovett, and Elmer Towns. *The Good Book on Leadership* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2005), 209.

⁷⁵ Mark 9:35 (NKJV).

⁷⁶ John Borek, Danny Lovett, and Elmer Towns. *The Good Book on Leadership* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2005), 209.

⁷⁷ Joseph M. Stowell, *Redefining Leadership: Character-Driven Habits of Effective Leaders* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 60.

⁷⁸ Jim L. Wilson, *Pastoral Ministry: In the Real World* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015), 185.

⁷⁹ Don N. Howell, *Servants of the Servant* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003), 301.

The Deacon's Role

Luke records this, “Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.”⁸⁰ (Acts 6:3). The key to any lay leadership is being *full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom*. These are key qualities to Christian leadership of any kind. What specifically is the role of lay leadership? According to Acts 6, the seven men who were chosen were to serve tables and take care of the orphans and widows. According to John Hammett, the term *diakonos*, is closer translated as minister or servant, not deacon which is a transliteration of the Greek. However, the Greek term *diakoneo* is the Greek term used “...to care for someone’s basic needs, or to serve in a general sense.”⁸¹ Hammett declares that the seven men chosen in Acts 6 are indeed a *prototype* for the modern idea of what a deacon is supposed to be. Hammett believes that the qualifications found in Acts 6 closely correlate to the more specific qualifications found in I Timothy 3:8-13. The qualifications of deacons are to be men of good reputation, mature, and filled with the Spirit. But what is the specific role of the deacon, and what is their relationship to the pastor?

What can be quite controversial is the fact that we have no New Testament model or example of a deacon at work. According to Hammett, all theologians can do is draw from the associations that surround the term *diakonos* and the actions from the seven men in Acts 6. Hammett’s assertion is that deacons are not called to leadership within the church. Biblically, the call of leadership is extended to pastors, not deacons. Hammett concludes that “...the care of the sick and poor, and the temporal affairs of the church in general...were the functions assigned to

⁸⁰ Acts 6:3 (KJV).

⁸¹John S. Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2019), 222.

the deacons in the churches that emerged from the Reformation.”⁸² It seems that more modern history has given the deacons the responsibility of keeping and maintaining the Lord’s Supper. Hammett contends, “The deacons are there to assist the pastor and to relieve him of any duties that would prevent him from doing those things that require their energy, time, and attention.”⁸³

While Hammett contends that there is no biblical basis for deacons to be leaders, he does give credence to the idea that the early 20th Century gave way to this popular idea that deacons are a board of directors or that they have special executive privilege within the church. This is the tradition that has caused so much angst between pastors and staff deacons. Hammett concludes, “...especially in smaller, single-pastor churches...deacons have held a position somewhere between simple servants in the church and a power bloc acting as a ‘check and balance’ against the authority of the senior pastor.”⁸⁴ Hammett argues that this is not a biblical view, but rather a modern-day tradition that has caused much conflict throughout many churches over the last 150 years. The biblical principles found in Acts 6 establishes the foundation that deacons are to hold a servant’s role.

In 1845, the Southern Baptist Convention was established as a separate denomination. In the mid-1800s, another change began to take place which redefined the role of the deacon. Instead of following a servant motif, deacons became an administrative body with decision-making authority. Howard Foshee has shared a practical reason as to why this practice probably became so commonly accepted. Foshee writes, “Oftentimes the deacons were the only elected church officers available to care for finances and property. Through the years the unfortunate

⁸² John S. Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2019), 224.

⁸³Ibid., 225.

⁸⁴Ibid., 228.

phrase ‘board of deacons’ developed. The concept of a legislative board of any kind is completely foreign to congregational church polity.”⁸⁵

This system of church government not only gradually occurred, it was also specifically taught. Several Baptist church manuals were published from 1845 to 1867 and were tremendously influential in the Southern Baptist denomination. J.M. Pendleton wrote the *Church Manual* in 1867 and it was widely read and taught among the Southern Baptist churches at that time. In *Church Manual*, Pendleton writes that deacons should be heavily involved in the business of the church.⁸⁶ In 1846, another book entitled, *The Deaconship*, written by pastor R.B.C. Howell of First Baptist church of Nashville, proclaimed that deacons were to be ‘the financial officers of the church’ and designated them as “a board of officers, or the *executive board* of the church, for her temporal department.”⁸⁷ This would be the first time that the idea of deacons being overseers and to serve as a board was introduced into Baptist life. Howell would wrongly state that deacons were to take care of the business of the church while the pastor cared for the spiritual matters of the church. Herein was the false dichotomy formed between the material and spiritual aspects of church life. This is a false dichotomy because it diametrically opposes the teaching found in the New Testament concerning deacons. If this is true, then the assumption can be made that the temporal, or material, aspects of the church have no connection to the spiritual matters of the church and vice-versa. This popular idea also introduced the idea of an *overseeing board* which is not consistent with New Testament polity. The deacons acting as a decision-making board has absolutely no biblical merit or support. There is nothing in the New

⁸⁵ Howard B. Foshee, *Broadman Church Manual* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1973), 102.

⁸⁶ Charles W. Deweese, *The Emerging Role of Deacons* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1979), 43.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 46.

Testament that gives the deacons the ability to become a *board of directors*. It is assumed that Howell was simply acting on the popular secular business model of the time. If this model were to be followed in the church today, it would be quite appropriate to quote Mark 7:8, “Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men.”⁸⁸

Benjamin Merkle agrees with Hammett, in that, contending that deacons should be servants in the church. He says, “Deacons provide much needed wisdom and energy to the ample physical needs in the church...using such provision as opportunities to minister as well to the spiritual needs of others.”⁸⁹ Merkle agrees with Hammett because he does not feel that the first seven men in Acts 6 are to share leadership roles. He argues that those men do not parallel Jewish or Greek leaders. A good biblical foundation can be laid through the pastor’s feeding the flock of God. It would also do well for the deacons and the pastor to remember Joseph Stowell’s character-driven servant-leader.

Dr. Henry Webb explains the desperate need for servant leaders in the local church. The author argues how important deacons are in demonstrating servant leadership as seen through the life and ministry of Christ. For deacons to be effective in the local church, they must maintain the attitude and heart to minister not only domestically but also spiritually.⁹⁰ Webb explains, a call to deacon ministry is a call to serve. The author argues that deacons are called to minister to the body of Christ as they serve Christ for His glory. A deacon board is not to serve as a ruling body but as servant leaders.

⁸⁸Mark 7:8 (NASB).

⁸⁹ Benjamin L. Merkle, *40 Questions About Elders and Deacons*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2008), 240.

⁹⁰ Henry Webb, *Deacons: Servant Models in the Church* (Nashville TN: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 23.

Unity Among Leaders

“Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,”⁹¹ the Spirit creates unity, and believers are responsible to maintain it. Therefore, the leaders of the church, pastors or deacons, must *lead* the flock in maintaining this spirit of unity by being unified themselves. Unity is more than tolerance; it is uniting around the core of the Christian faith. Michael Hare says this about leadership conflict, “their inability to work well together is now causing division within their leadership team.”⁹² If there is division among the leadership of the church, that behavior and example is going to be seen, felt, and even followed. Lloyd Rediger writes, “God offers us the possibility of healthy congregations and healthy spiritual leaders, but it is up to us to accept and live this possibility.”⁹³ Deron J. Biles was careful to add that ministers and leaders in the church reflect Christ in their actions and speech. He argues, “it should be a priority in every preacher’s ministry to be faithful through his lifestyle... We need to understand that we represent God in everything that we do.”⁹⁴

In Numbers 12, both Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses “*because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married....*”⁹⁵ (Numbers 12: 1). This conflict was evidently instigated by Miriam, Moses' own sister. Moreover, both she and Aaron questioned Moses' authority by asking, “*Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us also?*” (v.2). The verse continues, however, “*And*

⁹¹ Eph 4:3 (NKJV).

⁹² Michael Hare, *When Church Conflict Happens: A Proven Process for Resolving Unhealthy Disagreements and Embracing Healthy Ones* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2019), 89.

⁹³ G. Lloyd Rediger, *Clergy Killers: Guidance for Pastors and Congregations Under Attack* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 193.

⁹⁴ Deron J. Biles, *Pastoral Ministry: The Ministry of a Shepherd* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2017), 161.

⁹⁵ Num 12:1 (NKJV).

the LORD heard it.” At this point, God called all three of them to the door of the tabernacle and proceeded to rebuke Miriam and Aaron (vs. 4-9). When God’s presence left, Miriam was found to be leprous (v.10). Because of her condition, Aaron repented and cried out to Moses for forgiveness of their “*sin*” (vs. 11-12). Moses then prayed for Miriam’s healing and God healed her, although He sent her outside the camp for seven days (vv.13-15).

In this story, Miriam and Aaron were not deacons, but similar to a deacon, they held special places of service. As such, they had to learn what it means to respect God-given leadership. Though they both had considerable leadership positions of their own, they were to respect Moses as the leader chosen by God. In some situations, it may be hard for the deacon to accept the pastor's attitude, direction, or suggestions.

Next, consider Numbers 13 as the 12 spies return from Canaan. Ten of those spies say they cannot enter the Promised Land as God had promised. Instead of following Moses their leader and endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit, the Children of Israel murmured, complained, voted to not go into the Promised Land, then voted to fire Moses and find someone else to return them to Egypt. The ten spies were killed, the whole congregation wandered in the wilderness for 40 years, and the adults who voted against entering the Promised Land were told by God that they would not enter the Promised Land and that their carcasses would fall and be consumed in the wilderness. When leaders are not at peace and unity, the whole congregation suffers. Leaders in the church must be unified or the entire organization will suffer.

The local church must have a balanced and biblical approach so that it may function properly. When considering the deacon ministry in a church, the pastor must challenge the current and potential deacons concerning the call and responsibility of the calling that God has

placed upon the life of a pastor. The deacon needs to see that his calling is to be understood in relation to the calling of the pastor. The deacon serves the church as an extension of the pastor's ministry. The deacon must have a well-developed relationship with the pastor.

Deacons must understand that they are to serve under the leadership of the pastor. The pastor, deacons, and the congregation must understand that deacons minister to the church as servants, serve alongside the pastor, and the pastor is to give spiritual direction to both the church and the deacons. Deacons must understand that he is to be loyal to the pastor. This loyalty is demonstrated through prayer, encouragement, and fellowship. Consider the teaching of Apostle Paul in 1 Thessalonians where he instructs Christians to admonish and esteem one another very highly in love because of their work. He tells the church to comfort and edify one another. Paul also declares that the church is to be at peace with each other.⁹⁶ (5:11-14). If there is to be unity among the leadership of the church, the biblical responsibilities of deacons and pastors must be realized and followed. Pastors and deacons should follow the same exhortation given by Paul to the church at Thessalonica. They should admonish, edify, exhort, be kind, comfort, pray, and love one another.

As the shepherd, the pastor feeds the flock, and, in so doing, the pastor teaches the deacons their responsibilities to relieve him of some administrative responsibilities so that he may focus upon evangelism, preaching, prayer, and communicating his vision for the church. He must communicate this understanding to the church members so that they all understand the deacon's responsibility to protect and preserve the pastor's ability to focus on his key duties as pastor. The pastor and deacons work together in tandem to motivate the church and move the

⁹⁶1 Thess 5:11-14 (NKJV).

church toward perfecting its vision and obtaining spiritual goals. When the leadership is unified, the mission of the church will be preserved and perfected.

Pastoral Competence

There are pastors who lead in a Christ-like fashion and follow the precepts and principles that God has prescribed in the Scripture. Sufficient pastors will be men with Christ-like characters; those who follow and live out the Scripture in their daily lives. Dr. Michael Whittington said, “Leaders of character in times of crisis do the right thing because they have done the right thing in times of calm.”⁹⁷ The Apostle Paul challenges the pastor/elders of Ephesus, “Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.”⁹⁸ He tells spiritual leaders that they are to guard their own spiritual and moral purity while taking care of the flock. If the pastor fails morally, he will fail the flock of which he is placed in charge. Daniel Akin and R. Scott Pace argue, “If the spiritual nature and context of pastoral ministry are ignored, the role of a pastor is diminished to one who is simply responsible to draw crowds, please people, raise money, and build buildings.”⁹⁹ The shepherd that follows Christ is the shepherd that is character-driven instead of outcome-driven. This shepherd follows the heart and will of God and leads the flock in a godly way.

Pastors who are competent leaders will have an exemplary character. They will exhibit the fruit of the Spirit in everything they do and in every way they live. Joseph Stowell defines character-driven leaders as those “whose exemplary lives influence and empower those within the sphere of their authority to achieve great outcomes personally, spiritually, communally, and

⁹⁷Michael Whittington, “The Leader’s Character,” (Liberty University, 2020), accessed September 1, 2020.

⁹⁸Acts 20:28 (NIV).

⁹⁹Daniel Akin and R. Scott Pace, *Pastoral Theology* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2017), 19.

organizationally.”¹⁰⁰ Therefore, character-driven leaders enact leadership through their impeccable moral and respectable behavior. This leader will gain support because they have earned respect and credibility by providing an example that is supported Biblically and spiritually. Stowell says, “The power behind their leadership is leveraged by their moral authority that comes from the credibility of their lives.”¹⁰¹ Aubrey Malphurs asserts, “Credibility is critical to leadership because without it pastors, their people in general, and their boards in particular don’t trust one another.”¹⁰² For the character-driven leader, the most important thing to them is knowing they have led in a way that positively influences others. Don N. Howell writes, “Character can be defined as a person’s moral constitution, in which is embedded a stable set of values.”¹⁰³ The pastor has a mandate to lead in a specific way exhibiting specific characteristics as they lead the flock. Bill Hull argues, “Christian leadership calls for authentic living.”¹⁰⁴ The godly pastor will live in a godly manner and will exemplify the character of Christ no matter where he is or what situation he finds himself. Hull adds, “It requires humility, service, vulnerability, sacrificial living, and the willingness to put up with a constant stream of abuse.”¹⁰⁵ The pastor who is character-driven will not escape conflicting situations, but he will find godly solutions to those conflicts. Deron J. Biles contends, “Therefore it should be a priority in every

¹⁰⁰Joseph M. Stowell, *Redefining Leadership* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 24.

¹⁰¹Ibid.

¹⁰²Aubrey Malphurs, *Being Leaders* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003), 50.

¹⁰³Don N. Howell, *Servants of the Servant* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003), 296.

¹⁰⁴Robert W. Hull, *The Christian Leader* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 176.

¹⁰⁵Robert W. Hull, *The Christian Leader* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 176.

preacher's ministry to be faithful through his lifestyle... We need to understand that we represent God in everything that we do.”¹⁰⁶

Don N. Howell writes this concerning character, “Paul’s philosophy of leadership is character-grounded rather than geared around personality, role, temperament, or gifting.”¹⁰⁷ R. Peter Mason writes, “Paul’s overarching word to summarize the qualities of a competent, spiritually mature leader is *anepileptos* translated ‘above reproach’ (1 Tim 3:2) The spiritual leader is one who has a good reputation and deserves it.”¹⁰⁸ The godly leader, pastor and deacon, should be found faultless because they have lived with integrity and walked in a spiritually upright manner. Dr. Mason goes on to explain, “The expression, ‘above reproach,’ summarizes the following five targets of a spiritual leader: (1) he serves the church body, (2) he communicates spiritual truth, (3) he becomes Christlike in personal maturity, (4) he leads effectively in the home, and (5) he demonstrates integrity outside the church.”¹⁰⁹ To live an *above reproach* life then, would include more than talking a good talk. To be a competent pastor or deacon, one would have to also walk the walk and live a life that is enveloped by the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

Character traits are those that are on the inside of a person more so than personality traits, which are mainly on the outside. Your personality is much more visible to those who do not know you. What is much more difficult to see immediately is who they are at their core: honest or dishonest, disciplined, or undisciplined, selfless, or selfish. Character has much more of an

¹⁰⁶Deron J. Biles, *Pastoral Ministry* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2017), 161.

¹⁰⁷Don N. Howell, *Servants of the Servant* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003), 296.

¹⁰⁸ R. Peter Mason and Dino Pedrone, *Mentoring the Next Generation: Making a Lasting Difference* (Xulon Press, 2012), 15.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

impact than personality. If a person has a personality trait that is cheerful, they may make others happy in the short term. However, if that person is cheerful but dishonest, the short-term happiness given to someone will be overshadowed by the long-term effects of the dishonest way they have been treated. The most important concept of character is the primary, vital and impactful actions come from character, not personality. In other words, the principal actions are an extension of one's character. Stowell contends that it is not simply *how* we lead that is important to Christ. He says, "Jesus raised the issue of the importance of *who we are* as we lead."¹¹⁰

Character-driven leaders lead by following. Stowell explains, "As long as a leader is surrendered to the will, ways, and wisdom of Jesus, becoming an effective leader is well within our grasp."¹¹¹ A character-driven leader is a leader that follows. He is a pastor that leads his flock by following the Shepherd. The character-driven leader is one who will no longer see himself as a leader but will begin to see that they are called to first follow Christ and him alone. Derek Prime and Alistair Begg writes, "The preacher's gift proves its value to the body of Christ as his character demonstrates the truth of what he declares."¹¹² Matthew used the term *follow* as an active word. Character-driven leaders are to actively pursue Christ and "True follower-leaders see all of leadership as an opportunity to pursue Jesus."¹¹³ Character-driven pastors are sufficient pastoral models because they follow the Lord first. They are not driven by greed or selfish ambition. Character-driven pastors are competent because they are good followers and lead as

¹¹⁰Joseph M. Stowell, *Redefining Leadership*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 50.

¹¹¹*Ibid.*, 60.

¹¹²Derek J. Prime and Alistair Begg, *On Being a Pastor* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2004), 37.

¹¹³*Ibid.*, 65.

they are led. Aubrey Malphurs argues, “Leaders are followers and good leaders make good followers. In fact, if you can’t follow well, you will make a poor leader.”¹¹⁴ Pastors/shepherds will do well to know their biblical responsibilities and look to the examples of godly leaders in the Scripture. One such leader is Nehemiah, and his example will be surveyed a little later in this project.

Pastoral Incompetence

Jeremiah 23:1 gives a stern warning from God unto the pastors, or shepherds of Israel. Jeremiah declares, “Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of My pasture! Says the Lord.”¹¹⁵ This warning comes to those pastors who would try to lead the flock in a manner that was inconsistent with the Word of God. Ezekiel 34 gives an illustration of shepherds who were leading in a selfish and destructive manner.¹¹⁶ Pastors who lead in an insufficient manner, will lead in an outcome-driven way and measure their leadership through secular conventions.

Stowell defines outcome-driven leaders as those “...whose primary focus is on motivating others to achieve great organizational outcomes...the narrowness of their focus ultimately diminishes the breadth and long-term effectiveness of their leadership.”¹¹⁷ Outcome-driven leaders will “...lead solely from a strong sense of self-confidence and a belief in the validity of your own instincts...you are most likely to define your leadership by its outcomes.”¹¹⁸ For an outcome-driven leader, the operative word is *self*. Jesus said in Matthew 16:24, “Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his

¹¹⁴Aubrey Malphurs, *Being Leaders* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003), 120.

¹¹⁵ Jer 23:1 (NKJV).

¹¹⁶ Ezek 34:1-10 (NKJV).

¹¹⁷Joseph M. Stowell, *Redefining Leadership*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 24.

¹¹⁸*Ibid.*, 25.

cross and follow me.”¹¹⁹ For the outcome-driven leader, they are focused on what they can do, and what they perceive that they are doing. Their glory comes from the successful outcome of their business or church. The outcome-driven pastor would be more focused on his ability to preach/teach, organize, and lead. His reward comes from church growth, multiple baptisms, and increased offerings. While this is praise-worthy, for the outcome-driven pastor, the praise would go to himself rather than to God. What is particularly disconcerting for the outcome-driven leader is as Stowell writes, “...outcome-driven leaders get a hall pass on character if the results of their leadership are significant.”¹²⁰ It is a sad commentary to think that character only counts if you are gaining significantly according to the world’s standards.

For the outcome-driven leader, the obvious choice is making sure the outcome is as successful as possible. Unfortunately, the end justifies the means “...with little thought of caring for who they are at the core, of how they have led, or of celebrating the minions in the hold of the ship who are pulling on the oars of the enterprise.”¹²¹ This leader will make choices to create a fascinating bottom line, and in-so-doing, they will crush anyone who stands in their way. Ministers are not excluded from this attitude. Their choices will be based on themselves and not anyone else, including Jesus Christ. Stowell says, “They lead to gain for themselves instead of leading to give it away.”¹²²

The outcome-driven leader will not lead with the character of Christ in mind. Stowell writes, “Successful leaders are anything but meek, merciful, and poor in spirit.”¹²³ The

¹¹⁹Matt 16:24 (ESV).

¹²⁰Joseph M. Stowell, *Redefining Leadership*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 26.

¹²¹*Ibid.*, 35.

¹²² Joseph M. Stowell, *Redefining Leadership*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 49.

¹²³*Ibid.*

selfishness and conceit of the outcome-driven leader will allow them to engage in questionable business practices and lack the moral integrity to be concerned about others. This leader will always focus on their own efforts and forget others who have helped them climb the ladder of success. As Stowell puts it, “They bask in the limelight.”¹²⁴ Most outcome-driven leaders are puffed up with pride and arrogance. Proverbs 16:18 declares, “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.”¹²⁵ Some outcome-driven leaders do not see the error of their ways and therefore, they do not heed the warnings of the Scripture or those close to them who have perhaps warned them of their mis-dealings. Stowell asserts, “When we grasp for leadership and self-promote our way to the top, it stimulates pride and self-focused sense of ownership.”¹²⁶ The outcome-driven leader leads as if everything is owed to him. He feels that everything that is accomplished is done so by and through his great leadership skills and abilities. Stowell proclaims “...that he should be affirmed and applauded.”¹²⁷ The outcome-driven leader will not lead with the character of Christ in mind. Stowell writes, “Successful leaders are anything but meek, merciful, and poor in spirit.”¹²⁸ Deron J. Biles adds, “Shepherds embracing the CEO model of pastoral ministry are often more concerned about the business of ministry rather than tending to the lame or wounded sheep.”¹²⁹

¹²⁴Ibid.

¹²⁵ Prov 16:18 (NKJV).

¹²⁶Joseph M. Stowell, *Redefining Leadership*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 51.

¹²⁷Ibid., 52.

¹²⁸ Joseph M. Stowell, *Redefining Leadership*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 52.

¹²⁹Deron J. Biles, *Pastoral Ministry* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2017), 85.

Conclusion

The resources used for this project support that the pastor is called to lead the church as shepherd, overseer, and elder. To complement his leadership, the deacons are chosen to serve the church family under the pastoral leadership to advance the ministry, vision, and mission of the church. The shepherd is to be Christ-like and follow the qualifications set forth by the Apostle Paul for an overseer in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and an elder in Titus 1:5-9.

Theological Foundations

The purpose of this study is to identify biblical roles and foundations for that of the pastor and deacons and in so doing, those theological foundations will assist the pastor and deacons in identifying their roles, thereby decreasing power struggles that may erupt. The power struggles seem to lie within the fabric of congregants, pastors, and deacons not knowing the biblical roles of the leadership of the church. The goal of this chapter is to identify biblical characteristics of the pastor and deacons, thereby guiding them to fulfilling the mission and vision of the church.

Paul teaches, “And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.”¹³⁰ (Eph 4:11-12). The oneness that is experienced in the body of Christ is not to be overshadowed by the fact that the Holy Spirit has given each Christian a spiritual gift, a responsibility, as it were, within the body of Christ. These gifts are to be used to build up the church and to encourage the saints to continue striving for the Lord. It is important to recognize that the pastor is called by the Holy Spirit to do the work of God. However, deacons are called by the same Holy Spirit to do the work of God in *service*. The Apostle Paul lists

¹³⁰Eph 4:11-12 (KJV).

diakonian as a gift of the Holy Spirit, which is translated “service.” This outlines the importance that deacons must be called to *serve*. The ministry of the church must be led by the Holy Spirit for the purpose of edification and fulfilling the Great Commission. Pastors and deacons must be led by the Holy Spirit to do the work of God together biblically.

The Pastor as Shepherd

Jesus makes a proclamation in John 10:11 that He is the “good shepherd.”¹³¹ He reiterates this in verse 14 saying, “I am the good Shepherd; and I know My sheep and am known by My own.”¹³² Jesus uses the shepherding imagery to describe His relationship with His sheep. Shepherd can mean several things in the Bible because it is used both as a verb and a noun. Shepherd is used for both literal keepers of sheep and for kings and leaders of Israel in the Old Testament. The term shepherd carries the connotation that a leader of God’s people is to care for and protect them. It is a term that carries the idea of one that nurtures the flock of God. The Hebrew word *ra’ah* used in Ezekiel 34, figuratively speaking, means “to guard, care for, or rule.”¹³³ The word shepherd is used to refer to anyone who is leading the children of God. Be it the nation of Israel or the church of God, the shepherd is called upon to lead the people of God in a godly manner. The greatest example of this shepherd imagery is one that is used in the twenty-third Psalm. David proclaims, “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want...”¹³⁴ The metaphor is extended to God as a comparison between the caring nature of a shepherd to that of the caring nature of God. Because of this metaphor used in the Scripture, the image of a shepherding pastor,

¹³¹John 10:11 (NKJV).

¹³²John 10:14 (NKJV).

¹³³ *Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2013).

¹³⁴Ps 23:1 (NKJV).

or undershepherd, should be one that follows the characteristics of the true Shepherd. Deron Biles writes this concerning shepherding pastors, “Yet, the comforting assurance of a shepherd who leads his sheep to lush pastures and streams of refreshing water...resonates in the church as much as in the pasture.”¹³⁵ Biles goes on to say that if a pastor exhibits such characteristics, he has then become, “...a God-honoring shepherd.”¹³⁶ Having biblical knowledge of who the pastor is and what his office constitutes will be the focal point of understanding the structure of leadership for the church and Christ’s expectations of leaders.

Shepherding the flock of God requires an attitude of humility. The reason for a pastor to lead in humility as a shepherd is found in 1 Peter 5. Christ led with humility, therefore the pastor as the undershepherd is to lead by the same example of Jesus. 1 Peter 5:1-3, “Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; or as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.”¹³⁷ The word “shepherd” was first used literally (like its Latin equivalent) as a keeper of sheep.¹³⁸ The term derives from the “Latin *pastor*, meaning ‘herdsman’ or ‘shepherd,’ hence a shepherd of souls.”¹³⁹

¹³⁵Deron J. Biles, *Pastoral Ministry* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2017), 5.

¹³⁶Ibid.

¹³⁷1 Pet 5:1-3 (NKJV).

¹³⁸James Hastings and John A. Selbie, et al., eds., “*PASTOR*,” *A Dictionary of the Bible: Dealing with Its Language, Literature, and Contents Including the Biblical Theology* (New York; Edinburgh: Charles Scribner’s Sons; T. & T. Clark, 1911–1912), 692.

¹³⁹F. L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1237.

The Apostle Paul uses “the noun ‘pastor’ (*poimen*, ‘shepherd’).”¹⁴⁰ (Eph 4:11). The use of this term denotes the responsibilities and duties of a pastor are the same ones assigned to those who have the vocation of shepherding sheep. In essence, pastors are shepherding the flock of God and should take great care to shepherd them the same way a shepherd would his sheep. Acts 20:28, the pastors should care for the congregation; Acts 20:29, the pastor should protect the flock; Matthew 18, the pastor should seek the lost; and in 1 Peter 5:2, the pastor should oversee the flock. A part of being pastor requires the oversight of the flock, hence, the pastor is called the undershepherd to help in the leading of God’s people. The pastor should do so in kind, caring, and compassionate ways, but the idea of being the shepherd of the flock gives the image of one who tends the very needs of the flock, whatever that need may be.

A Caring Shepherd

The Apostle Paul teaches in Acts 20:28 that the *episkopos*, “overseer,” is to care for the church of God.¹⁴¹ The picture from the Scripture is a picture of the pastor being a caring leader who knows the flock. Paul mentions the word “shepherds” in Ephesians 4:11 and the Greek term used there is *poimen*, a noun that means “shepherd” and is defined as “one who cares for flocks.”¹⁴² Using the terms *shepherd* and *overseer* when discussing the pastor of the church has a figurative component. This figuratively speaks of Jesus as being the Great Shepherd watching over and providing for the welfare of His flock, or His church. The pastor is to mirror that of the Great Shepherd and care for the flock of God as a shepherd would care for his sheep. God has

¹⁴⁰ Benjamin L. Merkle and Thomas R. Schreiner, *Shepherding God’s Flock* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2014), 84.

¹⁴¹ *Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2013).

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

entrusted the care of His church to a called and gifted pastor. The pastor is called and gifted by the Holy Spirit to take care of the flock.

A pastor must have a Christ-like love for the people God has entrusted him to serve. It is Christ Jesus who gives the pastor the ability to love the unlovable.¹⁴³ (Eph 4:29-30). There are times when some members of a congregation of people are just hard to love. The pastor as shepherd, however, is to love them “in spite of” themselves. Jesus died for the church, which demonstrates His deep love for the church. It is for the pastor as shepherd to love the church as well. No congregation will trust a pastor unless he demonstrates that he loves them. In his article, “Six Basic Aspects of the Pastor as Shepherd,” Ray Gilder notes, “The first step to lead is to love.”¹⁴⁴ The Apostle Paul teaches the preeminence of love in all that is done in Christian service. He teaches in 1 Corinthians 13:1, “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.”¹⁴⁵

A Protecting Shepherd

In Acts 20:29, Paul teaches, “I know that after my departure, fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock....”¹⁴⁶ The pastor has a responsibility to protect the sheep that God has given him. Matthew Henry’s Commentary has this to say, “If the Holy Ghost has made ministers overseers of the flock, that is, shepherds, they must be true to their trust.”¹⁴⁷ Ezekiel

¹⁴³ Eph 4:29-30 (NKJV).

¹⁴⁴Ray Gilder, “Six Basic Aspects of the Pastor as Shepherd.” LifeWay.com <http://www.lifeway.com/Article/Basic-aspects-of-pastor-as-shepherd>, accessed January 5, 2022.

¹⁴⁵1 Cor 13:1 (NKJV).

¹⁴⁶Acts 20:29 (ESV).

¹⁴⁷Matthew Henry, *Concise Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Chicago, Ill: Moody Press).

chapter 34 verses 5-8 serve as an example of those shepherds who disregard their caring duty for the flock of God.

There are many “wolves” who may try to come among the flock to harm them. They may sow dissension or propagate false doctrine. It is the duty of a pastor as a shepherd to protect the flock from the raging wolves. The pastor must protect his flock from himself, too. Part of that is teaching the church to always listen with discernment, regardless of who is teaching or preaching. Gilder notes, “Paul warned the leaders at Ephesus about the wolves that would seek to destroy the flock. A pastor must not only preach the truth, he must expose error.”¹⁴⁸

The shepherds who have neglected the flock in Ezekiel 34 have been indicted, by God Himself, and verse 10 declares that God will remove the shepherds who have mistreated God’s people.¹⁴⁹ The shepherds have not protected the flock, as verse 4 proclaims, “The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought...”¹⁵⁰ It is important to note that Ezekiel is not just referring to kings and civil leaders. As Keil and Delitzshe state, “Only we must not take the term rulers as applying to the kings alone...among whom priests and prophets come into consideration...”¹⁵¹ Ezekiel 34 gives the picture of a shepherd who fails to protect the flock of God. The flock is neglected in every way imaginable and left to their own devices. However, conversely, we see the Great Shepherd and how He cares for His flock. Ezekiel gives us an image of how God cares for His children and how He declares in verses 11-22 that He will

¹⁴⁸Ray Gilder, “Six Basic Aspects of the Pastor as Shepherd.” LifeWay.com <http://www.lifeway.com/Article/Basic-aspects-of-pastor-as-shepherd>, accessed January 5, 2022.

¹⁴⁹ Ezek 34:10 (ESV).

¹⁵⁰Ezek 34:4 (ESV).

¹⁵¹ C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2001). 288.

gather His flock, lead them to good pasture, bind the wounded, and care for those who are sick.¹⁵² That is the example a shepherd will either follow or be removed by the hand of God.

A Seeking Shepherd

In Matthew chapter 18, Jesus gives us the parable of the lost sheep. Within that parable, Jesus tells us in verse 12, “If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray?”¹⁵³ The pastor, or shepherd, must not only care for the flock that he has within in his sight, he must also care for those who have wandered away from the fold. Those who have raised sheep and tend sheep will say that they have a tremendously bad habit of wandering away from the fold and then not be able to get back from whence they came. Are the children of God any different? Isn’t that why He sent a Shepherd and therefore calls shepherds to lead His children today? In Matthew 28, God has given the church His Great Commission for the church.¹⁵⁴ Part of that Great Commission is Missiological, in that, the pastor is to be a seeking shepherd.

2 Timothy 4:5 simply states, “...do the work of an evangelist...”¹⁵⁵ The Apostle Paul is exhorting Timothy and he tells Timothy to preach the Word, stay strong and rooted in sound doctrine and in the same vein, Paul tells Timothy to *do the work of an evangelist*. The shepherd must find the sheep who have gone astray. Once he has found them, lead them back to the fold.

As Jesus illustrates in His parable, does he not leave the ones safely in the fold to find that one who has gone astray? Jesus proclaims in Luke 15:5, “And when he has found it, he lays

¹⁵²Ezek 34:11-22 (ESV).

¹⁵³ Matt 18:12 (NKJV).

¹⁵⁴ Matt 28:19-20 (NKJV).

¹⁵⁵2 Tim 4:5 (NIV).

it on his shoulders, rejoicing.”¹⁵⁶ The pastor, shepherd, is to follow Christ’s example and seek those who are lost and try to bring them to a saving knowledge of Christ. The evangelical work that a shepherd does is finding those who have lost their way and those who were never part of the fold, but need to be brought in.

An Overseeing Shepherd

Peter addresses the elders of the church in 1 Peter 5:2 saying, “Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof...”¹⁵⁷ Being *overseers* was something that Jesus told Peter in John 21:16. The Greek term used here for overseer is *poimante*, meaning “to tend,” and it carries the idea of feeding, leading, caring for and protecting, which are “...all duties and responsibilities a shepherd has for his flock.”¹⁵⁸ Some theologians would contend that the roles assigned to overseers/bishops and elders are interchangeable. In Titus chapter 1, the Apostle Paul gives the qualifications of an elder and in verse 7, the true position and qualifications are given regarding this leadership position. However, in verse 7, there is a shift between *elder* and *overseer* perhaps denoting a connotative difference. “ ‘Elder’ implies the maturity and dignity of the man, while ‘overseer,’ indicates his work of overseeing God’s flock.”¹⁵⁹ Paul begins to give the qualifications for *bishops* in Titus 1:7 and the Greek word used here for bishop is *episkopos* which is commonly translated in the KJV (not contemporary

¹⁵⁶Luke 15:5 (ESV).

¹⁵⁷1 Pet 5:2 (KJV).

¹⁵⁸John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, eds., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament* (Colorado Springs, CO: Zondervan, 1984), 855.

¹⁵⁹Kenneth L. Barker and John R. Kohlenberger III, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 923.

translations such as in the ESV) as “bishop.”¹⁶⁰ The common-held theory for the dual titles is that Paul is simply using the term *episkopos* in a generic sense denoting the work and qualifications of the overseer in a particular church.

The term *poimante* is a shepherding term and most commonly found among those who tend the flock. Therefore, shepherds, as Paul used the term *poimen* which is translated “pastor,” are to tend to the needs of the flock of God. Given this shepherding metaphor, it can be perceived that the *pastor* is overseeing the flock of God and therefore, he has been given the authority to lead the church according to the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Just as a shepherd out in the wilderness tends to his sheep, so must the pastor tend the needs of his congregation. Gilder argues, “Tending to the flock includes providing general oversight, visiting the sick, counseling those with special needs and performing weddings and funerals.”¹⁶¹

Nehemiah, An Exemplary Shepherd

Nehemiah has served as a royal cupbearer and then most importantly, he served as governor of Judah; a *ruler* of the people. Nehemiah’s life is an example of pastoral leadership. Giving up a life of wealth and comfort, Nehemiah returned to his homeland to rally the people to rebuild Jerusalem’s wall. Nehemiah is an exemplary shepherd for the way that he cared for his people and for the commitment that he displayed in rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem.

Nehemiah’s Care

Warren Wiersbe quotes George Bernard Shaw as saying this, “The worst sin toward our fellow creatures is not to hate them, but to be indifferent to them: that’s the essence of

¹⁶⁰ John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, eds., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament* (Colorado Springs, CO: Zondervan, 1984), 762.

¹⁶¹ Ray Gilder, “Six Basic Aspects of the Pastor as Shepherd.” LifeWay.com <http://www.lifeway.com/Article/Basic-aspects-of-pastor-as-shepherd>. (accessed January, 2022).

inhumanity.”¹⁶² Nehemiah was a shepherd-leader who cared about people, traditions, needs, and hopes. He cared about the traditions of the past and needs for the future. He cared about his ancestral city and he cared about the glory of his God. Nehemiah cared for the people that who were placed in his charge. T.J. Betts had this to say concerning Nehemiah, “As governor, Nehemiah was in a position to enjoy the spoils that Persian aristocrats enjoyed...but he refused to do so. Instead he lent money and grain to those in need without interest and did not partake of the royal food....”¹⁶³ Nehemiah could have participated in the goods that were set aside for the privileged few, but instead, he shared those goods with those who were in need. Unlike the incompetent, selfish shepherds that are excoriated in Ezekiel 34, Nehemiah personally cares for the well-being of his people.

A century before Nehemiah, Jeremiah the prophet said this, “For who will have pity on you, O Jerusalem? Or who will bemoan you? Or who will turn aside to ask how are you doing?” (Jer. 15:5).¹⁶⁴ Nehemiah’s care is exemplified in the fact that he asked about his ancestors, the Jewish people, and he asked about Jerusalem. The answer he received was one that dire. Only a remnant of the people was left and Jerusalem laid in utter desolation. Perhaps Nehemiah thought that someone had finished the walls of Jerusalem or had at least started working on them. Hearing this news made Nehemiah do two things: weep and pray. Two things caring shepherds do for their people: weep *with* them and pray *for* them.

The first chapter of Nehemiah records that he returns to Jerusalem and prays for the people of Israel and he also prays that God would allow him to return to Jerusalem and help

¹⁶²Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: The Complete Old Testament* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2003), 752.

¹⁶³T.J. Betts, *Nehemiah* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020), 9.

¹⁶⁴Jer 15:5 (NKJV).

rebuild the walls. Nehemiah was willing to leave his comfort and prestige to help a remnant of people left in great affliction and struggling to survive. Nehemiah's compassion compelled him to go and work. Much like Matthew 28 tells us to *Go*, Nehemiah's word from God was to go to Jerusalem and rebuild the walls.¹⁶⁵ The second chapter of Nehemiah, he begins leading the people to do just that; rebuild the walls. Nehemiah was led of God to lead the people to rebuild. Nehemiah was a good follower, and he followed God's will for his life and by following the will of God, he was able to lead the people to do what God wanted him to do. A caring shepherd is a shepherd that follows first and leads second.

In the fifth chapter of Nehemiah, there are calls of help that come from the people who have committed themselves to the rebuilding of the wall. There are three cries for help that reach Nehemiah's ears: a need for food, a need to eliminate usury, and a need to reduce taxes. Some of the workers have sacrificed their own food while they labor on the wall, some have even mortgaged their land and are borrowing money for seed. They cry out to Nehemiah as their *shepherd* to help them. Nehemiah hears and defends his people. As their *shepherd*, Nehemiah is taking care of the hungry, the wounded, and the helpless; he is doing what a caring shepherd should do. If a shepherd knows his biblical responsibilities, he can follow the Lord first, then he can lead the flock wherever God wants them to go. Following the Lord will give the shepherd a caring heart, but it will also give the shepherd the commitment needed to follow through with the Lord's work and will.

¹⁶⁵ Matt 28:19 (NKJV).

Nehemiah's Commitment

Nehemiah 6:3 records, "...I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?"¹⁶⁶ The enemies of Nehemiah were trying their best to stop the progress on the wall. Much like a shepherd faces in the church today. There are enemies who would like to stop the progress of the shepherd and the church. Peter says in 1 Peter 5:8 that Satan is prowling like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.¹⁶⁷ Jesus teaches us in John 10:10 that the thief only comes to kill, steal, and destroy.¹⁶⁸ Every godly shepherd must put on the whole armor of God because the enemies, Sanballat and Tobiah, are in every church. Sometimes, they are your most trusted "friend" or most helpful deacon. Sanballat and Tobiah could not stop the builders, so they tried to stop the shepherd. Because of Nehemiah's commitment, he knew he was doing a great work by leading the flock to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. He would not be hampered by the insults or invitations of the enemy. He was doing a *great work*.

Nehemiah 4:6, "So built we the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof: for the people had a mind to work."¹⁶⁹ They built the wall because they had a mind to work, but who gave them the mind to work? Ultimately, it was God who always gives the increase, but it was their shepherd, Nehemiah, who committed himself to work of God to lead the people of God. Wiersbe notes, "The best thing to do is to pray and commit the whole thing to

¹⁶⁶Neh 6:3 (KJV).

¹⁶⁷1 Pet 5:8 (NKJV).

¹⁶⁸John 10:10 (NKJV).

¹⁶⁹Neh 4:6 (KJV).

the Lord, and then *get back to your work!*”¹⁷⁰ The competent shepherd-pastor must be committed to God, His work, and His people. The work will be finished, and God will be glorified just as He was with the walls of Jerusalem.

The Pastor’s Authority

The writer of Hebrews declares this truth in Hebrews 13:17, “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account.”¹⁷¹ It is Timothy Witmer’s contention that “...leaders have both the right and responsibility to exercise shepherding care.”¹⁷² It is to be understood that the term *shepherd* carries an understanding that a shepherd is *over* the sheep. In a pastoral sense, the pastor is over the flock of God. In the Scripture from Hebrews, there is a direct command to submit to and obey those who are in positions of leadership. Ken Sande writes, “When God places people in a position of authority, He expects us to obey them unless there is a valid reason not to do so.”¹⁷³ There is a direct correlation in Hebrews to 1 Peter, Acts, and Ephesians when the author states *for they are keeping watch over your souls*, indicating a pastoral role.

Paul uses the term authority in Romans 13:1 when speaking of governing authorities, but he is quick to add that all authority is given by God.¹⁷⁴ The Greek term *exousia* is used there and it is translated “authority.” Witmer defines *exousia*, “At its most fundamental level *exousia* is the

¹⁷⁰Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: The Complete Old Testament* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2003), 763.

¹⁷¹Heb 13:17 (NKJV).

¹⁷²Timothy Z. Witmer, *The Shepherd Leader* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2010), 75.

¹⁷³Ken Sande. *The Peace Maker*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004), 149.

¹⁷⁴Rom 13:1 (NKJV).

‘right to do something or the right over something.’”¹⁷⁵ Witmer would further argue that *exousia* gives, “...God’s shepherds...’the right to act’ on behalf of the Good Shepherd.”¹⁷⁶ Knowing that pastoral authority comes from God does not give pastors the right to take advantage of those in the flock. 1 Peter 5:2 gives the warning that pastors are to serve because they want to and not out of necessity.¹⁷⁷ Peter also warns those in leadership to serve with eagerness and not for money.

A pastor has God-granted authority to lead the church. That authority, however, is limited. The limited authority starts and stops with the One who called him, God. A pastor is to care for the church. A pastor is to provide what the church needs so that the church is equipped to fulfill the Great Commission and obey the Great Commandment. Haygood’s definition of the term “pastor” is instructive. In the *Holman Bible Dictionary*, B. Spencer Haygood defines the word, “pastor:”

Common translation of the Greek noun *poimen* (Eph. 4:11) and its verb form; also, the Hebrew *ra’ah* (Jer. 3:15; 10:21; 12:10; 22:22 KJV). Literally, a shepherd or one who keeps animals (Gen. 4:2; 13:7; 46:32, 34; Exod. 2:17; Isa. 13:20; Jer. 6:3; Luke 2:8, 15, 18, 20) but used figuratively of those called by God to feed (Jer. 3:15; John 21:16), care for (Acts 20:28), and lead (1 Pet. 5:2) His people, who are His “flock” (Num. 27:17; 1 Kings 22:17; Jer. 3:15; 10:21; 12:10; 22:22; Ezek. 34:2, 5, 7–10; Zech. 10:3; John 21:16; Acts 20:28; Eph. 4:11; 1 Pet. 5:2). Much instruction directed toward such church leaders can be found in the Pastoral Epistles (1 and 2 Tim. and Titus).

Preeminently, the idea is applied to and fulfilled in Christ (Isa. 40:11; Mic. 5:2; Zech. 13:7; Matt. 2:6; 25:32; 26:31; Mark 14:27; John 10:11, 14; Heb. 13:20; 1 Pet. 2:25; Rev. 7:17) and God Himself (Pas. 23:1; 27:9; 47:5; Jer. 23:3; 31:10; Ezek. 34:12, 23–24; Hos. 13:5). In the NT pastor (shepherd) appears to depict aspects, or functions, of the responsibilities of the overseer/elder (1 Pet. 2:25, where the two are put together in Christ).¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁵Timothy Z. Witmer, *The Shepherd Leader* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2010), 88.

¹⁷⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷⁷1 Pet 5:2 (NKJV).

¹⁷⁸ B. Spencer Haygood, “Pastor,” in *Holman Bible Dictionary*, ed. Chad Brand et al. (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 1250.

It is sufficiently argued in I Peter 5:2, that it is the pastor who is called and appointed to be the leader of the church. Peter says, “Feeding the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof....”¹⁷⁹ The pastor has a God-given authority which is to be exercised with humility and decency. The office of pastor is a spiritual gift that is important in the edification, growth, and leadership of the church. The church needs this pastoral leadership to survive in times of persecution. It is important for the church to submit to servant-shepherds to bring order and unity to the body of Christ. Benjamin Merkle said this, “...sheep cannot survive without a shepherd. Take away all the shepherds, and the sheep will surely perish. They will be lost, starved, and torn apart by predators.”¹⁸⁰ The body of Christ needs a shepherd. The shepherd is called and sent to care for and lead the flock that God has given him.

The Scriptural method is to allow those called and gifted to be elders/pastors/overseers in the church to lead the church. Though the church has a say in who is selected as their pastor, they are calling a leader and must let him lead once he is in the position. The Bible never presents a church-led church but always a shepherd-led church. A church needs a shepherd to lead them in the direction that God wants them to go. The Great Commission commands the church to *Go*. But where does the church go? How does the church get there? When does the church go? These are questions that God will answer through the shepherd. Without a shepherd, it would look like the multitude that Jesus saw and said, “...because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.”¹⁸¹ (Matt. 9:36). This has been true from the beginning. For instance, the apostles, who were elders, led in the early church. When the apostles moved from the scene,

¹⁷⁹1 Pet 5:2 (KJV).

¹⁸⁰Benjamin L. Merkle and Thomas R. Schreiner, *Shepherding God's Flock* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2014), 309.

¹⁸¹Matt 9:36 (KJV).

other elders, gifted as pastors, were given the primary place of leadership in the church. These pastors, like the church, were still under apostolic authority, as provided in the Word of God.

What was true in the beginning is still true today. Because apostles are no longer functioning, pastors have been designated as the primary leaders of the church. Pastors, then, have a continuing ministry. Further, pastors and churches are still bound by the authority of apostolic teaching, recognizing the Word of God to be the sole basis of their faith and practice. Thus, pastors, not the congregation itself, are to provide the primary leadership in the church today. Primary *leadership* for the church, not a primary *dictatorship*. While the pastor is the primary leader, the church still has a voice in making final decisions by making their concerns known through voting and committee membership.

For a church to move from a deacon-run church to a pastor-led church, there are some steps that need to be taken by the church: (1) a biblical organizational structure must be implemented; (2) the pastor must be accepted as the primary leader of the church and not just a hireling; (3) the pastor needs to be helped, prayed for, and listened to – not badgered, opposed, and run off; (4) he needs to lead the deacons, not be controlled by them. The pastor will never be perfect, but he must be respected as the pastor/shepherd of the church. John Feinberg had this to say, “Clearly, God considers the pastor a shepherd and expects him to function better than a hireling. If he acts like a hireling God will punish him. The responsibility of the congregation, though, is to recognize that the pastor is God's undershepherd and treat him as such.”¹⁸² This truth will never be fully implemented until churches start ordaining and choosing spiritually mature men of good report to serve as deacons within the local congregation. Those men, then,

¹⁸² John S. Feinberg, "An Undershepherd or a Hireling?" *Fundamentalist Journal* 2 (October 1983):17.

begin supporting and promoting the biblical truths of pastor and deacon roles and that the pastor is to serve as the shepherd of the church. C. Sumner Wemp said this, “In Baptist churches the pastor is the ‘ruling elder,’ and the deacons are subject to the pastor's authority, just as the disciples were subject to Jesus' authority or Timothy was subject to Paul's authority.”¹⁸³ This truth is probably hard to accept in many Southern Baptist churches and may even be somewhat detestable in today's culture. However, acting in obedience to God's Will always warrants a spiritual blessing. In addition, biblical authority and submission in a God-given relationship are to be exercised in love and respect. It is not a matter of superiority and inferiority, but one of function and organization that is given and blessed by God for His church.

The Apostle Paul teaches in Titus 1 that the *overseers* are to be “blameless,” and that the *elders* have been entrusted with “God's work.”¹⁸⁴ Therefore, “The Christian minister is not merely the servant of the church; he exercises his office under God's authority and answers directly to Him.”¹⁸⁵ The controversy lies in whether or not the deacons have been called to pursue a deliberative decision-making body as a board, or are they to function as a servant-ministry within the church?

The Need for a Deacon Ministry

The need for a deacon ministry is depicted in the Acts 6:1-7 passage. There were several reasons explaining the need for this ministry in the early church. Luke, the author of the book of Acts, explains the situation that caused the selection of other men to assist the twelve Apostles.

¹⁸³ C. Sumner Wemp, *The Guide to Practical Pastoring* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishing, 1982), 159.

¹⁸⁴ Titus 1:7 (NIV).

¹⁸⁵ Kenneth L. Barker and John R. Kohlenberger III, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 923.

Luke helps the readers to see that as the church multiplies, so do the problems. Where there are people, there will always be problems. The church will always be imperfect because it is made up of imperfect people. Storms were brewing on the horizon and the storm arose because some in the congregation were being neglected. This negligence was not intentional on the apostles' part, however. One must consider that the church of Jerusalem at this point numbered well over five thousand followers of Christ. The Jerusalem Christian community had witnessed considerable growth; and as is so often the case with rapid increase, administrative problems developed as well.¹⁸⁶

The first recorded conflict that arose within the church was not between Jews and Gentiles, but between Hellenistic and Hebraic Jewish believers. The church had continued the Jewish custom of caring for the widows in their community. The widows within the Hellenistic group believed that they were being slighted in their exchange of goods. Members of this group confronted the Twelve with their complaint. The Apostles had to respond and react to the problem and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the problem was solved. The Apostles solved this problem by helping the other believers see the need of choosing seven men to assist the Twelve. It has been noted by the authors of *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*, the Apostles had encountered a rather large problem.

When the Apostles were informed of these complaints, they immediately adopted measures for arresting the further progress of any feeling of discontent, and for removing, at the earliest moment, any cause, which might weaken the union and brotherly love of the Christians. They introduced, at the same time, a division of labor, which the wants of the Church required, and which freed the apostolic office from tasks of inferior moment, that were inappropriate and that also occasioned a large expenditure of time. But they do not proceed to action in an independent manner.

¹⁸⁶Robert E. Naylor, *The Baptist Deacon* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 7.

They agree among themselves that a change is needed, and that a certain distinctly defined course ought to be adopted, and then communicate the result of their deliberations to the Church. But they do not undertake to nominate the individuals who are to be invested with the new office; they ask the Church to select and propose suitable persons, to whom they, the apostles, might assign that office.¹⁸⁷

The Apostles, being men full of the Holy Spirit, desiring to maintain unity in the church, asked the offended party to choose seven men to address the needs of those in the church. Acts 6:2-4 gives us the account of this event, “Then the Twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”¹⁸⁸ Warren Wiersbe said this concerning the apostles, “They had created their own problem because they were trying to do too much...some pastors are so busy with secondary tasks that they fail to spend adequate time in study and in prayer.”¹⁸⁹ Much discussion has taken place regarding whether these seven men represent deacons at all. Their careers following their selection to serve speaks heavily against calling them “deacons,” however, in Acts 6:2, they are said to “*diakoneo*,” which means “serve” tables.¹⁹⁰ The term deacon was not assigned to these first seven men here in Acts 6. However, in Philippians 1:1 and 1 Timothy 3:8-13, the term deacon was used and their qualifications were given. The term *diakonos* used in Acts 6 simply gives the job duty as “a servant.” Luke does not

¹⁸⁷John Peter Lange, Philip Schaff, et al., *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Acts* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008), 103.

¹⁸⁸Acts 6:2-4 (NKJV).

¹⁸⁹ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: The Complete New Testament* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2003), 343.

¹⁹⁰John Peter Lange, Philip Schaff, et al., *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Acts* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008), 103.

call the first seven men in Acts 6 by their ecclesiastical title “deacon,” but he does “use the cognate noun *diakonia*, meaning ‘distribution’ in v.1 for what they were to do.”¹⁹¹ Luke then uses the verb *diakoneo*, “wait on,” for what these men were to do in the church to help the Apostles.¹⁹² As one looks at the Scripture, it can be ascertained that the first seven men were humble servants in the church, having good reputations and who were spiritually mature. The work of these seven men, made the ministry of the apostles possible because it allowed them to focus on prayer and Bible study. The deacon then, should focus on *servicing* the church, not *controlling* the church.

Free the Pastor

When the Hellenistic believers presented the problem to the Apostles, their response indicated that the role of the Seven would be in a servant’s role within the local church of Jerusalem. Acts says, “It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables.”¹⁹³ The Apostles were to focus on preaching and praying, and these seven would free them to do so by meeting the needs of those in the church. The Apostles, similar to pastors, needed time to focus on the Word of God, thereby preventing a spiritual deficiency from forming among the members, making a way for problems to grow. If the members are not maturing, growing, learning, and becoming learned in the Scripture, then problems will erupt that will harm the unity of the church. The seven men chosen were to protect and promote the freedom the

¹⁹¹ Kenneth L. Barker and John R. Kohlenberger III, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 414.

¹⁹² Kenneth L. Barker and John R. Kohlenberger III, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 414.

¹⁹³ Acts 6:2 (KJV).

pastors needed. One must note, the deacons were to set the pastors free so that the pastors were able to conduct their calling.

The pastors knew “the Lord was adding to the church daily those who were being saved.”¹⁹⁴ The Seven were chosen so that the pastors in the early church could have time to seek God to feed the flock that God entrusted them to serve. It takes time for meditation, Bible study, and sermon preparation. Benjamin Merkle notes,

Although the apostles realized the gravity of the situation before them, they also realized that for them to get distracted with serving tables would divert them from their primary calling of preaching the Word of God. The apostles were not indicating that it would be too humiliating for them to serve widows. Jesus had taught them that being a leader in His kingdom is very different from being a worldly leader (Matt. 20:25–27), and He washed their feet to demonstrate servant leadership (John 13:1–18). Rather, the apostles wanted to remain faithful to the calling and gifts they received from God. For them to leave the preaching of the Word to serve tables would have been a mistake. Instead, they proposed a better solution to this problem.¹⁹⁵

The solution to the problem was the selection of the first seven men. These seven men were chosen to free the apostles to do what they were called to do.

Maintain the Peace

The seven men who were selected by the early church, were selected to help with the disgruntled widows by hearing their complaints and then to make sure the distribution of goods was fairly given. Disgruntled church members can bring about disharmony in the church and the deacons should take care of this before it is blown out of proportion. The Apostles (pastors) need to be praying, studying, preparing, preaching, and teaching. The church will not function

¹⁹⁴Acts 2:47 (NKJV).

¹⁹⁵Benjamin J. Merkle, *40 Questions about Elders and Deacons* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publishers, 2008), 228.

properly if such disunity exists. The preaching of the Word will not be at its strongest if the pastor is constantly extinguishing fires among the congregants.

It is very easy for misunderstandings to arise among even the most loving and loyal followers of Christ. However, when the situation is dealt with biblically, it can be effectually and quickly healed. The seven men acted in wisdom with loving and honest intentions. Therefore, making it of utmost importance to pick men who are of spiritual maturity and who follow the qualifications given in 1 Timothy 3:8-13.¹⁹⁶ Maintaining unity would require the deacon to refrain from being “double-tongued” as verse 8 proclaims.¹⁹⁷ One such commentary concludes this to mean, “...saying one thing to this person, and another to that person...Others explain it “saying one thing, thinking another.”¹⁹⁸ For the deacons to maintain unity, they must be willing to be supportive of the pastor and ministries of the church and not be taken up in murmurings and disputations that may arise. The seven men who were chosen in Acts provided a solution to a growing problem. Anytime there is disunity in the church, deacons should serve as guardians to protect and maintain unity among the believers, as demonstrated in the Acts 6 passage. The work of God can be hindered when there is disunity in the church. Deacons should support the pastor as he preaches the Word of God, so that the pastor will not become sidetracked spending time addressing issues that a deacon can address.

¹⁹⁶1 Tim 3:8-13 (NKJV).

¹⁹⁷1 Tim 3:8 (NKJV).

¹⁹⁸Robert Jamieson, A.R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House), 1360.

Stephen, the Deacon After God's Own Heart

Stephen was one of the seven that was picked to serve the widows in the church. He is often referred to as a deacon because the Apostles laid hands on him and that has become the traditional way of ordaining deacons in the 21st Century Southern Baptist church. Stephen was a man who was full of the Holy Spirit and one who taught, witnessed, and defended the faith; every good deacon should model their life after that of Stephen.

Stephen the Spirit-Filled

Luke gives the description of Stephen in Acts 6:8, “And Stephen, full of faith and power, did many great wonders and miracles among the people.”¹⁹⁹. The most important prerequisite for anyone in Christian service is to be full of faith and the power of the Holy Spirit. Because Stephen was full of the Holy Spirit, he was able to do great work for the church and for the Lord. We are told in verse 5 that Stephen was one of the seven called by the church to help with the administration of goods to the widows in the church. Stephen was asked to be a servant of the church because of his spiritual stature. Luke records in Acts 6:3 that the first seven men chosen needed to have a good and honest reputation and be filled with the Holy Ghost and wisdom.²⁰⁰ *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* asserts, “Interestingly Stephen was ‘full of’ or controlled by five factors: the Spirit, wisdom, faith, grace, power. What an outstanding leader!”²⁰¹ The fact that Stephen was able to do great signs and wonders (Acts 6:8), testifies to his being filled with the Holy Spirit of God. In Acts 6:10, Luke records, “...they were not able to resist the wisdom and

¹⁹⁹Acts 6:8 (KJV).

²⁰⁰Acts 6:3 (NKJV).

²⁰¹ John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, eds., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament* (Colorado Springs, CO: Zondervan, 1984), 368.

the spirit by which he spake.”²⁰² Deacons who are spirit-filled are servants that God will use mightily for the church and for the pastor. Biblical knowledge alone will not unite the church. James tells us that we do well if we believe that there is one God; “thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.”²⁰³ (James 2:19). While most Southern Baptist churches look first at whether or not the deacon has been married only one time, the contention would be to look at whether or not that man was filled with the Spirit of God. Luke even says that Spirit was filled with God’s grace and His power. These are the same words that Luke used to characterize Jesus in Luke 4:22 and the church in Acts 4:33. Luke used the same words describing both Christ and Stephen; this is paramount in the Christian life, especially that of a servant in the church (i.e., deacon). This writer has pastored for 26 years, and in that time, very few spirit-filled deacons have ever been seen. Many deacons in the Southern Baptist church have been asked to fill that position based on their seniority, popularity, finances, or business connections.

Stephen the Witness

Luke records the words of Jesus in Acts 1:8, “...and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”²⁰⁴ Stephen was a witnessing deacon. Theoretically, every child of God should be a witness, especially those who are servants in the church. Stephen did not limit his ministry as a deacon to just that of waiting tables, he also told the lost about Christ. Warren Wiersbe said this, “This was part of His [God’s] plan to use Stephen to bear witness to the leaders of Israel.”²⁰⁵ The church

²⁰²Acts 6:10 (KJV).

²⁰³Jas 2:19 (KJV).

²⁰⁴Acts 1:8 (KJV).

²⁰⁵Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: The Complete New Testament* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2003), 344.

would be decidedly different if the deacons were as concerned about the lost as they are the temporal (material) business of the church. To be frank, the church would be much more powerful and serve as a brighter light if its entire membership were as concerned about the lost as Stephen was. As Stephen witnessed to those around him in Jerusalem, it was noted that no one could match his wisdom or spiritual knowledge. The only way to combat such wisdom was to simply destroy Stephen. Warren Wiersbe analyzed Stephen and Jesus and points out that both of them were treated in the same fashion. Wiersbe notes, “First they hired false witnesses to testify against him...they stirred up the people who accused him...Finally, after listening to his witness, they executed him.”²⁰⁶

The Bible has not only given qualifications of deacons, but also an example of how a deacon should live and serve. The Bible also speaks to us concerning pastors, their qualifications, and examples of pastors who led and served the people of God. Old Testament leaders such as Moses, Abraham, Joshua, Gideon, Nehemiah, and the prophets all give us a picture of what faithful and courageous shepherds should look like. While they are not specifically called shepherds, the leaders of the Children of Israel are examples to pastors today and have been the subject of books, Sunday School and Vacation Bible School literature.

Theoretical Foundations

The pastor is given the spiritual gift to lead the church as God has called. However, certain traditions prevent the pastor from leading the church. In most Southern Baptist churches, the deacons are called upon to lead the church and the pastor is simply there to preach and visit the sick. This writer has been in the ministry for 31 years at the time this project was started. The

²⁰⁶Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: The Complete New Testament* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2003), 344.

size of the church does not outweigh the tradition of the church. If the deacons acted like a board of directors when the church ran 50, it will continue to have the same mentality when the church averages 200. The New Testament gives the qualifications for pastor, bishop, elder, and deacon. The expectations for those offices are clearly stated as well as the responsibilities for those called to fill the offices.

The newly created position of deacon did not have the same job description as that of an apostle (or elder), but their ministry was just as real. Although two from the group, Stephen and Philip, were in the spotlight, the other five served in the background as “unsung heroes.” All seven were involved in the work of the Lord. These men not only helped their preachers, but they preached themselves. They not only ministered effectively to the church body, but also to the lost world. Not only did they perform practical ministry, but supernatural ministry. Ministry of this type cannot be valued too highly or commended too often. The writer is not attempting to demonize deacons at all. Rather, the writer is attempting to make the distinction between the roles of pastor and deacon and show the importance of knowing the biblical responsibilities of each position and office. Unfortunately, it seems that deacons are viewed as nothing more than a board of directors holding a life-long position within the church. That is far removed from God’s intentions as seen in the early church and in the example of the first seven men chosen to be servants in the church.

These first seven men did not simply hold a church office or position but rendered service that was vital to the life of the first church. They were not second-class Christians but rather, they served as primary role models for the rest of the church. Their ministry did not focus

on overseeing or administrating the church, but, more importantly, on ministry, or service, to people. These men were not worldly and apathetic but gave evidence of being filled with the Spirit and with the wisdom of God's Word. Because they lived exemplary lives, were men of *good* report, possessed a high level of commitment; these men became the finest examples of devotion among the Christian community. The seven men appointed as the first deacons were willing to serve, even to the point of death, showing firsthand what it meant to take up the cross and follow Jesus' example of servitude and humility. The Apostle Paul described the humbled and exalted Christ in Philippians 2:1-8 and it can be said that the seven men chosen in Acts 6 were "like-minded" and that they possessed Lord's mindset.²⁰⁷ These men, willing to witness and serve at all costs, were living examples of servant leaders. Because of the importance of the deacon in the local church, there is a need to educate and explain God's design for the role of deacon in the New Testament church.

The need for educating and clarifying the roles of deacons and pastors in the local Southern Baptist church is obvious for at least three reasons: (1) the evident confusion in current practice, (2) the constant conflict within the local church, and (3) the apparent lack of a clear definition in Southern Baptist literature. To validate this need for clarification, the writer will offer examples and statistics to be shared concerning CFCC. Some of the illustrations used are based on the writer's 31-year ministry as a preacher and pastor. The statistics are based on a survey done in conjunction with this project.

²⁰⁷Phil 2:1-8 (NKJV).

Current Confusion

After having looked at the Bible for responsibilities and duties of deacons and pastors, one can see God's intended purpose for deacons and pastors in His church. However, the *intended* purpose and the *actual* purpose prove to be two largely different things, indeed. Consider this, the writer pastored a church prior to CFCC and began casually asking members of the church what approval would be necessary to remodel the downstairs restrooms. Each person asked considered it the decision of the deacons, not the pastor, Trustees, or Building and Grounds committee, and nor should it be brought before the church in a business meeting for discussion. This information is significant for several reasons. First, upon further investigation, the church proved to have a "board of deacons," who served as a general clearinghouse for all matters concerning the temporal (material) and spiritual affairs of the church. Second, the writer found that the church had a history of asking pastors to resign if the church was not growing. Third, this situation is all too common and indicates confusion: the church entrusts the deacons to lead the church but holds the pastor responsible for its fruitfulness. When a church adopts this errant process of handling its business, frequently rotating pastors will not remedy the problem. A faulty procedure will lead to a faulty process and that, in turn, will produce catastrophic results.

A second illustration from the second church this writer pastored involved a young man who expressed doubt about his usefulness as a deacon. Two things were problematic for him. One, he expressed a desire to minister to people (i.e., hospital visitation, meeting the needs of the elderly, etc.) but was somewhat nervous and unsure about his abilities. He said that no instruction or training had been provided for the deacons in his church. Two, in his view, the

deacons' meetings consisted of small talk about business matters and questioning the pastor about things he had done without their "approval." And yes, those deacons' meetings were held in private without the pastor's knowledge.

Constant Conflict

Moments of conflict within the church are plentiful far and wide. Breaching the walls of the Southern Baptist Convention, this writer has heard horrific stories of conflicts taking place within every denomination. However, those surveyed for this project are all Southern Baptist, and 100% of those surveyed have witnessed conflict in the church. This percentage is significant and startling.

An example of a church conflict is based on the testimony of a Baptist pastor (a dear friend of the author) who experienced a church split. Seemingly, the conflict revolved around a rapid increase in membership. The church had grown, breaking all records for attendance and baptisms. The dissenting group, consisting of several deacons (many from the same family) and staff, became upset over the direction the church was going. They eventually led a group of members to levy attacks on the pastor and call his integrity into question, an action that required an investigation, the pastor being taken out of the church by armed police officers, and officers guarding the church to prevent him from returning to the premises. This resulted in negotiations by the Tennessee Baptist Convention and a vote by the church on a Sunday morning. The pastor "won" the vote, but at what cost? No matter what else was accomplished, the church frequently made the headlines in several local newspapers.

Another such example involves the writer just recently. The COVID virus had gotten extremely bad again and it was forcing closures all over Blount County. It resulted in a 25%

absentee rate for one local high school. After consulting with the deacons, the writer elected to dismiss services the first week of September (Sunday morning only) after learning that only five people would be in attendance. That was Labor Day weekend and most of the congregation would be away for the long weekend. A call was sent out, everything went well. The next Sunday, one deacon, his son-in-law, and entire family had taken to social media and excoriated the writer for making that decision. The writer was accused of being faithless, godless, and cowardice. The writer was working on this project when all of that started taking place. The one particular deacon began making calls and texts to other church members, engaging in the age-old practice of “politicking.” This battle raged for three months, and many things came to light during this time. Illustrating the dire need for biblical understanding and knowledge of how God wants His church to be established as well as the job descriptions that He has already set forth.

Other stories involve similar problems. One well-known Southern Baptist pastor was punched in the nose during a church business meeting by one of his deacons. Later, because this pastor would not succumb to the will of several deacons, approximately forty deacons left the church. The church, however, changed from a dead and lifeless church to one of the most prominent and highly visible churches in the world. One may recognize this little church as the First Baptist Church, Atlanta.²⁰⁸

These examples provide a small portion of incidents that could be shared. However, these are sufficient to suggest that consistent problems are occurring at the local church level. In the cases shared above, the problems often arose during growth. Problems attributed to growth were

²⁰⁸[Sermoncentral.com/sermon illustrations](http://Sermoncentral.com/sermon-illustrations).

present when the first deacons were chosen.²⁰⁹ Those who serve as deacons must not contribute to such problems. Their calling is based on solving problems, not causing them. Deacons and pastors are called to do ministry, not hold an office. Anyone who merely holds an office is prone to exhibit possessiveness in the church.

Call for Clarity

The idea that responsibility to run the church rests with the deacon body has been present in Southern Baptist life for some time. The problem first occurred in the mid-1800s. Church manuals produced during this period changed the role of deacons from ministry to overseeing the business affairs of the church. Later, this idea was fostered through the training manual of P. E. Burroughs, which taught that deacons were to function as a board of administrators.

An attempt to correct this mistake in Southern Baptist life was not made until the 1900s. At this time, Howard Foshee spoke of the misconceived idea of a “board of deacons.” Others also politely mentioned this problem in their manuals. However, more recently, it appears that the literature published has tried to mediate these positions. For instance, Robert Sheffield suggests that the pastor and deacons have equal responsibility for overseeing the function of the church, though he never clearly states that position. His position may be based on the contemporary “servant-leadership” model, generally stemming from egalitarian presuppositions. Even though a “board” concept is discouraged, no clear biblical model is presented in said literature.

A major contribution to the overall problem is the almost total lack of biblical exegesis presented in the content of Southern Baptist literature. Many books and training programs that

²⁰⁹Acts 6:1 (NKJV).

relate to the deacon ministry merely contain practical suggestions. This lack of a solid and thorough exegesis of Scripture to undergird the practical advice given has led to confusion in many churches and deacon bodies. Therefore, a large part of the misunderstanding might be reduced by restoring a biblical foundation to the deacon ministry as well as to the pastoral ministry. A fresh and thorough consideration of the New Testament can often solve several functional problems. However, the Bible must not only be studied but implemented in practice. One of the most solid deacon ministries known to the writer once functioned as “boards” but now has been restored to a position of “ministry” through careful consideration of the New Testament.

This project is so relevant because there seems to be a complete lack of understanding when it comes to deacons and pastors. There is a misunderstanding when people say *deacon board*. The New Testament never calls them a *board*. Board is defined by Webster’s Dictionary as “a group of administrators” or a “council.” The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “board” as “the recognized word for a body of persons officially constituted for the transaction or superintendence of some particular business.” Neither of those definitions accurately describe the biblical definition of what a deacon should be.

The second misunderstanding centers on the term pastor. Most often the term pastor is related to the title, “preacher.” That title carries the connotation that the pastor does nothing but preach twice on Sunday and once on Wednesday. The Bible is much more descriptive and definitive on the role of the pastor. Certainly, preaching is part of that pastoral call and gift, but the title “preacher” is in no way an all-encompassing term.

Conclusion

Other examples could be given to illustrate the dysfunctional nature of the Church regarding deacons and pastors as they presently exist. It appears that some who serve as deacons want to serve as business administrators and not as ministers to the people. If this is true, then the function of the deacon as it currently exists is not based on a sound, New Testament model. Though deacons may become the stabilizing factor in a church due to a frequent pastoral turnover, they still have not been entrusted by God to be overseers in the church. And this is the crux of the power struggles that exist between pastors and deacons in Southern Baptist churches. A wise pastor will want ideas from the whole church, including his deacons. Such desire for participation is far removed, nevertheless, from the current practice of demanding the direction of the church come under the approval of the deacon body.

Churches must function according to the mandates of the New Testament, not according to commonly accepted traditions. Thus, a more biblically sound base for the deacon ministry must be established in Southern Baptist life. It is also imperative for the pastor to be treated as the shepherd of the church and lead the flock that God has entrusted him to lead. Lead as a gentle shepherd, not a belligerent bully.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Intervention Design

This chapter serves as the description of the research and implementation of the ministry project for Christ First Community Church. The purpose of the project is to find unity in the church leadership, specifically the pastor and deacons, by becoming educated in the biblical concept of leadership that God has given us. The ministerial roles should adhere to scriptural teachings regarding the pastor and deacons. It is the opinion of the researcher that this balance between pastor and deacons will only come through gaining biblical knowledge of the pastor and deacons. This biblical knowledge gave insight into how God has already established the way His church should operate.

The project began with a questionnaire (Appendix E) given to church members for the express purpose of assessing their biblical knowledge in four areas: pastor/deacon roles, relationships, responsibilities, and reconciliations. This questionnaire gave insight into the level of Scriptural knowledge as well as any presuppositions concerning pastors and deacons that may exist. The questionnaire will serve as a base-point for the six-week study on leadership that will be delivered to the church.

Following the questionnaire, a six-part study over three weeks (Sunday and Wednesday sessions) was conducted teaching the responsibilities of deacons and pastors. These lessons outlined specific duties of the deacons and pastor, beginning with qualifications. The lessons also looked at various Old and New Testament leaders and how their leadership practices can be applied in the church today. The researcher taught these lessons with the goal of educating the

congregation, showing them God's designed purpose for His church and how He calls the pastor to lead and the deacons to serve. The questionnaire and six-part leadership lesson allowed the opportunity to adopt the Deacon Family Ministry (Appendix A). The explanation was given to the church that each family will be given a deacon for the purpose of ministry. The Deacon Family Ministry (DFM) was presented as a way to bring the deacon ministry in line with the biblical responsibilities of the first seven men called in Acts.

Biblical Knowledge of Pastor/Deacon Questionnaire

The questionnaire given to the congregation of CFCC has been utilized for the purpose of understanding the biblical knowledge of church leadership, specifically that of pastors and deacons. This questionnaire gave the researcher insight into the problems that are presented in this project; the power struggles that exist between the pastor and deacons at CFCC. It is also useful to determine any presuppositions that exists within the congregation regarding the role pastors and deacons play within the church. The researcher used the information obtained in the questionnaire to ascertain the effectiveness of a Deacon Family Ministry. The questionnaire is critical in understanding the congregation's viewpoint concerning church leadership. The survey's information helped the researcher determine the biblical knowledge and even spiritual maturity of the congregation. The spiritual maturity is determined by participant answers regarding their own opinions and experiences.

The researcher gave the congregation the surveys and all active members took the questionnaires home and answered the questions. The congregants were made aware of the project and its goals, and they all signed the consent letter. The questionnaires were given to each person in envelopes that contained the questionnaire and the consent letter and a self-addressed

stamped envelope. The participants were asked to complete the questionnaires and sign the consent forms and return them to the researcher in the self-addressed stamped envelope. A total of fifteen questionnaires were returned and the data has been compiled. The data has been recorded and is being used by the researcher to finish preparing and delivering the six leadership lessons which are to be delivered on Sunday mornings and Wednesday evenings.

Implementation

Obtaining Permission

Permission was granted for the study, and the assessment of spiritual maturity and biblical knowledge of the congregation began prior to the six lessons taught at the end of January through the first of February. Participants were asked to anonymously complete an attached questionnaire. Once the participants completed the questionnaires, the data was collected and analyzed to discern the spiritual maturity and biblical knowledge of those taking part. Participants were presented with informed consent information prior to beginning. Taking part in this study is voluntary, and leaders were welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Administering the Questionnaire

After receiving permission from CFCC and the IRB, the questionnaire was given to participants. Participants were limited to those eighteen years of age or older who are current members of CFCC. The assessment took approximately 15–20 minutes to complete and assurance was given to the recipients that participation would be completely anonymous, and no personal, identifying information would be collected.

This questionnaire solicited responses from active members serving and attending CFCC. Responses from area churches, pastors or members, outside of CFCC were not solicited. The two

remaining deacons were contacted and asked to participate in the questionnaire. Responses were collected from the participants at CFCC.

Participants in the questionnaire were solicited exclusively from members attending CFCC. The questionnaire was not advertised in any other medium. This was done in order to compile responses that reflect the opinions of CFCC members. No attempt was made to solicit responses from pastors or members attending or serving congregations in other denominations or faith groups. Thus, the questionnaire is limited to responses only from active members attending CFCC.

Pastor/Deacon Questionnaire Design

Obtaining Permission from Participants

After a participant receives the letter of consent, he or she signed and dated the consent form so that they could participate in the project. The researcher checked to make sure that the consent forms were all signed by the participants and if not, the participant could not move forward with the survey. When the participants consented, the researcher gave background information to address the purpose of the questionnaire. The participants understood that the data received was to ascertain an overall knowledge of pastor/deacon roles and what biblical knowledge they have of pastor/deacon responsibilities and relationships. The participants were also provided clear understanding of any risks involved with the study. Risks were minimal, meaning they were equivalent to the risks of daily life. The email explained that participants will receive no compensation or direct benefit from completing the survey.

Participants were provided with a confidentiality form and the assurance that the results of the study would be kept private. Research records are stored securely, and only the researcher

will have access to them. To further clarify confidentiality, the participants have been reassured that the responses would be anonymous. Data is stored on a password locked computer and may be used in future presentations.

Process for Participation

Questionnaire

Participants were asked to fill out each section of the questionnaire (Appendix E) to the best of their knowledge and understanding prior to the six-part lessons on leadership presented to the participants. There will be four different sections in the questionnaire. Each section targeted a specific area that tends to be problematic when discussing pastor/deacon power struggles and errant relationships. The four sections included pastor/deacon roles, relationships, responsibilities, and reconciliation. The participants were able to think through their own opinions and experiences in church and answer the questions. The information was used to evaluate the knowledge of the participants.

The questionnaire was given to both deacons prior to giving to the participants. It included a description of the questionnaire as well as an explanation of the researcher's status as a graduate student in the Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University. It clarifies that the researcher is conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry degree. The letter reveals that the purpose of the research is to ascertain the spiritual maturity and biblical knowledge of CFCC regarding the pastor and deacons. Along with an invitation to participate, parameters were listed. One must be 18 years or older, an active member at CFCC and willing to participate. A confidentiality agreement concluded the packet of information. To provide easy access, my email was also provided to the participants.

Interviews

The research includes interviews (Appendix G) with all of the members from CFCC. The members interviewed were selected after prayerful consideration. The selections were made based on knowledge gained through the questionnaire, personal knowledge of the individual, and personal conversations. The selection of those interviewed was clearly a subjective process. The interviewees clearly answer the questions based upon their understanding of the Scripture, their individual experiences, and their demonstrated willingness to participate in the present discussion.

All of those willing to participate in the interviews were members of CFCC and 18 years of age and older. The researcher did not ask about the education level of those participating just to see if there are any correlations between their personal opinions of deacon and pastor roles, and the level of their education. However, the researcher did ask how many years the individuals had been actively attending church. One such interviewee has been attending church actively for 70 years and had a great deal of input. Purposive sampling was used to choose the interviewees. The list of criteria used to pick the interviewees included: age, years of experience in the church, leadership levels, and if they have had family members who have either served as a deacon or pastor. For example, there was a lady interviewed who is a widow of a pastor. She was interviewed to get her experience as a former pastor's wife. Another participant interviewed, has been a deacon for many years. The researcher executed the interview in a non-biased way and remembered that not all participants will agree with personal assertions or opinions. After the data was collected, the researcher began sorting through the material and identified themes from each participant, possible key experiences from the participants, and what elements existed in

that key experience. The questions are deep and probing to gain insight into experiences and opinions of those participating.

The interviews were conducted on site at the present location of CFCC. The interviews are identified by number based on the sequence in which they were conducted. The interviews were conducted at the convenience of each individual. At the end of the interview, there was coffee and snacks to provide a time of fellowship and decompression. With each interview, the passion of the interviewees was evident as stories of spiritual breakthroughs as well as spiritual battles were shared. It was truly a blessing to share this time with these precious friends and church members. It was personally humbling as each person shared stories from their heart. Many shared experiences of the past, the most recent battle, and they also shared of what God was yet to do in the life of the church.

The interviews all took place after the six-part leadership lesson series brought before the church on Sunday mornings and Wednesday evenings. The purpose of the interview was to see if the biblical knowledge of leadership had increased or if anyone had gained a deeper understanding of the roles of pastor and deacon according to the Bible. The interview questions correlated with the questionnaire, in that, the researcher made sure that the questions were not redundant, yet that they coincided with each other. While refraining to ask the same questions, the researcher wanted to see if the individuals had the same or somewhat different answers based upon the six-part leadership lesson.

Implementation of Intervention Design

The researcher collected the data from both the questionnaire and the survey from approximately 15 participants. Based on the information that was received from the

questionnaire, a six-part leadership lesson was delivered on Sunday and Wednesday sessions beginning in January, after the researcher received the IRB approval, and lasting until the first week of February. This questionnaire acted as a pre-test to give the researcher a baseline of the biblical knowledge the congregation had of the roles of pastor and deacons. This information was extremely important because part of the problem with power struggles that exist in churches between the pastor and deacons stem from the members not knowing the biblical definitions, requirements, and responsibilities of those two offices.

Question number one on the questionnaire, asked the question; did the Bible establish an overseer for the church, and most all of the participants answered yes, the pastor. That was interesting to the researcher, but it also revealed that the congregants were almost all in agreement that the pastor is the shepherd, or overseer of the church. That was a positive indication that everyone in the congregation is in one accord now.

After having received the data from the questionnaires, the researcher was then able, with much prayer and leadership of the Holy Spirit, compile six sermons, or leadership lessons as they have been called. The researcher used Scripture found in Nehemiah, Matthew, Acts, 1 Timothy, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and 1 Peter. The problem that is being addressed in this project is the power struggle that exists between pastors and deacons in Southern Baptist churches. The biggest reason the power struggles exist is because a lack of biblical knowledge. The researcher felt it necessary to apply basic biblical knowledge and address leadership as it is outlined in the Scripture. This six-week lesson on leadership is the first part of the implementation phase for CFCC. Understanding that it will not solve *all* of the problems but applying biblical principles to positions of leadership will alter the course of CFCC by providing a guiding light and compass

for both the church and her leaders. For the most part, when a church finds itself off track, it is because the leadership and congregation has either lost their compass and guide (the Word of God), or they have allowed the Light of the Gospel to grow dim or become hidden. As the Psalmist said, His Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path!²¹⁰ (Psalm 119:105) The best way to educate the church on leadership is to simply teach God's Word. A sermon series, or series of lessons based on God's Word describing God's plan for the church is a positive way to build relationships, repair hurt feelings, and completely alter the course of the church.

Phase One – Six-Part Series on Leadership

The researcher began the six-week series on leadership by first reviewing *The Heart of a Servant* by looking at Nehemiah 1:1–11. The researcher related a leader's greatness to that of a servant and alluded to Matthew 20:27. The beginning lesson was to set the tone for God's vision of leadership as seen through the life of Christ. Jesus described leadership from a new perspective. Instead of using people, we are to serve them as leaders. Jesus' purpose was to serve others as He gave His own life for those He served. Using Nehemiah, the researcher connected Nehemiah's leadership style to that of Christ, thereby showing that a true leader has a servant's heart. The true leader will appreciate others and realize that they too must be willing to work and serve in the church.

Nehemiah was used as the foundation for the lessons because chapter one reveals that Nehemiah was all about God's glory and the reputation of God's people. He was not after vain accolades, nor did he offer vain oblations. Nehemiah was a man of prayer and action, ready to serve the Lord in any capacity. The first lesson has two points to leadership: 1) the predicament

²¹⁰Ps 119:105 (NKJV).

of the people of God, and 2) the prayer for the people of God. This first lesson lays the groundwork for the intention of God's leaders for His church. The point that the researcher intended to make is that the leadership of the church must have a servant's heart and have the best interest of the church in mind as we strive to do God's will in the church.

The second lesson was more specific as it dealt with the qualifications and responsibilities of the pastor. The writer used the Scripture found in 1 Timothy 3:1–7 to discuss the qualifications for a pastor and the researcher discussed the meaning of *bishop* as it applies to the pastor. The second point of this lesson emphasized the characteristics of the pastor using 1 Peter 5:1–5 as the biblical basis. The writer pointed out that Peter described several characteristics surrounding good pastors: 1) good pastors realize they are caring for God's people, not their own; 2) they lead out of eagerness to serve, not because they are forced out of obligation; 3) they are concerned for what they can give, not what they can receive, and; 4) they lead by example, not force. The pastor is called to lead, and he should lead by those characteristics. The third lesson in this series analyzed the role of the deacon in the church.

The third lesson looks closely at God's design for deacons: their beginning, purpose, and continued ministry. The writer looks at two prominent deacons in the Scripture, Philip and Stephen. Their examples are given to deacons and church workers alike because of their devotion to the continued work of the church and ministry. Acts 6, Philippians 1, and 1 Timothy 3 were used for this lesson, which discusses the *ministry* of deacons as opposed to a *deacon board* mentality. The writer points out the history of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century *deacon board* mentality and how it began. The writer uses Paul's teaching, "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments

of the world, and not after Christ.”²¹¹ In Colossians 2:8, Paul emphasizes the point that as a church, we want to be careful to always do everything that God has prescribed for us to do. If we are to successfully fulfill our mission and vision, then we must follow God’s precepts for leadership in his church.

The last three lessons on leadership deal with Nehemiah and his ability to persuade others to follow him and become passionate about the work of the Lord. Incorporated into that lesson is the example of Jesus’ ministry and how He called the 12 to follow Him and do the work of His Father. Lesson five centers around the leadership example of Joshua and Moses. The last leadership lesson focuses on the leadership skills and shepherding ability of the Apostle Paul. Having taught these lessons, the researcher feels that the church is on board with the distinction of pastor and deacons. The second part of the implementation process focuses on the Deacon Family Ministry for CFCC.

Phase Two – Deacon Family Ministry

The second part of the plan would incorporate the Deacon Family Ministry Plan by Lifeway Christian Resources. Each deacon would be given a deacon handbook containing: a training unit on the *Deacon Family Ministry Plan* and one copy each of the following: *The Deacon Family Ministry Plan Really Works*; *How Can a Deacon Help You*; Family Information Form; Family Ministry Calendar; Monthly Report; Referral Form; Prayer List Form; tabbed loose-leaf dividers. This would allow the pastor and deacons to work together in the ministry of CFCC rather than focus on business and leadership-type board meetings. The monthly deacon’s

²¹¹ Col 2:8 (KJV).

meetings would be centered around the Deacon Family Ministry, a deacon-led devotion, and prayer.

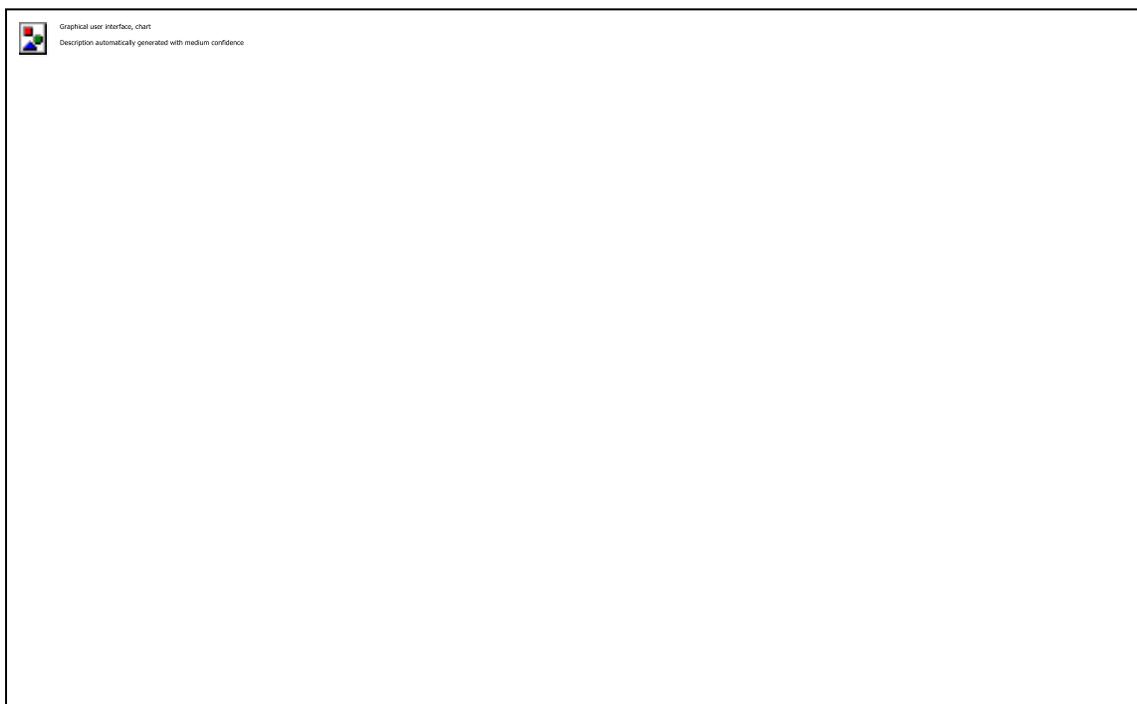


Figure 1. How the Families are Chosen for the DFM Plan. The implementation of the Deacon Family Ministry Plan (DFM) will take the focus of leadership off the deacons and place the focus on ministry. Implementation of this plan would not only change the focus of the deacons but would allow the pastor and deacons to minister to CFCC alongside one another. The DFM plan involves each deacon in a ministerial role in the church. Each deacon is given a certain number of families, to begin with, 3-5 families per deacon. As the church grows, the number of families will grow as well. This number will determine the need for new deacons to be selected. Once the deacon has been assigned their families, they will fill out profile cards on each family.

Information will include birthdays, anniversaries, children, grandchildren, phone numbers, and addresses. The deacon will be able to minister to their families by sending cards, making calls,

checking on them during a prolonged illness or absence, and fielding questions or concerns to be brought to the pastor. Another important part of the DFM is that each family will be prayed for and if there is a need within a particular family, the deacons will discuss it and see how the church can minister to them. The DFM is also a productive way to solve any conflict that may arise within the families.

Periods of reporting to the deacon body build accountability into the deacon group. Regular reporting encourages teamwork. During each meeting of the deacons, the agenda should show a time for reporting. Examples would be reports of visits made, ministry acts performed, prayer requests, deacon committee actions, and other reports. Report times offer opportunities to celebrate God's blessings and to encourage other deacons. The deacons' meetings will discuss the DFM in great detail and focus on needs, prayer requests, and accomplishments or celebrations.

Such a plan ensures that no family in the church fails to receive needed ministry by entrusting every family to the care of a deacon. In Acts, men helped the apostles deliver food to the widows in the church. Depending upon the size of a church, a pastor may not be able to effectively minister to each member's needs. To free the pastor to concentrate on preaching/teaching of the Word, the deacons take a lead role in ministering to these needs. Thereby, making the deacons co-ministers in the church. The deacon, in turn, cares for those families that have been entrusted to him. Some of his duties would involve:

- Educating members about church policy and doctrine.
- Providing guidance and direction on an appropriate Sunday school class or small group ministry.

- Locating the church ministry for which members’ spiritual gifts are most suited.
- Listening to burdens, and in confidence, upholding their needs before the Lord.
- Providing spiritual counsel as deemed necessary.
- Providing encouragement when there is suffering or congratulations when celebrating.
- Caring for members suffering due to illness, job loss, death of a loved one, or other misfortunes.
- Arranging for meals to be delivered to a member recuperating from surgery or illness.
- Providing short-term financial assistance from the Benevolent Fund when a member experiences a financial shortfall due to job loss or disability.



Figure 2. New Deacon Election.

Pat MacMillan says, “There is a propensity for action that often precludes taking the time to plan and agree upon our processes.”²¹² If CFCC is to follow the Great Commission, it must

²¹² Pat MacMillan, *The Performance Factor*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 139.

have well-defined processes to show the church and the community it has clear and definitive purposes with a plan to achieve goals and objectives. MacMillan defines processes as, “‘how’ we go about achieving the ‘what’ in our purpose.”²¹³ The by-laws and constitution state the pastor and current deacons will choose new deacons, men who meet the qualifications of a deacon found in 1 Timothy 3:8–13.²¹⁴ Once a man is chosen, the pastor will confer with the current active deacons and discuss any reasons the prospect should not be nominated. Once the pastor and deacons have met and agreed, the prospect will be brought before the church to be voted upon.

This policy and procedure eliminates any “beauty contests” that may occur in the church. In the past, some deacons have been chosen because of their status in the community, job position, monetary worth, and “seniority” in the church. None of those are biblical reasons for selecting a man to serve as a deacon. The ministry team and deacons consulting and working together to choose a man of good report and “being found blameless”²¹⁵ allows the Holy Spirit to lead in the process. Much prayer and consideration will go into the process, and this must be understood with the current, active deacons.

The DFM plan would guide the pastor and current deacons of CFCC to determine when new deacons should be elected. As new deacons are needed, the pastor will train the deacon-elect according to God’s Word. Any deacon-elect will be trained and taught the responsibilities and expectations of deacons according to the Scripture. Biblical knowledge of deacon responsibilities will be prerequisite for deacon service in CFCC. Training new deacons and making them

²¹³ Ibid., 122.

²¹⁴ 1 Tim 3:8-13 (NKJV).

²¹⁵ 1 Tim 3:10 (KJV).

knowledgeable of their biblical responsibilities will ensure a proper working order and relationship between them and the pastor. The third and final implementation process will take the longest and be the longest-lasting. Monthly pastor and chairman of deacons' meetings must take place to keep the lines of communication open and ensure a spiritual continuity between the pastor and deacons.

Phase Three – Pastor and Deacon Chair Meetings

The last part of the plan involves the pastor and chairman of deacons. The pastor and deacon chairman should meet regularly to establish a working relationship, team-building opportunities, and focus on co-ministry in the church. Phase 3 will take the longest but will be the most productive solution to the problem of pastor-deacon power struggles.

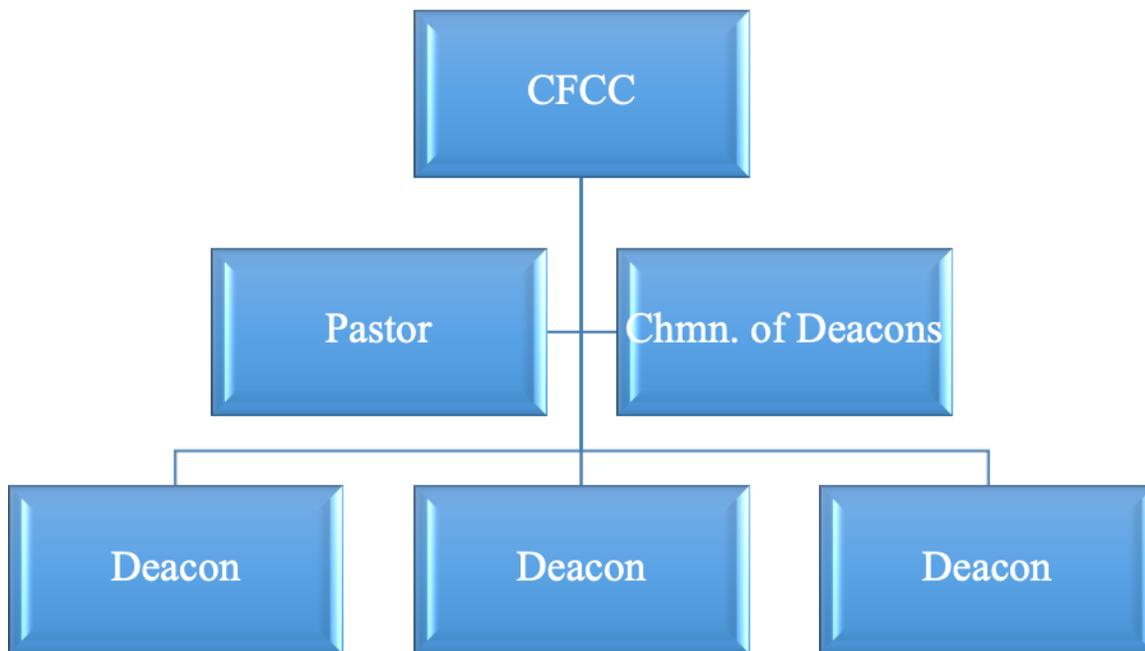


Figure 3. CFCC Pastor, Deacon, Church Relationship. This phase of the intervention plan will take the longest and perhaps will be the most productive in finding a solution to the addressed problem. The pastor and chairman of deacons will have regular informal meetings. The pastor

should emphasize the need for the deacons and the chairman to help in this critical area of ministry within the church. Emphasis will be placed on Acts 6:3 where seven men were chosen to help the Apostles in the physical ministry of the church to pray and teach. These meetings should take place at least monthly or bi-monthly. These meetings should open the door to discuss the agenda for the next deacons' meeting, create an open and honest dialogue between the pastor and chairman of deacons to discuss concerns and discuss the most successful ways to promote and propel the mission and vision of the church.

Effective deacon ministry depends on how well individual deacons relate to one another and to other organizations in the church. These relationships are important if team spirit in the church is to develop. Building these relationships will be a key component of the pastor/chairman meetings each month. Discussing the team of deacons and resolving issues will be key to producing solutions. It should be discussed that the pastor and deacons are working simultaneously for the Kingdom of Christ and that they both want what is the best for CFCC. Even if there is a feeling of animosity between the two men, that can be worked out by keeping the lines of communication open during these regular meetings.

The pastor and chairman should work together to complete the agenda for the next deacons' meeting. They should work together to choose deacon families and implement a "deacon on call" program. The pastor and chairman should consult one another on ministry opportunities that arise within the church. They should stay away from budgetary and financial discussions and keep the focus on ministry. They should also discuss Sunday School, Discipleship, VBS, and student and children's ministries.

Chapter 4

Results

The Questionnaire

The researcher surveyed 15 members of CFCC in the areas of pastor/deacon responsibilities, pastor/deacon relationships, pastor/deacon expectations, and pastor/deacon reconciliation. The questionnaire consisted of six questions, focusing on topics such as the expectations the church has on the pastor and deacons, the biblical roles of the pastor and deacons, and how deacons and pastors can reconcile their differences (see Appendix E). The questions and answers gave the researcher an idea of the biblical knowledge of the participants and helped steer the six lessons presented to the church.

The questionnaire was designed to gather information regarding the offices of deacon and pastor, the importance of the roles, and who is the principal leader of the church, according to God's design. While the roles vary from one congregation to another in Southern Baptist churches across America, the focus of the research is on the Bible's definition of a deacon and pastor and their specific roles in the church.

The questionnaire was crafted by asking common questions based upon the qualifications of a deacon and pastor found in 1 Timothy 3 and Acts 6. The Apostle Paul gave young Timothy several qualifications for deacons, who were to function as servant-ministers in the local church. He also gave Timothy qualifications for calling pastors to lead local churches as he knew that more and more churches would form as Christianity spread. These new churches would need leaders and pastors to teach, preach, and lead. Paul, knowing the high calling and demand of the ministry, described key character qualities that a deacon and pastor must manifest in his lifestyle.

The church was to select men of sterling character to lead them, as exemplified by the qualifications. Likewise, Luke provides an example of deacons for the modern-day church to follow in Acts. Luke gives the examples of Stephen and Philip as deacons because God expects their sacrificial service of pastors and deacons.

The research questions were designed to ask members of the church their observations concerning each question. The survey was designed to elicit valuable information from church members about the value of the deacon ministry and the strength of pastoral leadership. The data compiled from the applied research will empower pastors and deacons to recognize the need to identify men who have exquisite character qualities and a heart to serve. This research will educate members and leaders and empower pastors to lead as shepherds and deacons to minister as servants and be a help, not a hindrance, to the pastor.

The Role of Pastors and Deacons

The first question of the pre-assessment questionnaire was “Does the Bible establish a particular overseer for the church? If so, is that the deacons, pastor, or another office?” 94% of those questioned responded that the pastor was the overseer of the church and that 1 Peter 5:2 was talking about the pastor of the church being the shepherd of the flock. Only 6% indicated that they believed the pastor and deacons had the responsibility to oversee the church, but that the pastor was the shepherd. This answer indicates that the overwhelming majority of the church believes the pastor is the shepherd of the church and he is to lead the church as a shepherd would lead the flock.

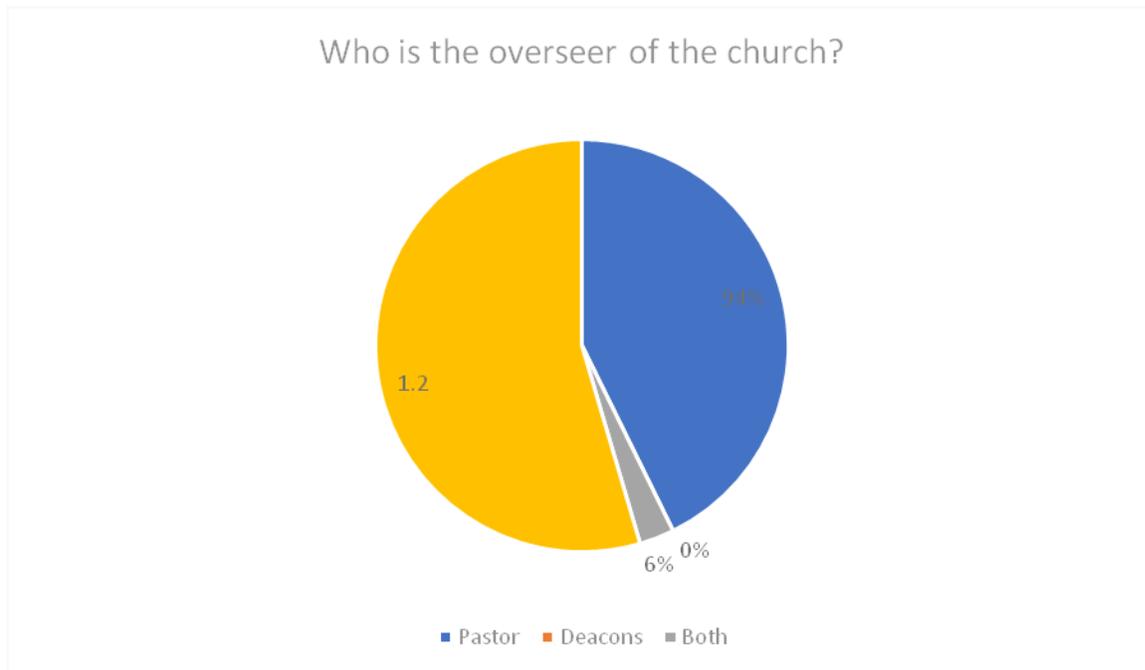


Figure 4. Who is Viewed as the Overseer?

The second question pertained to deacons: “According to Acts 6, why were the first 7 men chosen, and how does that serve as a model for the pastor/deacon relationship?” The overwhelming response to this question was that the deacons were called to serve the church and support the Apostles/pastors so that they could spend time in prayer and preaching. All participants responded with the same answer to the first part of this question. The answers from the second part of the question were mixed, but all of the responses had the same meaning. About 80% of those asked replied with a similar answer for the second part of the question. Eighty percent answered that the deacons and pastor should be like-minded and have a servant’s heart for ministry. However, they finished the answer by stating the pastor is the leader of the church and the deacons are there to work alongside the pastor and follow his leadership.

The Pastor and Deacon's Expectations

The question was asked, "Are the church expectations for the pastor and deacons different from biblical expectations? If so, how?" The researcher asked this question because a church will, at times, provide a job description for the pastor. The expectations of the church are outlined in the job description and sometimes those expectations are based more upon traditional expectations rather than biblical expectations for the pastor. The responses received were telling. Nearly half the participants said that the expectations for the pastor were not in line with biblical expectations. Those participants believed that the expectations of the pastor should be more about preaching, teaching, and, leading and less about visiting, calling, and being at every meeting and church function. Those same respondents believed that the expectations placed upon the deacons were not biblical. They said most people in church expected the deacons to be involved in decision-making instead of serving, which is the opposite of the biblical expectations.

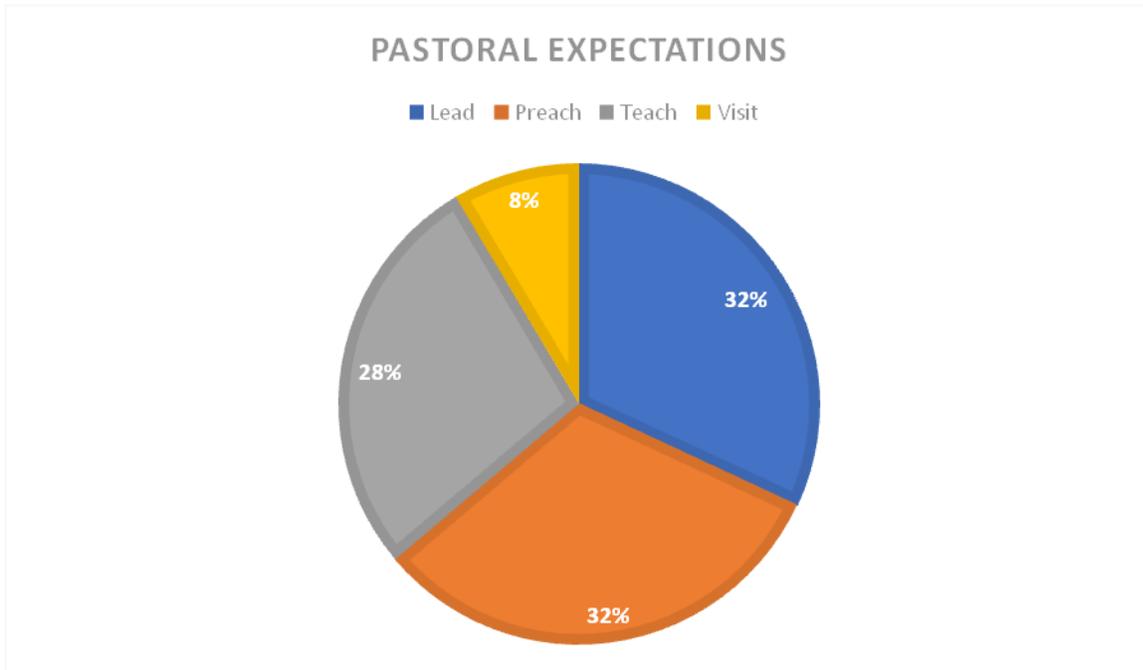


Figure 5. Pastoral Expectations from the Church

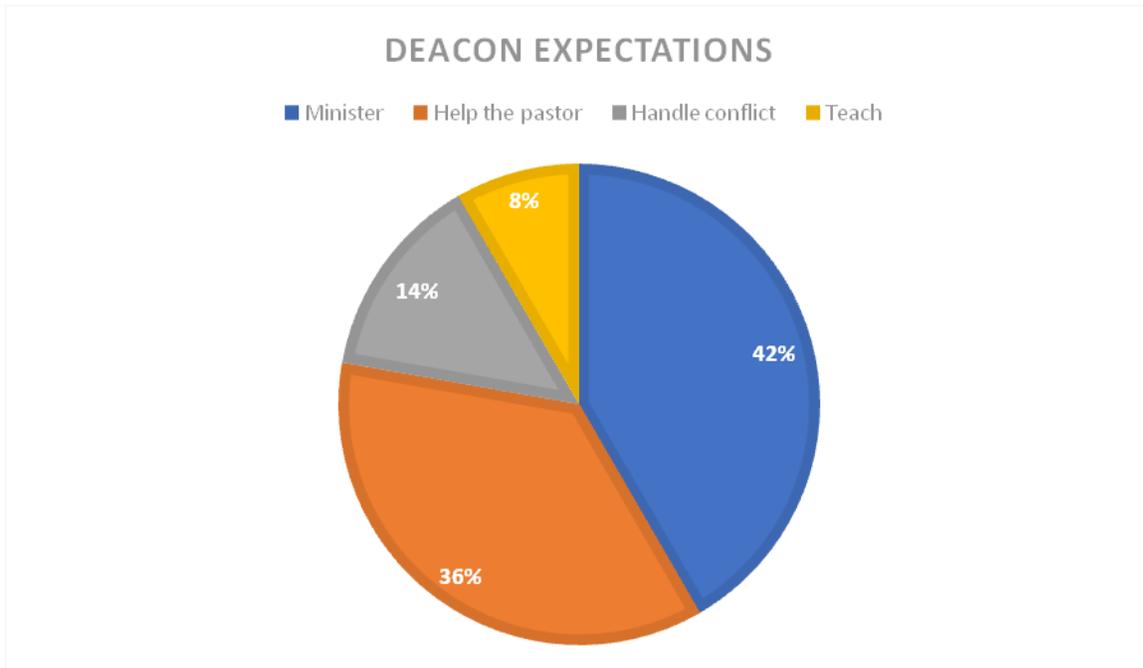


Figure 6. Deacon Expectations from the Church

The other half of the participants reported they had experienced bad deacons and pastors in the past. Luckily, this researcher was not included in that number, and they were careful to make that point (whether that was a true response or not is between them and God). The reported answers were all almost the same in that they described deacons and pastors as more concerned about themselves than the church. The researcher was reminded of the shepherds mentioned in Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Knowing that pastors and deacons are not perfect, the researcher understands the importance of being rooted and grounded in the Word of God. Because of their imperfection, deacons, pastors, and church members need to be fully vetted and immersed in the principles and practices of leadership as set forth in God's Word.

Pastor/Deacon Disagreements

One would think that two spiritual leaders in the church could follow the precepts of Scripture and be able to, first, agree, but, secondly, forgive one another when they cannot agree. However, most of the power struggles that have occurred between pastors and deacons have never or will never be resolved. Jesus described what those in the church who could not agree should do: "if thy bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift."²¹⁶ To say that it is important for pastors and deacons to get along would be an understatement.

This section asks only two questions, and both of them pertain to pastors and deacons reconciling for the sake of the church, thereby moving the church forward and fulfilling the mission and vision of the church. The first question was if the participants had experienced

²¹⁶ Matt 5:23–24 (KJV).

conflict in the church. A resounding 100% said yes. Most participants elaborated on at least one such experience, and all of the experiences led to either a church split or the pastor's resignation.

The next question was simple: "What is the most common problem between pastors and deacons that you have witnessed or experienced?" All of the participants answered "a power struggle." The main problem was not theological. It had nothing to do with spiritual matters. It was not related to church growth or a lack thereof. The problem was not even related to that of a moral failure from the pastor, deacons, or staff members. The main problem that arose between deacons and pastors was power. As one participant answered, one wanting power over the other, and they did not specify which one was which. The answer to this question gives the most compelling evidence for this project. If 100% of the participants have experienced church conflict, and 100% of the same participants have experienced a power struggle between pastors and deacons, this researcher concludes that this issue is a problem.

The Survey

Once the researcher finished compiling the data from the questionnaire and prepared the six-week leadership series, a post-assessment survey (see Appendix F) was issued to the participants. The same policies and procedures applied to the survey as did the questionnaire. The participants were all 18 years of age and active members of CFCC. They were all given initial consent forms and knew the material covered would remain anonymous. They could elect to stop at any time and their information would be destroyed. The participants knew that their information would be stored on a password-protected computer and only the researcher had the password.

This survey consists of 10 questions, and functions to review the questionnaire. The survey was given after the six-week leadership series was taught. The study followed this order to see if there were any discrepancies or changes in the answers before and after the Bible studies. The researcher asked similar questions to see if there would be any differences in the participants' answers. The researcher focuses on five questions in this section of Chapter 4.

Question two was, "Are the deacons given biblical authority to run the church?" This question correlates with those questions regarding pastor/deacon roles and pastor/deacon relationships found on the pre-assessment questionnaire. The participants answered this question 100% no. Most of the participants said that no one was given the right to run the church. Most qualified their answers by stating the pastor was called to lead or shepherd the church, but not to run the church. The significance of the answers tells the researcher that the members of CFCC grasp the notion that God calls the pastor to lead and the deacons to serve. It speaks to the fact that the church members are spiritually mature enough to realize that no one should be given the authority to *run the church*. This information is refreshing as CFCC moves forward because it affirms the high level of spiritual maturity and biblical knowledge that the congregation has gained through this project. It also communicates to the researcher that the congregation has the wherewithal to move the church forward in a positive, God-like manner following His precepts for church leadership.

Question five, "To whom do the deacons answer?" had a mixture of answers. About eight of the fifteen participants thought the deacons were to answer to the church. Seven of those participants answered, "*The deacons are to follow the leadership of the pastor and as such, they are to answer to the pastor.*" While the researcher does not agree with that answer, almost half

of the participants believe the deacons should answer to the pastor. Two of the participants did not answer the question. It is unknown why they did not feel comfortable answering the question.

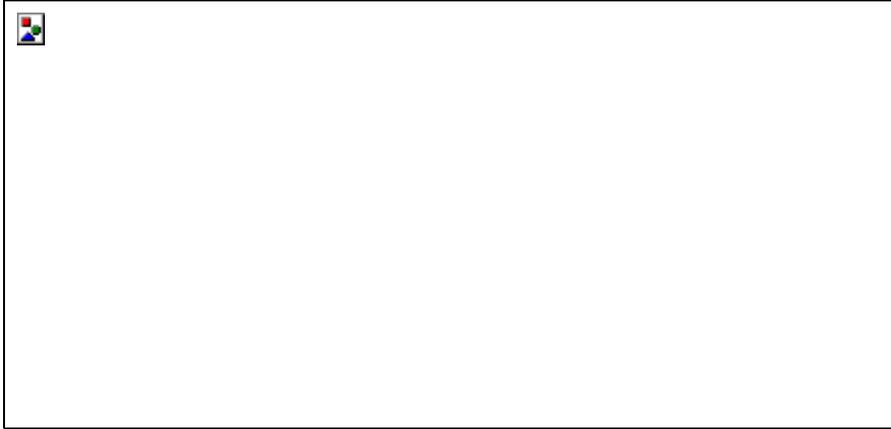


Figure 7. To Whom Do the Deacons Answer?

Question seven was, “Have you ever known of a situation where the deacons ‘ran the pastor off?’” The responses ranged from “*Yes, I have witnessed the deacons running the pastor off, to no, they didn’t actually run the pastor off, but they made it so hard for the pastor to stay that he eventually resigned.*” This researcher has witnessed this phenomenon in Southern Baptist churches and has been a victim of this same behavior. While the deacon does not blatantly ask the pastor to leave, the environment is changed by the deacon(s) to force a resignation from the pastor. Some have used tactics of politicking, idle gossip, the rumor mill, the by-laws and constitution of the church, and sadly, other staff members to create an environment of hostility and disharmony. This researcher has experienced those same tactics personally, even during this project.

Question nine supplied the researcher with several different answers. Few answers were the same. However, all of the answers were thought out and deliberate. The question was,

“According to the Bible, is the church to be treated as a business, the pastor the CEO and the deacons a decision-making board?” The researcher felt this question was important because of the questions discussed in the earlier questionnaire. The project researched theories of churches that assumed the model of a business and the deacons filling the role of a board of directors rather than servants. If the deacons are seen in this regard, the pastor must then assume the role of CEO and answer to the deacons (board of directors). However, that is not the case with the answers received from those who participated.

Five of the 15 participants answered that the church was not a business. They went on to say that there were aspects of the church that could be considered a business, but it was still a church. The pastor is a shepherd and not a CEO. Similarly, the deacons were servants, not a board of directors. Those five explained that committees and teams were formed by the church to take care of the “business side” of the church.

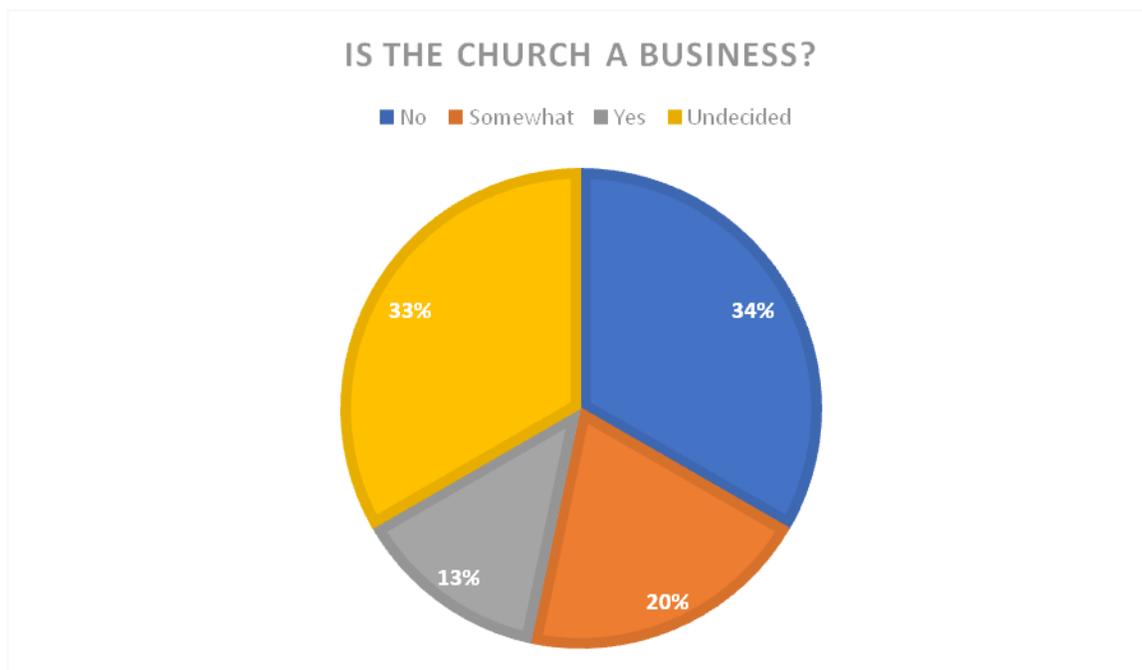


Figure 8. Is the Church A Business?

Those participants who answered yes did so with the thought of business meetings, exchanging money, or making business-like decisions. Those who answered yes were quick to verify that the pastor was not the CEO nor the deacons a board of directors. Those who answered somewhat said the pastor was sort of like the boss, but the deacons helped him and followed the pastor's lead.

The researcher feels that even though the participants provided biblically correct answers pertaining to the pastor and deacons, there are still some areas of the church with which the members struggle. Perhaps the researcher should introduce a six-week study pertaining to the church and the vision and mission. True, aspects of the church can seem business-like, and certain areas of business must be cared for. Jesus would not have had a treasurer if his ministry had not called for times of business. However, it is how the business is dealt with that must be the important consideration. Teams, committees, Trustees should be given the authority to perform acts of business under the leadership of the pastor and communicated with the church body.

Conclusion

The data compiled from the *pre-assessment* questionnaire shows the researcher two things. First, the members of CFCC have had many troubling experiences in the churches that they have attended in the past. Because of those experiences, many of them are mature spiritually and have researched the topics of pastors and deacons. Many of the members of CFCC have proven through this project that they are knowledgeable of biblical qualifications for pastors and deacons.

The data tells the researcher that the members of CFCC are willing to follow the biblical qualifications for pastors and deacons as well as follow God's instructions for His New Testament church. There were few traditional presuppositions given concerning pastors and deacons, and that is refreshing to this researcher. If God's people are willing to follow His commands, the pastor and deacons will be more apt to agree together in unity, minister together as servants, and help the church fulfill the Great Commission.

The information gathered from the *post-assessment* survey reveals to the researcher that the membership gleaned critical aspects from the six-week leadership lessons and that they are ready to move forward as God's church with His design. While most of the participants agree that pastors are shepherds and deacons are servants, they still have a traditional appeal to the business side of the church. Some participants felt the need to comment that business meetings should still be monthly and not quarterly. This is a traditional view of business meetings within a Southern Baptist church and not one that will be easily removed. One begs the questions then, is this the hill on which to die?

Chapter 5

Conclusion

The problem that this project addressed was the pastor and deacon power struggles that exist in Southern Baptist churches, specifically CFCC. There is a desperate need to create unity and to strive for peace in the Body of Christ. It is imperative that the church know the biblical roles of pastor and deacon, but more importantly, it is imperative for those men who fill those positions to know their biblical role, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, submit to God's role for them. This biblical knowledge and leadership of the Holy Spirit will serve as a proactive measure in preventing strife and conflict within the church. If the leadership is unified and determined to work together, CFCC will become a powerful church through their witness to the lost, ministry to the hurting, and growth as a family. God desires for the church to be unified, as Jesus said, "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand."²¹⁷ (Matt 12:25).

With the implementation of this project, Christ First Community Church will now have a sure foundation upon which to build. If the leadership of the church is grounded in the biblical rudiments of the responsibilities of pastors and deacons, then the church will be able to proceed with God's mission for His church. However, the pastor and deacons not only need to know their place biblically, but they also need to be open to the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Knowing the biblical role is only part of the solution; *applying* the biblical principles is the final part of the solution. Knowing and doing God's will must go together in unity if any progress is to be made in the church.

²¹⁷Matt 12:25 (NKJV).

The purpose of this project was not to examine every Southern Baptist church exhaustively, but rather, to find a solution to the power struggles at Christ First Community. This project has created a process whereby church members, deacons, and the pastor can learn biblical principles of leadership, apply those principles by creating a process of choosing new deacons and shifting the deacons into more of a servant role. The six-part lesson on leadership will provide a framework for the church and a guide for the church to follow. The expectations for both pastor and deacons have been given, and those expectations are from God's own vision for His church. Moving the deacons into a servant role by creating the DFM will be a long-lasting, evolving ministry that will be refined and sharpened year-after-year. As the church continues to grow, more deacons will be chosen and the new deacons will know their role at CFCC is a servant role, not a dictator or power broker. Jesus spent approximately three years building leaders for the establishment of the Church.²¹⁸ The problem addressed by this project is that the church has stopped developing leaders for the church, in particular, the role of deacons. The implementation of this project will begin developing those deacons into servants and move away from the ideology of a *deacon board* by teaching the biblical standards of deacons, the responsibilities of the deacons, and why being servants in the church is so important to the pastor and to the church body. Likewise, pastors need to be shepherds who lovingly lead the flock and feed them the Word of God.

Bill Hull writes, "Pastors are not important to the secular community, but in the kingdom of God, they are crucial. They are to pay attention to what God is doing and point it out to their

²¹⁸Edward L. Smither, *Augustine as Mentor: A Model for Preparing Spiritual Leaders* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2008), 4.

congregation.”²¹⁹ Pastors, too, must learn their specific roles and expectations as found in God’s Word. The power struggles that exist in Southern Baptist churches are frequently due to pastors and deacons not knowing their *place* in the church. While pastors lead the church, they are not leading on their own, nor should they. It is not their church to lead, and it is not their will in which to lead it. Jesus gave His life for the church and each pastor should be surrendered to Christ’s leadership for the flock.²²⁰ (Eph 5:25). In his book *Shrink*, Tim Suttle said, “We need a leadership narrative built not on the American vision of success but on Jesus’ vision of the kingdom.”²²¹ When so many pastors are focused on *outcome-driven* results, it must be considered that pastors are called and chosen by God to shepherd His people. Not in a dogmatic, dictatorial, deviant way, but rather, in a kind, caring, and cautious way.

The writer learned from the project that leaders who serve well, are those who make sure the needs of others are being met physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. In a new church, or established church alike, meeting the needs of others is imperative. For any church to become a fruitful and vibrant church, its leaders must follow the method and manner of Jesus who exhibited the heart of a humble leader. Jesus gave the disciples an object lesson in humility to rebuke their jealousy, pride, and strife exhibited during the last meal they had together before He was crucified. The lesson of the example applies to all the relations of believers with one another. It is one that is continually needed. As noted in this project, humble leaders are those who have the heart to serve others.

²¹⁹ Bill Hull, *The Christian Leaders* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 79.

²²⁰Eph 5:25 (NKJV).

²²¹Tim Suttle, *Shrink: Faithful Ministry in a Church-Growth Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 29.

The Apostle Paul describes the humility of Jesus and exhorts his readers to have the mind (or attitude) of Christ.²²² Jesus humbled Himself to take on the form of a man and the attitude of a servant, which led Him to die the death of a criminal on behalf of those who needed to be saved. While Paul presents Jesus' example of selfless humility as the model for all Christians, it is especially important for Christian leaders. Dongho Cho asserts, "when the leader adopts the attitude of humility displayed by the Lord, it will affect not only his actions, but his motivations: Humility means that the leader does not want to have the greatest power to make decisions but intends to share the leadership for the sake of the ministry and invests in making many leaders in the church."²²³ From the writer's personal experience, as a pastor with 26 years of experience, this same mindset should especially be displayed in the heart of leaders in a church, Kenneth Wuest explains this idiom Paul uses in his exhortation:

The words "let this mind be" are the translation of one Greek word which means, "to have understanding, to be wise, to direct one's mind to a thing, to seek or strive for." The word seems always to keep in view the direction which thought of a practical kind takes. The expression could be translated in several ways, each of which while holding to the main idea, yet brings out a slightly different shade of meaning. The entirety of the thought, in the exhortation seems to be that of urging the Philippians to emulate in their own lives, the distinctive virtues of the Lord Jesus spoken of in 2:2-4. It is the habitual direction of our Lord's mind with reference to self that is in the apostle's thinking, an attitude of humility and self-abnegation for the benefit of others, which should be true also of the Philippians.²²⁴

In the church, the act of humility is vital, in both word and deed. The pastor and deacons must display humility as they serve others. The writer gleaned from this project that the pastor must remind his deacons of the importance of serving with humility. This can be accomplished

²²² Phil 2:1-11 (NKJV).

²²³ Dongho Cho, "Leadership Principles and Applications for Establishing a Christ Centered Church in South Korea" (D.Min. diss., Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, 2016), 123.

²²⁴ Kenneth S. Wuest, *Wuest's Word Studies from the Greek New Testament: For the English Reader*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997).

through deacons meetings, Bible studies, sermon series, and choosing new deacons. A church will not be able to fulfill its vision and mission if its leadership does not lead with love, humility, simplicity, and service to others.

The writer explored the history of deacon ministry, the biblical qualifications for a deacon, the relationship of the deacon and the pastor, and how a deacon is to serve within the local church. There is a recognition that the appointment of the seven to assist the Apostles establishes a precedent for the office of deacon.²²⁵ (Acts 6:2-3). It also suggests that the purpose for which the seven were appointed is the closest thing Scripture gives to a job description for deacons. The research of the project demonstrates, however, that throughout the history of deacon ministry, deacons have taken on various roles and duties not found in the Acts 6 passage in their service to the church.

Research Results

The questionnaire and survey used by the research during this project helped the researcher gain new insight into the fellowship of CFCC. The results yielded answers that the researcher has found helpful moving forward. Because of the schism that has so adversely affected the church, this project has helped the church mend and gain insight into the biblical model of church leadership. Without this project, would the membership have been as ready to receive the Word of God concerning spiritual leadership? Would they have been as ready to make commitments to move forward with this new knowledge of biblical leadership as applied to deacons and pastors?

²²⁵Acts 6:2-3 (NKJV).

The writer found three main findings in the results. First, the church is unified in its willingness to move forward in understanding the biblical roles of deacon and pastors. The church has made it clear that they are on board with the biblical model of pastor and deacons. They have accepted that the pastor should be the shepherd and lead the church in a Spirit-driven way. They have also accepted the deacon's role as a servant-ministry to and for the church. The writer feels that while the church was experiencing this last power struggle, this project has helped them understand the necessity of being biblically grounded in every facet of the church and, perhaps most importantly, especially in church leadership.

If CFCC is to continue to grow and fulfill the mission that God has given, there must be coherence between the deacons, pastor, and membership. Not only must there be constant spiritual growth and teaching, but there must also be constant leadership by the Holy Spirit. CFCC membership understands that if the Holy Spirit is to lead, then everything must be performed in God's Will and way. The church is His, and He has a program, policy, and procedure in place for every area of the church.

The two deacons that remained after the last power struggle agree with their new roles as servants and performing a servant ministry in the church. After the six-week leadership series, the two deacons have more than realized their roles in the church are as servants and not directors. They have met with this writer and proclaimed that they knew, biblically, the pastor was the shepherd, and they were chosen to be servants. However, as tradition dictated, they acted more like business leaders than as servants. In their defense, one of the reasons given for their business role was because the former church was without a pastor quite frequently. As one deacon examined further, he realized that the short tenure of the pastors was probably because

they did not operate biblically, as far as the leadership in the church was concerned. If the current deacons realize the negative effects of not following God-given guidelines, they will hopefully be much more emboldened to follow the correct, biblical guidelines for the church. The writer hopes that every church member would realize the blessings that come from following God's Will!

Thirdly, CFCC is ready to embark upon the new Deacon Family Ministry along with the deacons. The prospect of having deacons calling, visiting, and welcoming them has excited the membership. Likewise, the deacons are equally as excited because of their involvement in the lives of the people, rather than the business of the church. This is the part of the project that will be the longest lasting and most productive for CFCC. The writer has seen the DFM work in previous churches and if the deacons are encouraged to move into a servant role, as Scripture teaches, then they will be less likely to fall back into the business role. Subsequently, this servant role will help CFCC when the time comes for new deacons to be chosen. If the current deacons are enveloping the idea of being servants in the church, they, along with the pastor, will be more likely to choose spirit-filled, servant-minded men to fill this position. This is extremely important for the future of the church to remain biblically minded and spiritually focused. To remain focused on God's Will is necessary for the church to deliver its message, fulfill its mission, and accomplish its ministry.

Further Research

It would be interesting to perform further research on Southern Baptist churches utilizing the DFM to find out if there are any differences in the way deacons are perceived. A history of the church would have to be researched and pastor tenure would have to be studied to see if there

are any correlations between pastor tenure and deacon perception. For example, if deacons are seen as servants rather than a board of directors, does this affect the tenure of the pastor? Do the deacons still act as a decision-making body even though they are filling a servant role?

Pastoral leadership could also be researched. If the pastor implements the proposals made in this project, would he say that the church is easier to lead, or has it remained relatively the same? Analyzing the sermon series would be another consideration to study. Would it benefit the church and the leadership to have the pastor conduct a leadership sermon series each quarter, annually, or only at a time when the church needs to add new deacons?

According to Pastor Kenny Lewis, First Baptist Church, Brownsville, Texas, his deacons are his dearest friends. He believes this closeness is due in large part to their church's acceptance of Scriptural authority concerning the roles of church officers. Jim Steenland, Chairman of Deacons, says this harmony did not always exist and when changes were made toward doing ministry, some men left. Thus, Pastor Lewis believes God's Word must be consistently taught to churches or conflict will continue. He states:

My counsel and plea to every pastor would be to give himself to prayer and to the ministry of the Word and to insist on Scripture being the absolute authority—if he does this, it will work...If he will just be honest and open, and admit where he is failing and hurting, and if he will really major on developing men, really concentrate on discipling them, he will receive more benefit, encouragement and strength than in any other thing he does.²²⁶

One element of the research that was not addressed was whether scriptural passages support women serving as deacons. While there is some debate over the issue, the writer finds this could develop into a new area of research that will equip churches with what the Bible has to say.

²²⁶ Kenny Lewis, interview by Waylan Payne, Brownsville, TX, September 20, 1995.

Another element that was not addressed that could be developed into further research, was that this project did not include the development of a deacon manual. The writer found several deacon manuals during his research; however, only a few dissertations or thesis projects focus on the subject of pastor-deacon relationships. The writer believes this area of research will empower church leaders and deacons with further tools to strengthen the well-established churches and new churches alike.

While the focus of this project was a new church, the writer believes that this project can be utilized for well-established churches as well. The writer believes this project can be utilized for empowering, equipping, and exciting pastors and deacons by providing them with a tool that will explain the biblical call and expectation for deacons and pastors as they serve the local church.

The writer has been reminded that not only must the deacon and pastor focus on the Lord Jesus as their primary relationship but so must all church members. For a church to survive, all church members must allow the vertical relationship with God to remain the top priority. Without this vertical relationship, the candidate for deacon, pastor, and church members alike will discover their relationships misshapen horizontally. The principal concern for church leaders should be their walk with God. If the church members do not have a strong, growing vertical relationship with the Father, then the church is asking for trouble.

All church members are to work diligently to promote and protect harmony in the church. In a spirit of humility, service, cooperation, and unity, church members are to focus their attention upon one another's needs and the needs of the larger community of which they are a part. Elwell and Beitzel assert,

The NT presents servanthood in the sense of ministry or service as a mark of the whole church—that is, as normative for all disciples (Mt 20:26–28; Lk 22:26, 27). Jesus’ teaching on the final judgment equates ministry with feeding the hungry, welcoming strangers, clothing the naked, and visiting the sick and imprisoned (Mt 25:31–46). The entire NT emphasizes compassionate care for individuals’ physical and spiritual needs as well as the giving of one’s self to meeting those needs. Such service is ultimately a ministry to Christ himself (Mt 25:45).²²⁷

Nothing preserves the spirit of unity in the church like the involvement of all its members in the fulfillment of the mission of the church. However, conflicts do occur in the church. When the early church experienced turmoil, the leaders acted swiftly to solve the underlying problem. Seven men of good report and spiritually mature were appointed to ensure that all the widows were treated equally, that harmony was restored in the church, and the result was continued growth in numbers as even many priests trusted Jesus as their Messiah²²⁸. Likewise, today, when divisive issues and concerns arise, church members must act to preserve church unity. What is true for all believers is especially so for a deacon and pastor. They, as servants of the congregation, are to stand up for what is right and ensure harmony is maintained and the church’s mission is advanced. A deacon must remind the members that the measure of Jesus’ followers is love for one another, evidenced by harmony and peace in the church. Led by the Holy Spirit, the deacons and pastor can not only remind the congregation of the importance of loving one another and esteeming one another in kindness, they can model it by showing this love and kindness to one another.

This writer is reminded that a deacon or a deacon candidate should serve under the leadership and spiritual direction of the pastor. Biblically, it cannot work any other way. A

²²⁷ Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 589.

²²⁸ Acts 6:1–7 (NKJV).

deacon serves as an extension of the ministry of the pastor, so he must be loyal to the pastor. A deacon is to support the pastor through ongoing prayer. When the deacon openly prays for the pastor during a worship service or meetings, the members will notice that the deacon is concerned about his pastor. The pastor must openly pray for the deacons. He must pray with the deacons and their families, and they must bear witness with one another's spirit. The author of Hebrews delivers this exhortation, "Let brotherly love continue."²²⁹ Phil Stevenson adds,

Our lifestyle communicates a message to those we lead. Leaders must go beyond simply teaching lessons; they must be examples of what they teach. Leaders reproduce who they are. As one adage puts it, "The only thing that walks back from a tomb with the mourners and refuses to be buried is character." What we say will be forgotten, but what we are will survive us.²³⁰

Jesus knew that the church would be led by leaders. He chose and trained those who would be the first leaders of His church. He taught them the importance of leading others with a servant's heart. The same lessons they were taught by Jesus apply to the church today. In the account of the Last Supper, Jesus does something unexpected:

Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so, he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.²³¹

Jesus humbled himself and served His disciples. Afterward, Jesus emphasized this lesson:

"Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. "You call me Teacher and Lord, and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his

²²⁹ Heb 13:1 (NKJV).

²³⁰ Phil Stevenson, *5 Things Anyone Can Do to Lead Effectively, You Can!* (Indianapolis, IN: WPH, 2007), 53.

²³¹ John 13:3–5 (NIV).

master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.”²³²

Jesus taught that those who lead others in His name must do it as He demonstrated, with humility and love. Jesus demonstrated how to lead and disciple others effectively. The model Jesus presented is the perfect model that should be imitated by well-established churches and by new churches alike. Life transformation and the eternal destinies of people depend on the redemptive message entrusted to the local church. Servant leaders who strive to lead others like Jesus will make a change in the lives of others. Pastors must lead as the Shepherd led. Deacons must serve as the Master served. The church cannot and will not flourish under any other leadership model.

Without the pastor taking time to train his deacons and teach biblical truths found in God’s Word concerning the church and its leaders, the church will experience power struggles and other avoidable adverse situations. Deacons trained as servants will help the pastor handle problems that arise in the growth of the church as did the seven men in Acts 6. Spirit-led and spirit-filled deacons will support the pastor and strengthen the church to obey the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:36–40) and fulfill the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19–20).

²³² John 13:12–16 (NIV).

Jason Sweeton

R. Peter Mason

Re: IRB Application - IRB-FY21-22-314 Applying Biblical Teaching to Resolve Power Struggles Between the Pastor and Deacons in a Southern Baptist Church

Dear Jason Sweeton and R. Peter Mason,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study does not classify as human subjects research. This means you may begin your project with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your IRB application.

Decision: No Human Subjects Research

Explanation: Your study is not considered human subjects research for the following reason:

(2) Your project will consist of quality improvement activities, which are not “designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge” according to 45 CFR 46. 102(l).

Please note that this decision only applies to your current application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued non-human subjects research status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

Also, although you are welcome to use our recruitment and consent templates, you are not required to do so. If you choose to use our documents, please replace the word *research* with the word *project* throughout both documents.

If you have any questions about this determination or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your application’s status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

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APPENDIX A

Deacon Family Ministry Plan

WHAT IS A DEACON FAMILY MINISTRY PLAN?

It is a plan through which the deacons can join the pastor in ministering to the physical, spiritual and emotional needs of each church member and family. The church families are divided into groups that are assigned to our active deacons, who will minister to them as the need arises.²³³

Benefits of the plan:

1. The entire church is strengthened.
2. Families will be reminded that the church cares for them.
3. Trust in the deacons will grow.
4. Families will discuss their problems with the deacon and benefit from his ministry.
5. Various ministry programs of the church will be interpreted more clearly.
6. Fellowship of the church is strengthened.
7. It will lighten the load of the pastor.
8. Deacons will discover the real meaning of the servant role.²³⁴

²³³The writer adopted and adapted wording from the “*Deacon Family Ministry Plan*,” First Baptist Church, Union MO, (accessed December 18, 2018), <http://www.fbcunion.org/DeaconsFamilyList>.

²³⁴Rolen C. Baily, *Training for Servanthood: A Basic Training Guide for Baptist Deacons*, (accessed December 21, 2018), <https://bgav.org/church/deacon/>.

THE DEACON MINISTRY PLAN IS DIVIDED INTO EIGHT (8) MINISTRY AREAS:

1. Hospital Visitation Ministry: provides encouragement and support for those who are hospitalized. This ministry goes beyond visitations and ensures that the needs at home are addressed.
2. Bereavement Ministry: provides comfort and support during times of sorrow and grief to individuals and families who have experienced the death of a friend or family member.
3. Homebound Help ministry: provides care for those in the congregation experiencing illness or, due to reasons beyond their control, confined to home.
4. New Members: provides information to new members concerning the church's covenant, bylaws, and doctrine.
5. Communications Ministry: Follow up (via phone contact) with first-time visitors to provide information concerning the church and to see if there are any needs to be met to provide ministry to the family.
6. Nursing Home Ministry: visits, prays for, administers the Lord's Supper, and encourages members of the church living in nursing homes.
7. Benevolence and Crisis Ministry: We provide aid to those in need through our benevolence fund. All requests for aid are kept confidential. Cornerstone's benevolence fund is supported by contributions from its members. One (1) designated deacon will serve/be available as the contact person for needs that may arise with church member(s) and be responsible to contact two (2) other deacons to determine the amount to be given and then contact the church secretary to distribute monies.
8. The designated contact deacon will inform the pastor so that he is aware of the need that was met by the church.

How can a deacon help you? Your deacon wants to help in specific ways.

- Visitation: the first visit will be to get acquainted with you and your family. Your deacon will visit throughout the year if someone in your family is in the hospital or you have sorrow or sickness in the home.

- Witnessing to unsaved family members: one of your deacon's chief concerns is that every member of your family knows Christ as Savior.
- Rejoicing with you and your family: your deacon will share your joy when you celebrate important events or accomplishments in your life.
- Being a friend: as your deacon listens to your troubles and concerns, you will know someone cares.
- Giving support in times of crisis: sometimes your deacon can help you through the crisis by listening and giving support. At other times, your deacon will know someone or a community agency that can help.
- Answering questions about your faith or about church.
- Your deacon will watch for opportunities for you to use the talents, skills, and abilities God has given you.
- Praying for you and with you: believing that you are important and believing in the power of prayer, your deacon will join with the pastor and other deacons in praying for you and each member of your family.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF A DEACON

In accordance with the meaning of the word in the New Testament, deacons are to recognize their roles as ministering servants of the church. They are church members whose character and qualifications meet those that are specified in Timothy 3:8–13, Acts 6:1–6, and Titus 1:6–9.

The deacon body shall serve under the leadership of the pastor and assist him by performing pastoral duties to free him for the ministry of the Word and other pastoral duties. The deacons will support and work with the pastor as follows:

- To lead the church in achievement of its mission
- To minister to believers and unbelievers
- To care for the church's members and others in the community
- To demonstrate consistent stewardship through the deacon's example in tithing to the church
- To demonstrate Christ-like consecration, loyalty, prayer support, and faithfulness to the local church program
- To visit the sick, needy, and indifferent of the church
- To encourage and strengthen new converts and the spiritually weak
- To be available at the worship services for assisting the pastor in receiving new members and counseling those who make new decisions
- To serve the Lord's Supper
- To serve on a Deacon Ministry Team

SHARED MINISTRY CONCEPTS

1. Deacons minister with others in the church:
 - a. Understand your role in relationship to that of other partners in ministry. What is your main role?
 - b. All partners are equal in responsibility, though not in gifts and skills.
 - c. You are to be a role-model leader in your ministry.
 - d. Remember, you are responsible to God and the congregation who selected you as a deacon.

2. Deacons minister with the pastor:
 - a. The pastor is first among equal partners as the church leader.
 - b. Deacons work as a support team alongside the pastor in ministry, to the churched and unchurched.
 - c. Deacons minister to their pastor and his family.
 - d. Deacons are visibly supportive of the pastor.
 - e. Deacons work cooperatively with their pastor in worship opportunities.

DUTIES OF THE CHAIRMAN OF THE DEACON BOARD:

The duties will include the following, regardless of the size of the church or the number of deacons:

1. Serve with humility and readiness to lead by example for other deacons and church family to recognize that he is a Spirit-filled deacon.
2. Assist the pastor in planning, conducting, and evaluating deacons' meetings.

3. Assist the pastor to provide deacons with adequate training and resources for their work.
4. Guide deacons in organizing and conducting a ministry to families in the church.
5. Serve as a voice to all church committees/council to properly interpret the service of a deacon(s) in relation to the total work of the church.
6. Participate in all deacon work, including ministering to a group of families in the deacon family ministry program.
7. Report when deemed necessary to the church on the work of the deacons.
8. Assist the pastor as deemed necessary in conducting and evaluating the work of another deacon(s).
9. Be responsible so that the Lord's Supper and Baptism are ready when scheduled by the pastor.
10. Give guidance to the pastoral ministries of the church when it is without a pastor.
11. Be ready and available to assist the pastor for any other service as deemed necessary.

APPENDIX B

Permission Form

January, 2022

Mr. Mack Whitehead
Deacon
Christ First Community Church
20 Webster Court
Loudon, TN 37774

Dear Mr. Whitehead,

As a graduate student in the Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry degree. The title of my research project is *Applying Biblical Teaching to Resolve Power Struggles Between the Pastor and Deacons in a Southern Baptist Church*. The purpose of this DMIN action research project is to enable Christ First Community Church to find unity in the church leadership, specifically the pastor and deacons.

I am writing to request your permission to contact members of your deacons, Ministry team, and Christ First Community Church members and to invite them to participate in my research study.

Participants will be asked to complete the attached survey/contact me to schedule an interview/etc. Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, respond by email to pastorj1976@yahoo.com. A permission letter document is attached for your convenience.

Sincerely,

Jason O. Sweeton
Pastor, Christ First Community Church

APPENDIX C

Recruitment Email

Dear Joe:

As a graduate student in the School of Divinity at Liberty University, [I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry degree. The purpose of my research is to understand the biblical knowledge of the church concerning pastors and deacons and the roles they play within the church, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be 18 years of age or older and be active members of Christ First Community Church. Participants, if willing, will be asked to complete a questionnaire (15–20 minutes), and be interviewed (10–15 minutes). Participation will be completely anonymous, and no personal, identifying information will be collected.

To participate, please contact me at 865-318-2574 for more information/to schedule an interview.

A consent document is enclosed with the questionnaire. The consent document contains additional information about my research. After you have read the consent form, please click the link to proceed to the survey. Doing so will indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to take part in the survey.

Sincerely,

Jason O. Sweeton
865-318-2574/pastorj1976@yahoo.com

APPENDIX D

Consent Letter

Title of the Project: Applying Biblical Teaching to Resolve Power Struggles Between the Pastor and Deacons in a Southern Baptist Church.

Principal Investigator: Jason Sweeton, DMIN graduate student, pastor of Christ First Community Church. The Rawlings School of Divinity, Liberty University.

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study
--

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be 18 years of age and a member of CFCC. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please read this form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?
--

The purpose of the study is to enable Christ First Community Church to find unity in the church leadership, specifically the pastor and deacons. This leadership relationship is beneficial for the church and it is imperative to find this balance.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

1. First, complete an online survey taking 15–20 minutes.
2. Second, fill out a questionnaire taking 15–20 minutes.
3. Additional tasks will include interviews taking approximately 30–40 minutes.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

[Option 1: Direct Benefits] The direct benefits participants should expect to receive from taking part in this study are a better understanding of the roles deacons and the pastor have within the church. Another benefit would include a Deacon Family Ministry where every member would be served by a deacon of the church.

Benefits to society include a unified church where the leadership works together as a team to carry out the church's mission and work toward accomplishing the church's vision. A unified church is a powerful witness in the community, lifting Jesus up in worship, witness, and work.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?
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The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks encountered in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?
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The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher[s] will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be anonymous. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher[s] will have access to these recordings.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or Christ First Community Church. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any questions or withdraw at any time.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please exit the survey and close your internet browser. Your responses will not be recorded or included in the study.

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher[s] at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher[s] conducting this study is [REDACTED]. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at 865-318-2574 and/or [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor [REDACTED].

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher[s], **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

Before agreeing to be part of the research, please be sure that you understand what the study is about. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. If you have any questions about the study later, you can contact the researcher using the information provided above.

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

APPENDIX E

Pre-Assessment Questionnaire

Question 1 will focus on the roles of pastors and deacons.

1. Does the Bible establish a particular overseer for the church? If so, would that be the deacons, pastor, or another such office?

Questions 2–3 will focus on the pastor/deacon relationship.

2. According to Acts 6, why were the first 7 men chosen and how does that serve as a model for the pastor/deacon relationship?
3. The Apostle Peter talks about *shepherding the flock* and *exercising oversight* (1 Peter 5:2). Is that speaking of the pastor? Deacons? Both?

Question 4 will focus on the pastor/deacon's responsibilities.

4. Are the church expectations for the pastor and deacons different from biblical expectations? If so, how?

Questions 5–6 focus on pastor/deacon reconciliation.

5. Have past problems between a pastor and deacons effected the church in a negative way?
6. What is the most common problem between pastors and deacons that you have witnessed or experienced?

APPENDIX F

Post Assessment Survey

1. Do conflicts between pastors and deacons effect the church spiritually?
2. Are the deacons given biblical authority to run the church?
3. What is the biblical teaching regarding the leadership of the church?
4. According to the Scripture, to whom does the pastor answer?
5. To whom do the deacons answer?
6. Do the current by-laws have any policies pertaining to the deacons?
7. Have you ever known of a situation where the deacons “ran the pastor off?”
8. How often are pastor/deacon conflicts about theological matters?
9. According to the Bible, is the church to be treated as a business, the pastor the CEO and the deacons a decision-making board?
10. Do you think of the pastor as a shepherd?

APPENDIX G

Interview Questions

1. How long have you been actively involved in church?
2. In your church experience, what were the roles of the pastor and deacons?
3. Have you ever witnessed a conflict between the pastor and deacons? If so, tell about that experience.
4. In your opinion, according to the Scripture, what should the pastor and deacons be doing at CFCC?
5. Why is spiritual maturity important in the list of qualifications for pastors and deacons?