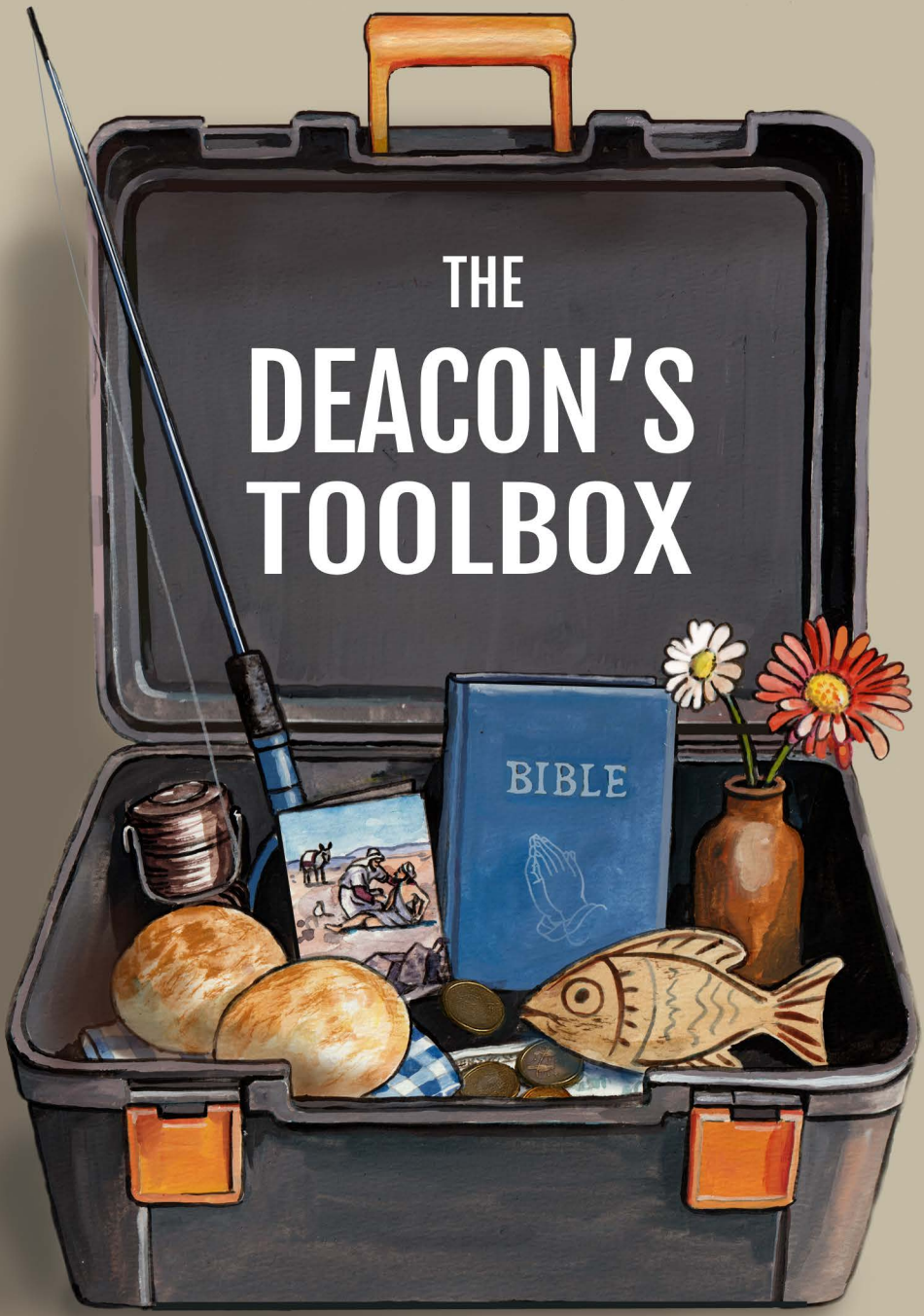


Diaconal Committee of the ICRC

The Deacon's Toolbox

Diaconal Committee (ed.)

International Conference of Reformed Churches

2026

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF REFORMED CHURCHES

The Deacon's Toolbox

2026

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Foreword

The calling of a deacon is one of deep compassion, wisdom, and faithful service. Every visit, every conversation, and every act of mercy is an opportunity to reflect Christ's love to those in need. Yet, to be a deacon can often feel overwhelming. How do you navigate the complexities of poverty, addiction, and grief from a sound Biblical perspective? While there are many other resources available, ***The Deacon's Toolbox*** **was created to provide quick, practical guidance for moments when deacons need direction**: Are you preparing for a visit? How do you find the right approach? Where do you find relevant Scripture passages? What words of encouragement can you offer?

The Deacon's Toolbox is not just another publication on diaconal ministry, it is an accessible reference designed to equip deacons with biblical wisdom and practical insights for real-life encounters.
The challenges of those we serve are ever-changing, and the way we minister must remain both rooted in Scripture and adaptable to the needs before us. May this resource strengthen your hands, clarify your calling, and above all, draw you deeper into the work of mercy that reflects the heart of Christ!

The Deacon's Toolbox was written by the members of the Diaconal Committee of the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC): Aaron Bae, Chris Boersema, Pieter Boon, Gé Drayer, Lawr Khawbung, David Nakhla, and Rick Postma.

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Part I

The Call and Office of a Deacon

1. What is a Deacon?

In the Old Testament, the Lord impressed upon his people the obligation to show mercy to the needy. God's covenant people were called to show mercy, especially toward the sick, widows, orphans, lonely, poor, foreigners, and strangers (Deut. 16:11,14; 24:19-21; 26:12-13; 27:19).

The Lord Jesus Christ came into the world to serve (Mark 10:45). In his mercy he fed the hungry, healed the sick, and showed compassion to the afflicted (Matt. 4:23-24). Through his Holy Spirit he instructs and equips his church to follow him (John 13:15; Matt. 20:26; 23:11; Luke 6:36). The ministry of mercy, as assigned to the deacons, proceeds from this love of our Savior.

The office of deacon is a new office Christ gave to his church (Acts 6:1-7). Deacons should be "*men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom*". The task of the deacon is not limited to the collection and distribution of funds and maintaining church property, nor is it a stepping-stone toward eldership.

Through the diaconal office, Christ ensures that mutual care is given in the face of challenges like illness, loneliness, poverty, and old age. Deacons encourage the whole congregation to reach out to those afflicted. Deacons are responsible to see to the good progress of this service of charity in the church. They acquaint themselves with existing needs and difficulties and exhort the members of Christ's body to show mercy. They gather and manage the offerings and distribute them in Christ's name, according to need.
The scope of the deacon's ministry is not limited to the church. The apostle Paul wrote to the churches in Galatia: "*let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith*." (Gal. 6:10) Deacons are also called to help equip the church to fulfill this ministry in the world. With this ministry of love, Christians are called to labor for the coming of Christ's kingdom in this still broken world (Rom. 12:9-21).

2. Qualifications for a Deacon

The first and most important qualification of a deacon is that, although he may feel inadequate and although he is a sinner, he is a true and trusted believer, relying on help from God in everything! As a true and trusted believer, he (see 1 Tim. 3:8-13):

- is to be worthy of respect, sincere, realistic and practical;
- is serious and not double-tongued, but honest;
- is not given to much wine, but self-controlled;
- is not pursuing dishonest gain or being greedy;
- is holding to the faith with a clear conscience; he is one who practices what he preaches;
- is the husband of (not more than) one wife and rules his children and his own household well;
- if he has a wife, she is also serious, sober and faithful in all things and not a slanderer;
- willing to share what he has received.

What Paul wrote to Titus, also applies to deacons: As God's steward, he "must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined." (Titus 1:7-8)

3. Duties of a Deacon

The duties of a deacon vary according to local circumstances, but it is advisable to have, if possible, the following different roles or profiles present in your diaconate:

- **A man of prayer**: He prays with and for those to whom he ministers.
- **A watchman**: He is vigilant in identifying both needs and the God-given gifts and resources to meet those needs. He seeks out ways to comfort and restore.
- **A coordinator**: He promotes and facilitates cooperation where necessary, especially in times of need or disaster.
- **A bridge-builder**: He knows how to establish, maintain, and build contacts and connect people.
- **A protector**: He upholds and protects the vulnerable, and bears burdens.
- **A helper**: He shows compassion, offers a listening ear, looks for solutions for those in need, and is quick to help.
- **A trainer and motivator**: He trains, encourages, and motivates the congregation in its diaconal ministry in the church and the world.
- **A voice, a spokesman or even an accuser**: He acts as the one who speaks for and walks besides those who are voiceless, defenseless, or oppressed by society and/or the government.

It is not impossible to have all these roles combined in one person, but we know our gifts and talents are limited – including those of us who are deacons! Therefore, look for diversity in your diaconate and seek men who are gifted with one or two of these roles.

4. The Relationship Between Deacons and Elders

Elders and deacons, though distinct in primary function, are intrinsically related and must work together to build up the church, both in Word and deed. While the elders' primary responsibility is to provide spiritual oversight and leadership through governance, preaching, teaching, and visits, the deacons minister to the same congregation by showing mercy and meeting practical needs.

Diaconal ministry relies on the support of elders, especially in spiritual matters. Members often turn to elders for prayer and counsel, while deacons are especially attentive to physical and practical needs. As deacons carry out their work, they also serve as the elders' eyes and ears, helping to identify members who may need spiritual care. Similarly, elders in their work might identify temporal needs that require the attention of the deacons. By communicating and working together in this way, elders and deacons can respond more effectively, ensuring the congregation is well cared for both physically and spiritually. While elders and deacons have different roles, their shared goal is to strengthen the whole body of Christ.

Following is a list of concepts to consider in this regard:

- **The Division of Labor**: Deacons are given the ministry of mercy and the elders oversee the ministry of the Word. Having clear role definitions and division of labor enables the effectiveness of the work.
- **Word and Deed**: The ministry of mercy ought to always be accompanied with God's Word, ensuring that the deeds of the church reflect the mercy of Christ and bring him glory.
- **Accountability**: Deacons serve under the oversight of the elders and are accountable to them, as God's overseers who are responsible for the doctrine, direction, and discipline of the church and thus humbly submit to the elders' spiritual leadership and vision.
- **Partnership vs. Competition**: Since the focus of diaconal

ministry is to bring glory to God, there is no place for viewing the other office as a competitor, but rather as a partner.

- **Differing Gifts**: God gives different gifts within his church, so that the complementary use of gifts such as teaching, service, and administration might together strengthen his church.
- **Communication and Cooperation**: Clear and regular communication is crucial to create and maintain a healthy elder-deacon relationship and to provide a timely response to needs.
- **Collaboration**: By understanding and respecting their distinct biblical roles, elders and deacons can work together most effectively to serve the congregation's spiritual and practical needs.

The following Bible verses are helpful on this topic.

- **Acts 6:1-7** - See here the clear definition of roles, the division of labor and the delegation of the ministry of mercy to the deacons.
- **Rom. 12:1-21 -** Notice how different gifts are used to glorify God. The gift of teaching provides biblical instruction and counsel, and equips the congregation for ministry. The gift of hospitality is used to show warmth and to create a welcoming atmosphere.
- 1 Cor. 12:1-31; Eph. 4:11-16; 1 Tim. 3; James 5:13-16

5. Reflecting Christ in the Community

In the Heidelberg Catechism (Lord's Day 12, answer 32), believers profess that they are called Christians, sharing in Christ's anointing to be prophets, priests and kings. In this life, they represent Christ as such. This is in line with the mission that the Father set for his Son. In Scripture God reveals himself as the One who "so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). The Father gave his Son to die on the cross and "through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross" (Col. 1:20). Before his ascension, Jesus commissioned his disciples: "As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you" (John 20:21).

Presenting Christ is therefore not a hobby for enthusiasts, but, rather, it is the reason why God's church exists. Our worship of him also entails reaching out to a world in need. The church has no agenda of its own but rather is an instrument in God's hands, to go "into all the world and proclaim the Gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:15-16). God's loving interference with the fallen world becomes visible when the church goes out into the world with both deed and Word.

If we consider that Jesus left the comfort of heaven to share in the brokenness of the world, then a church cannot lock itself up in its own safe environment but ought to go into the fallen and sinful world. Christ requires the church to go out, discovering the needs of and establishing relationships with its neighbors, praying for and with them that God will reconcile them with himself and their neighbors, through the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ, and will restore their lives in every respect, under the guidance of his Holy Spirit.

The local neighborhood, city, and country must constantly be on the prayer list of the church. As priests we intercede and ask God to lead fallen mankind back to him. It is for the deacons to decide where the

church can reach out to its neighborhood in accordance with the gifts within the congregation.

Since it is our calling to reflect Christ in the community, we should be willing, available, and alert to where he wants to deploy us. In this endeavor, prayer brings peace. It is not our work, but we can believe that God is at work and using us! He will show us the path forward.

The Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 12, gives reference to important Bible verses relevant to this topic. Also very helpful are the following:

- **1 Cor. 12:12-27** - As members of his body, we represent him also.
- **Matt. 10:32** - Our Lord wants us to be his mouth, hands, and feet.
- **Eph. 6:10-20** - As this is not an easy task, we may stand strong with the whole armor of God.

6. Attending to the Needy

According to Scripture, from the very beginning of creation the Lord gave us all the task to be his stewards, to take care of his creation – whether human beings, animals, or plants (Gen. 1 & 2). This is also the essence of the diaconal ministry. In the spirit of Genesis, our Lord Jesus teaches us to be of service to others.

Caring for our fellow human beings who have no helper has always been the task of Christ's church. Deacons have played a crucial role in this regard since Acts 6. They first worked within the church but secondly took to care for others outside the church too, as far back as the New Testament times!

Over the centuries, the method of care has changed again and again, but the target group has always and everywhere continued to be those people who have no helper. This care comes in material and/or financial form, but it can also be in the form of advice, education, and instruction. It should always be accompanied by encouragement and comfort from God's Word.

The nature of diaconal work will often depend on the cultural, economic, and political circumstances and the society in which one lives. Criteria for these are therefore difficult to specify as a one-size-fits-all. So, identifying the problems you may encounter and their roots will have to be determined with wisdom and discernment, led by the criteria found in Acts 4: "no one lacked anything."

Matthew 25 teaches us that our caring for others involves much more than merely financial or material support. The classical seven works of mercy emanate from this chapter of Scripture: 1. feeding the hungry, 2. quenching the thirsty, 3. clothing the naked, 4. housing the strangers, 5. visiting the sick, 6. visiting the prisoners, and 7. burying the dead.

7. Promoting the Communion of the Saints

God created mankind to have a blessed relationship with him and with his neighbor. This beautiful design was broken with the fall as described in Genesis 3. However, it remained God's desire to have a relationship with those he chose to be saved through faith in Christ and to become beloved children of God (John 1:12).

This same faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ is what unites all Christians as one body (1 Cor. 12), as we profess in the Apostles Creed: "I believe in the holy catholic church, the communion of the saints …" In the Old Testament, God's people were commanded to care for one another but especially for the needy among them (Deut. 24:19-21; 26:12). This remains our command even more so in the New Testament (1 John 3:16). This blessed communion of the saints was especially visible when Christ fulfilled his promise to send the Holy Spirit (John 14:16-17). The church was living out a beautiful unity and selflessness that exemplified Christ's love for us (Acts 4:32-35).

However, we live in a broken world and are members of a church made up of redeemed sinners, who can be negligent and are in need of correction, guidance, and encouragement to obey and to live out the second great commandment (Matt. 22:39). This is where the New Testament church received a great blessing with the office of deacon. Christ gave deacons to his church to encourage and stimulate the whole body of believers to love and care for each other (Rom. 12; Heb. 10:24). Deacons lead in this by their own example, imitating Christ in showing sacrificial love (Phil. 2:1-18).

Every Lord's Day the believers gather to worship God. However, they are no less united from Monday to Saturday, making our gifts and talents useful. To that end, deacons play a vital role in identifying not only the needs, but also the gifts and talents in the church. They encourage the church to live out the communion of saints in many different ways.

8. Diaconal Meetings

It is customary and advised that local diaconal committees will hold formal meetings regularly. While much liberty is possible within the principles that have been laid out regarding diaconal roles, following is a suggestion for the structure of such meetings, based on the experience of successful committees in ICRC churches:

Proposed Agenda

1) Scripture Reading and Convening Prayer
2) Adoption of Agenda
3) Approval of Previous Minutes
4) Diaconal Development (reading a book, watching a video, etc.)
5) Report of Treasurer
6) Discussion of Immediate Diaconal Needs (listed by name)
7) Discussion of Long-term Needs (list by name)
8) Discussion of Mercy Projects
9) Other Matters (possibly periodically discussing diaconal policies)
10) New Matters
11) Communication – Matters to be reported to elders and/or congregation.
12) Set Date of Next Meeting (typically next month)
13) Adjournment with Prayer

Notes:

- Typical length: 1-2 hours
- Typical frequency: once a month

Part II

Toolbox for Home Visits

1. **Introduction to Home Visits**

It is widely known that pastors and elders should visit the flock in their homes as shepherds and overseers. This has been true since the time of the Apostle Paul (Acts 20:20). So, the question may be asked: Should deacons also make home visits? If so, who should they visit?

To answer these questions, we should keep in mind the previously discussed questions, "What is the office of deacon?" and "Who is a deacon, and what does he do?" Therefore, having in view that, in summary, a deacon is to attend to all those in need and to encourage the entire congregation to serve one another, we are able to see how beneficial it is for deacons to visit all of the church members.

When the deacons visit, it is Christ's representatives literally entering the family's home to bring relief, comfort and love, which is the gospel message. By visiting the homes, deacons can better see and sense how each family is living as Christians; whether in peace, in order, in abundance, in sadness, in need, or maybe even in chaos and disorder.

This too is a good reason why deacons should visit all members of the congregation, and not only those who are visibly in need. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12, we are one body, we each have gifts to be shared with one another, and each of us needs one another. Therefore, we all have needs, no matter how mature we are in our faith or how materially blessed we may be. Part of the deacons' role is to get to know the gifts, talents, and material blessings that each person has to share for the good of others.

This is best accomplished by visiting all members in their homes. These home visits to all members can be organized in two- to three-year cycles. Deacons should prepare in advance of any home visit by being aware of what they intend to accomplish. Choose a Bible text to read. If you are aware of a type of need, make use of the appropriate theme in this booklet as a guide. If the visit is not in response to a specific known

need, choose a text such as Acts 4:32-35, Rom. 12:1-16, 1 Cor. 12, or Heb. 13:1-16.

Some other general recommendations include the following:

- Be punctual.
- Dress as a representative of Christ and not as a casual visitor to a friend's house.
- Move the conversation objectively to the formality of the visit and do not be derailed by chatting about other matters in life.
- Begin and end with prayer.
- Be ready to listen more than to speak, unless those being visited are mostly seeking comfort or guidance.
- Do not be afraid of saying "we will think about this and get back to you soon".
- Always seek to speak and act as you believe Christ would, since you serve as his hands and feet.

2. Communion of the Saints

2.a Hospitality

1. Why should a deacon be involved?

It is human nature to feel most comfortable in our own home. But, Christians are called to love one another, the second great commandment. In Acts 6, the new deacons promoted this by ensuring all were cared for. Hospitality is a biblical mandate.

2. Points of attention:

Hospitality in essence means to show love to others (whether in conversation, in meeting together anywhere, or in having them over to your home). Hospitality is also a way to witness to those who don't know the gospel. Those who are able to be hospitable in their homes should be attentive to having a wide variety of brothers and sisters in their home over the years, as opposed to only a selective group.

3. Bible passages:

- **Rom. 12:9-13** Contribute to needs of saints … show hospitality.
- **Heb. 13:1-2** "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers …"
- **1 Pet. 4:8-10** "Show hospitality … without grumbling."
- Acts 2:42-47; Rom. 16:1-2

4. Possible questions to ask:

How have you experienced Christ's love for you? How have you been able to show this unconditional love to your fellow brothers and sisters? What God-given gifts do you have that you can use in showing hospitality to others? What are the challenges you face in showing hospitality, or in having others over to your home? Are you at peace with everyone in your church, or do you have matters that need to be resolved with someone?

5. Prayer Points:

- Thank the Lord for loving us by his grace alone.
- Ask that the Lord would show the gifts that you certainly have.
- May hindrances and challenges to showing hospitality be overcome.
- May barriers be broken to showing love to all brothers and sisters.
- May the Lord be glorified in all efforts to show hospitality to others.

2.b. Sharing Gifts

1. Why should a deacon be involved?
God's Word says that we have all been given spiritual gifts that must be used for building up the church. But often we are negligent in giving of our time and using our gifts to show love to one another. Deacons must encourage church members in this regard.

2. Points of attention:
- Do not assume that people are not using their gifts.
- Encourage people to do more if they can.
- Point out additional gifts that people may not have recognized (be prepared with specific examples).
- Be sure to emphasize that all this is for the love of Christ and the glory of God (not us).
- Remind them that it is more blessed to give than to receive.

3. Bible passages:
- **Acts 4:32-37** "those who believed were of one heart and soul, and … they had everything in common."
- Ex. 35:20-29; Luke 10:25-37; Acts 2:42-47
- Acts 20:33-35; 1 Cor. 12; 2 Cor. 8:1-7

4. Possible questions to ask:
- What gifts has the Lord given you?
- Would you be willing to help others?
- Are there more ways in which the church, or specific members, could be of help?
- How have you been blessed by others sharing their gifts with you?
- Have you experienced the blessing of giving?

5. Prayer Points:
- Thank the Lord for the body of members that make up the church.
- Thank the Lord for gifts given to each member.
- Ask that opportunities to serve be made evident.
- Pray for all the members of the church to grow in using their gifts for the good of the body.

2.c. Visiting the Wealthy

1. Why should a deacon be involved?
God has chosen to bless some Christians with material wealth in his sovereignty and for his glory. However, the wealthy may need encouragement, and even instruction, in blessing others not only with their wealth but also with other spiritual gifts and their time. All are stewards of that with which they have been entrusted.
2. Points of attention:
Do not assume either that a wealthy person is not tithing or that he is giving more than his tithes to the Kingdom work. Challenge the wealthy to use all their God-given gifts to serve others, including their time. If there is no evidence of unfaithfulness or lack of humility, do not make the main topic of the visit material wealth, but focus on the gospel and loving one another for the glory of God.
3. Bible passages:
- **1 Tim. 6:17-19** "As for the rich … charge them … to set their hopes … on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy."
- Ex. 35:20-29; Prov. 3:27-28; Prov. 11:4; Prov. 11:28
- Luke 16:10-13; Rom. 12:9-16 2 Cor. 8:1-7; 2 Cor. 9:6-15; Phil. 4:10-20
4. Possible questions to ask:
- Is their trust and hope entirely in Jesus Christ (and not in anything else).
- Are they faithful in their tithing and offerings.
- In which ways can the deacons or other church members help them.
- Are there ways in which they can bless others in the church and beyond (and be ready to respond!).
5. Prayer Points:
- Praise the Lord for his faithfulness to all.
- Ask the Lord to give us wisdom and willingness in using all his gifts (material and spiritual) for the good of God's people.
- Ask that God would keep us humble despite any life situation and in awe of his greatness.

3. Financial Principles

3.a Stewardship

1. Why should a deacon be involved?

Since all that we have belongs to God (Ps. 24:1), we are called to be faithful stewards. The deacons' first calling was to make sure everyone in the church was being taken care of (Acts 6:1-7). This also involves making sure that all church members are faithful stewards of the blessings they have for the well-being of others (1 John 3:17).

2. Points of attention:

Focus on a life of gratitude for all the Lord has done for us, especially in sending his only Son as our Savior. Do not assume that someone with little income is unable to bless others in many different ways. However, also do not assume that they are being faithful. Do not assume that someone with material wealth is, or is not, faithful with their tithing or in sharing with others. Be sure to also consider the faithful stewardship of time and God-given talents.

3. Bible passages:

- **Prov. 3:9-10** "Honor the LORD with your wealth …"
- **1 Pet. 4:10** "As each has received a gift, use it to serve …"
- Ps. 24:1; Matt. 6:1-4; Matt. 25:14-30; Luke 16:10-13
- 2 Cor. 9:6-15; Col. 3:23-24

4. Possible questions to ask:

- Do you acknowledge that all we have comes from the Lord, and that we are called to be faithful stewards of those gifts?
- How have you been able to keep the "Two great commandments" (Matt. 22:36-40) with what the Lord has entrusted to you? How can you do more?
- Are there areas in the use of your time, treasures, or talents where you might not be glorifying God?

5. Prayer Points:

- Give all glory to God, the Creator and Sustainer of life.
- Express gratitude for the Lord's countless merciful blessings.
- Ask for strength and guidance to be more faithful stewards of our time, material wealth and talents for the good of all and to the glory of the Lord.

3.b. Joy of Thanksgiving

1. Why should a deacon be involved?
It is human nature to be ungrateful, and even as Christians we may take life's blessings for granted. While we have all been blessed with different amounts of material wealth and life circumstances, we have also been blessed in Christ far beyond any merit, and we should live a life of joy and thanksgiving to our Lord and Savior. Deacons do well to point this out.

2. Points of attention:
The topic "joy of thanksgiving" may be the focus of a visit in different circumstances: a) someone may have been greatly blessed in some way; or, b) someone may need encouragement in being "down" in life or discouraged in some circumstance. Be sure to listen first so as to understand what the person is going through (be it joy or sadness).

3. Bible passages:
- **Prov. 17:22** "a joyful heart is good medicine"
- **Phil. 4:4-7** "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice."
- Neh. 8:10; Ps. 100:1-2; Prov. 17:22; John 16:22-24; Rom. 15:13
- Phil. 4:4-7; James 1:2-4; 1 Pet. 1:8-9

4. Possible questions to ask:
- How do you see the Lord's love and care for you in this time of joy?
- How can you share this joy with others in our church family?
- How can you show gratitude to the Lord at this time?
- While life is indeed broken and very difficult, are you able to see any hope in Christ that could bring you some joy?
- How can we help you to relieve your sadness/pain?

5. Prayer Points:
- Give thanks for the joy in Christ, that surpasses everything.
- Praise the Lord for His goodness and point to blessings for which we can rejoice.
- Ask what you should pray for (connect to their feelings and hear what they think are their greatest needs).
- Ask the Lord to give clarity about how to move forward.

3.c. Danger of Love of Money

1. Why should a deacon be involved?

Deacons should be involved because both the abundance and lack of financial means are important aspects of their ministry and because money and material possessions are some of the idols of our age.

2. Points of attention:

- Recognize that life can be costly and that there are commitments that need to be met (be prepared to help).
- Finding joy in a lifestyle that is beyond our means is a form of idolatry (worshiping a created thing rather than the Creator, Rom. 1:25). Man cannot serve both God and money (Matt. 6:24).
- Remind that working on the Lord's Day when not an act of necessity or mercy is idolatry.
- Encourage the pursuit of investments that give eternal dividends.
- Remind that God provides wealth to some so that they will share generously (1 Tim. 6:17-19) and do good works (be prepared to share ideas).

3. Bible passages:

- **1 Tim. 6:6-10** "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil."
- **Matt. 6:19-20, 24** "Do not … store treasures … moth ... destroy."
- Prov. 30:7-9; Heb. 13:5; Prov. 28:6; 1 John 5:21

4. Possible questions to ask:

- How is money a challenge in your life?
- What does the Bible teach about money and possessions?
- How are you placing God and your family before your own hobbies?
- How could you use your money/possessions to show your love to God and to your neighbor?

5. Prayer Points:

Pray that God would teach us how to use the gifts he gives in a way that doesn't lead us astray, but rather to provide for our families, to give to God and our neighbor, and to enjoy God's gifts without letting them replace our joy in God; and that he would increase in us a love for heavenly treasures (Mt 6:20).

3.d. Contentment

1. Why should a deacon be involved?
Discontentment impacts the spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being of many in our day. It can easily lead to sins of thought, word and/or deed. The tenth commandment highlights the sin of coveting or discontentment with what the Lord has given us.
2. Points of attention:
- Confess that we all wrestle with discontentment at times.
- Discontentment negatively impacts how we live before the Lord and our neighbors and should not be tolerated in our lives.
- Discuss how our providential Lord is both the provider and withholder of all that we have.
- The desire for a better job, better housing, or a more faithful church (to give a few examples) may reflect legitimate desires related to family or personal needs. Come alongside and offer suggestions.
- Discuss how the Lord has been a blessing in their lives, stimulating thankfulness.

3. Bible passages:
- **1 Tim. 6:6-7** "But godliness with contentment is great gain…"
- **Heb. 13:5** "… be content with what you have…"
- Prov. 30:7-9; Ex. 20:17; Phil. 4:11-13; Matt. 6:25-26; 1 Cor. 7:17
- Josh. 7; 2 Cor. 12:10; Matt. 6:33; Matt. 5:6, 2 Kings 5:20-27

4. Possible questions to ask:
Could you tell me about yourself and your life? How has the Lord blessed you along the way? How are you wrestling with contentment? Are there steps that you could take that are consistent with God's Word that would improve your contentment? Are you willing to accept that it may be God's will to not address your desires in the way you hope? What gifts has God given you?
5. Prayer Points:
To find ways to use God-given gifts to glorify him and serve those around us. To be content with where the Lord leads our lives.
To be able to clearly see the many blessings showered upon us and be grateful. To forgive the sins of envy and discontentment. To look forward to an eternity with God, the Lord Jesus and the Church.

3.e. Employment and Unemployment

1. Why should a deacon be involved?
Unemployment has financial, relational, and health consequences. Someone may need assistance from the deacons.
2. Points of attention:
- Listen first before giving advice. Do not compare with others.
- Appreciate the financial struggles of providing for one's family.
- Remember there are both bad and good causes for being unemployed: laziness, complacency, disrespect, lay-off, pride, unwillingness to do work, economic recession, health-related, etc.
- Unemployment can result in loss of self-respect, depression, embarrassment, and/or anxiety about the future. Even if unemployed, one still has a calling in the eyes of the Lord. Man is commanded to work.

3. Bible passages:
- **Ps. 127** "Unless the LORD builds .. those who build it labor in vain."
- **Col. 3:23** "Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord."
- Gen. 2:15; Gen. 3:17-19; Ex. 20:8-11; Ps. 104:23; Prov. 10:4
- Matt. 6:25-34; Eph. 4:28; 1 Thess. 4:11-12; 2 Thess. 3:10-12

4. Possible questions to ask:
Why are you unemployed? Are there any immediate needs?
Practical consequences – housing, mortgage, etc.? How does this affect your relations (marriage, children, friends, family, yourself)?
Do you have financial reserves? Has the family helped? What opportunities are you looking at now? How do you see the future?
What are you doing with your time when you are unemployed?
Can we help in another way (like to draft an application and resumé)?
Are you considering further professional development or retraining?
Can a deacon or the congregation help you find a new job?

5. Prayer Points:
Ask what you should pray for (connect to their feelings and hear what they think are their greatest needs). Ask the Lord to give clarity about how to move forward. Pray that new job opportunities be made clear. Ask for patience. Remember the Lord is sovereign in all situations.

3.f. Poverty

1. Why should a deacon be involved?
The needs of those who are unable to support themselves and their families with food and shelter is an essential part of their calling.
2. Points of attention:
- Treat those wrestling with poverty with dignity, compassion, patience, and love, but also with firmness when necessary.
- Recognize that poverty is a spiritual, emotional and relational challenge in addition to an economic one.
- Speak to all involved (if a family, for example).
- Address immediate needs without committing to long-term support.
- Help find employment for those who are able-bodied.
- Facilitate help from family members first, then the church and government services, if unable to work.
- If unwilling to work, lovingly but firmly address this sin.
- If family ties are broken, help restore them, if possible.
- If wasteful-living, help develop a budget with accountability.
- Do not provide things that the person can provide for himself.
- Be very careful not to develop unnecessary dependency.
- Find ways of serving church or community if no work can be found.
- Find a mentor from your congregation to walk beside the person.

3. Bible passages:
- **Gal. 6:10** "... do good to everyone, especially … household of faith."
- **2 Thess. 3:10** "… if anyone is unwilling to work, let him not eat."
- Ps. 82:3; Luke 10:30-37; Acts 6:1-7; 1 Tim. 5:4,18

4. Possible questions to ask:
Could you tell me about yourself and your life? How has the Lord blessed you along the way? How has he revealed himself to you? How are you wrestling with poverty? What skills do you have? Are there steps that you could take that are consistent with God's Word that would address your poverty? Do you agree that God requires you to meet your own needs if at all possible?
5. Prayer Points:
Appeal to the Lord our great Provider and pray for patience, transformation, and a recognition of personal responsibility where lacking.

3.g. Request or Offer of Financial Help

1. Why should a deacon be involved?

The ministry of mercy to the poor is one of the primary responsibilities of the deacons of the church. This most often takes the form of financial assistance, and deacons are those charged with oversight of the diaconal treasury.

2. Points of attention:

- Seek to be generous, especially at the time of an initial request.
- Seek to meet the need directly, as opposed to giving out cash.
- Consider ways to apply accountability when meeting the need.
- Include advice on positive steps that might be taken to prevent future shortfalls, as appropriate, such as teaching budgeting.
- Be attentive to potential misuse of the aid given. Look for a willingness to carry through on advice given.
- Consider meeting the need to a lesser amount on a second request, to avoid creating dependency.

3. Bible passages:

- **Ps. 50:10** God owns the cattle on a thousand hills; he can provide.
- **1 Cor. 12:26-27** When one suffers, all suffer as the body of Christ.
- **1 John 3:17-18** Love not in word or talk, but in deed and in truth.

4. Possible questions to ask:

What is the exact amount being requested? What are the circumstances that led to this current need? Have there been any efforts to negotiate outstanding bills and/or agree upon a payment plan? Is this need potentially covered by insurance? Has available government assistance been sought? If applicable, what steps have been taken to prevent the need recurring? How has the family participated in meeting this need? In the case of an outsider, is there someone we can call to confirm their story? Can we help teach the practice of budgeting?

5. Prayer Points:

That the Lord would supply all that is needed physically and spiritually; that the Lord would be near those in their time of want; that these gifts are given in the name of Jesus, the only one who can supply all our needs in this life and the next.

4. Age and Health-related Topics

4.a. Suffering

1. Why should a deacon be involved?

Ministering to those suffering is at the heart of the deacon's call to care for the flock. Suffering can take many forms (physical, emotional, spiritual) and deacons do well to demonstrate compassion, support, and hope and to lead the congregation in doing the same.

2. Points of attention:

- Listen with empathy and validate their pain.
- Avoid platitudes or minimizing their suffering.
- Offer practical help and support as needed.
- Point them to the hope and comfort found in Christ.
- Be patient and understanding, as healing may take time.
- Be attentive to positive signs in reactions and underline these.
- Pray with and for them regularly.

3. Bible passages:

- **Ps. 34:18** "The LORD is near to the broken-hearted …"
- **John 16:33** "… in the world tribulation … have overcome the world."
- Ps. 147:3; Isa. 53:3-4; Rom. 5:3-5; Rom. 8:18; 2 Cor. 1:3-4
- 2 Cor. 4:17; 1 Pet. 4:12-13; Rev. 21:4; Ps. 119:50; Ps. 92:4-5

4. Possible questions to ask:

- Can you share with me about the suffering you're experiencing?
- How has this affected your daily life and relationships?
- What has been the hardest part of this journey for you?
- How can I best support and encourage you during this time?
- Have you been able to find any comfort or hope in the midst of your pain? How has your faith been impacted by this experience?
- Are there any specific needs or prayer requests you have right now?

5. Prayer Points:

For comfort and peace that surpasses understanding; strength to endure; healing of body, mind, and spirit; hope and joy in the midst of pain; a deeper sense of God's presence and love; wisdom and discernment for decisions; opportunities to grow in faith and trust; grace to forgive and let go of bitterness; ultimate redemption of suffering for God's glory.

4.b. Infertility

1. Why should a deacon be involved?
Deacons can assist in finding the right help and overcoming practical challenges. Infertility can cause poverty in some societies, or financial abundance in others. People without children may have more time to serve in the church and society. Deacons can assist in bringing together 'supply and demand', and they can connect members in similar situations.

2. Points of attention:
- Infertility can cause loneliness, since other families can talk much about their children or grandchildren.
- Infertility may cause other problems (financial, relational, etc.).
- As they age, the childless may have no one to look after them.
- In certain societies, infertility is seen as a punishment.
- While adoption may be a possibility, there may be practical and financial challenges involved.

3. Bible passages:
- **Is. 54:1** In God's people, the childless receive many children.
- **Rom. 5:3-5** God produces something beautiful through hardships.
- **James 1:17** God doesn't give the same gift to everyone.
- Gen. 25:21; 1 Sam. 2:21; Ps. 113:9

4. Possible questions to ask:
- Are there ways your specific circumstances allow you to serve the LORD and his church?
- Can you play a role in other children's lives in the church?
- In the case of aging people: do you need help (practical, financial etc.)?
- Might adoption be an option for you?

5. Prayer points:
- Give thanks that in the church nobody has to carry burdens alone.
- If applicable, pray that the Lord will give children and for patience.
- Ask that God will show what his plan is for their lives.
- Ask for wisdom and guidance if adoption is being considered.

4.c. Elderly

1. Why should a deacon be involved?
The elderly often face unique challenges such as loneliness, health issues, and a sense of purposelessness. The church is called to honor and care for older members of the community, recognizing their wisdom and contributions. The ministry of presence is an important aspect of caring for the elderly.
2. Points of attention:
- Show respect and patience, valuing their life experiences.
- Be attentive to their physical limitations and safety concerns.
- Encourage them to share their stories and wisdom.
- Offer practical assistance (transportation, home maintenance, etc.).
- Help them find ways to serve and contribute to the church community, such as praying for and reaching out to others in need.
- Be mindful of potential cognitive decline or dementia.
- Remind them of God's unfailing love and presence.
3. Bible passages:
- **Is. 46:4** "even to your … gray hairs I will carry you."
- **Job 12:12** "Wisdom is with the aged …"
- Ps. 71:9, 18; Ps. 92:12-15; Prov. 16:31
- Lev. 19:32; Tit. 2:2-5; Eph. 6:2-3
4. Possible questions to ask:
How have you been feeling lately? What brings you the most joy in this season of life? Are there any specific challenges you're facing that I can pray for or assist with? How can the church better support and include you? What words of wisdom or life lessons would you like to share with younger generations? How has your faith grown and changed over the years? Are there any memories or stories you'd like to share?
5. Prayer Points:
Give thanks for their life and faith; pray for physical health and comfort; ask for opportunities to share their wisdom;
pray against loneliness and feelings of purposelessness; ask God to reveal himself afresh to them; pray for patience and understanding from family and friends; request joy and peace in their daily lives.

4.d. Terminal Illness

1. Why should a deacon be involved?
When one is diagnosed with a terminal illnesses, this can be a time of great physical, emotional, and spiritual need with much uncertainty as to the future and how one's family will be cared for in their absence. Deacons do well to be attentive to the abundance of temporal needs that a terminal illness can create.
2. Points of attention:
- Listen more than you speak, offering a caring presence.
- Avoid platitudes or minimizing their pain and struggles.
- Be sensitive to their physical limitations and respect their privacy.
- Offer practical help (meals, errands, etc.) as appropriate.
- Point them to the hope and peace found in Christ.
- Be prepared to discuss end-of-life issues and decisions.
- Pray with and for them regularly.
3. Bible passages:
- **Matt. 11:28-30** "Come to me … heavy laden … I will give you rest …"
- **2 Cor. 4:16-18** "… outer self … wasting away … inner self … renewed"
- Ps. 23; Ps. 34:18; Ps. 46:1-3; Ps. 103:13-14; Is. 41:10; John 14:1-3
- Rom. 8:35-39; 2 Cor. 1:3-4; Phil. 4:6-7; Rev. 21:4
4. Possible questions to ask:
How are you feeling today, both physically and emotionally? What has been the hardest part of this journey for you? How can I best support you and your family during this time? Are there any practical needs we can help with? What are your biggest fears or concerns? How has your faith been impacted by this experience? Did you speak with your family about the funeral? Has someone been appointed to take responsibility for the arrangements after you pass away? Would you like me to pray with you or read from the Bible together?
5. Prayer Points:
For physical comfort, relief from pain, emotional strength and peace, spiritual encouragement, assurance of God's love, wisdom for medical decisions, grace for family members and caregivers, and opportunities to share the hope of the gospel.

4.e. Anxiety and Depression

1. Why should a deacon be involved?
Mental health issues can significantly impact a person's spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being. This can lead to impacting their work and their ability to care for their family. Deacons do well to lead in bearing burdens and offering hope, love, and compassion.
2. Points of attention:
- Listen with empathy without judgment or platitudes.
- Encourage them to seek professional help and assist in finding help.
- Be patient and understanding, as recovery may take time.
- Offer practical support (meals, childcare, etc.) to lighten their load.
- Remind them of their worth and value in God's eyes.
- Don't minimize their struggles or offer simplistic solutions.
- Pray with them and for them regularly, but respect their boundaries.
- Be mindful of how their depression/anxiety has affected their family and seek to be attentive there as well.

3. Bible passages:
- **Ps. 34:17-18** "When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears …"
- **Matt. 6:25-34** Don't be anxious. Father knows what you need.
- Ps. 42:11; Ps. 94:19; Is. 41:10; John 14:27; 2 Cor. 1:3-4
- Phil. 4:6-7; 1 Pet. 5:6-7; Ps. 139:7-12; Ps. 46:1-3

4. Possible questions to ask:
How long have you been struggling with anxiety/depression? What has been the most challenging aspect of this struggle for you? Have you sought professional help or counseling? How can I best support and encourage you during this time? Are there any specific triggers or situations that worsen your anxiety/depression? How has your faith been impacted by this experience? What Bible verses or truths bring you comfort?
5. Prayer Points:
For peace that surpasses understanding, strength to face each day, comfort in knowing God's presence, wisdom in seeking help, freedom from shame and guilt, renewed joy and hope, healing of the mind and spirit, and restoration of relationships affected by the struggle.

4.f Hospitalization

1. Why should a deacon be involved?
Hospitalization can be a time of great vulnerability, uncertainty, and fear. Deacons do well to offer comfort, support, and hope to those who are suffering and to remind them of God's presence and love during difficult times. The ministry of presence is an important aspect of caring for people who are hospitalized.
2. Points of attention:
- Be mindful of visiting hours and respect hospital policies.
- Offer a comforting presence and a listening ear.
- Pray with and for the patient and their family.
- Avoid offering unsolicited medical advice or opinions.
- Be sensitive to the patient's physical and emotional state.
- Offer practical support to the family (meals, errands, etc.).
- Follow up after discharge to offer continued support and prayer.
3. Bible passages that can be referenced:
- **Ps. 41:3** "The LORD sustains … on…sickbed … restores to full health."
- **Is. 53:4-5** "… he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows."
- Ps. 103:2-3; Ps. 147:3; Matt. 4:23-24; Mark 5:34; James 5:14-16
- 2 Cor. 4:16-18; 2 Cor. 12:9-10; Rom. 8:28; Ps. 34:18; Ex. 15:26
4. Possible questions to ask:
How are you feeling today? What has been the most challenging part of this hospitalization for you? How can I pray for you specifically? Is there anything you need or any way I can support you and your family during this time? What are the doctors saying about your condition and treatment plan? Are you experiencing any pain or discomfort? How has your faith been impacted by this experience?
5. Prayer Points:
For physical healing and comfort, peace and rest, strength for the journey, wisdom for doctors and medical staff, comfort and encouragement for family members, a deeper sense of God's presence, opportunities to witness to others, grace to endure suffering, and a speedy recovery and restored health.

4.g. Discharge

1. Why should a deacon be involved?
Deacons should be involved in supporting church members during the discharge process as they transition from hospital to home. This can be a vulnerable time requiring practical, emotional, and spiritual support to ensure a smooth recovery and prevent readmission.
2. Points of attention:
- Be sure the member has a clear understanding of discharge instructions. Be careful to not interfere if family is involved.
- Help coordinate follow-up appointments and transportation.
- Assist with obtaining medications and medical equipment.
- Offer to help with meal preparation or household chores.
- Provide support and encouragement during the transition.
- Don't give medical advice contrary to the doctor's instructions.
- Respect the member's privacy and autonomy in decision-making.

3. Bible passages:
- **Gal. 6:2** "Bear one another's burdens …"
- **Phil. 4:13** "I can do all things through him who strengthens me."
- Ps. 41:3; Ps. 103:2-3; Ps. 147:3; Is. 38:16-17; Matt. 11:28-30
- Eph. 6:18; Phil. 4:13; Heb. 4:16; 3 John 1:2; Ps. 138:3; 2 Cor. 12:9-10

4. Possible questions to ask:
How are you feeling about being discharged? Do you have any concerns or worries about managing your recovery at home? What support do you need from your church family during this time? Are there any specific tasks or errands you need help with? How can we pray for you as you continue to heal and regain strength? Do you have any follow-up appointments scheduled and do you need assistance with transportation?
5. Prayer Points:
Give thanks for the progress in healing; pray for continued recovery and strength; ask for wisdom in following discharge instructions; pray for peace and comfort during the transition; request patience and perseverance in the healing process; pray for protection against complications or setbacks; ask for renewed purpose and perspective.

4.h. Disabilities

1. Why should a deacon be involved?
People with disabilities are an important part of the body of Christ and may need help more than others – physical, emotional, and/or financial.
2. Points of attention:
- Don't treat everyone the same. There are many disabilities.
- Despite needing help, everyone has unique talents.
- Consider how to make your church facility accessible, such as for a wheelchair.
- A disability may also impact those around the person, emotionally and financially; it is often a never-ending, exhausting journey. Faithful friends are indispensable.
- A disability does not always mean a limitation in every respect. A weakness may also be a strength in some way or another!
- There are specialized caregivers and agencies who help people with various disabilities to reach their full potential.
- What may be needed most is not problem-solving but rather acceptance, understanding, hope, love, and appreciation.
- Be cautious with well-intentioned but ill advice. A non-disabled person may have little understanding of the struggles of the disabled.

3. Bible passages:
- Ps. 139:13-18 God created everyone in a unique and marvelous way.
- John 9:1-39 God works powerfully through a disabled person.
- **1 Cor. 12:12-26** If one part of the body suffers, all suffer together.

4. Possible questions to ask:
- How can we help you and your family?
- Are there plans in place for when the primary caregivers (like the parents) are not there anymore?
- For what can we pray and give thanks together?

5. Prayer Points:
- Pray for comfort, peace, hope, and assurance of God's love.
- Pray for God's blessing on the medical care.
- Pray also for the caregivers.

4.i. Addiction

1. Why should a deacon be involved?

Addictions (such as medication, sleeping pills, painkillers, pornography, alcohol, internet, gambling, tobacco, soft and hard drugs, etc.) have immense financial, relational and health consequences – it may even destroy families.

2. Points of attention:

- Often addictions are hidden and surrounded by feelings of shame and self-loathing.
- Signs that may indicate an addiction:
  - Excessive use of a substance.
  - Becoming the dominant thing one thinks of and is busy with.
  - Withdrawal symptoms when it is not done or used.
  - Crossing boundaries because of one's use or behavior.
  - Debt.
- A person that is addicted often tries to portray himself as a victim. He needs to acknowledge his own responsibility in the addiction.
- An addiction usually becomes an ever-bigger priority in a person's life, causing neglect of the family, not being able to provide for the family (financially, emotionally, or otherwise).
- This may also lead to other family problems, even divorce and bankruptcy.
- Addiction may lead to health problems, loss of self-esteem, and loneliness.
- As a deacon, avoid telling your own story and do not compare this member with others.
- Listen first, and even a second time, before giving any advice.
- Help only by bringing a person to a rehabilitation facility. Do not help with paying off debts or trying to solve other problems, unless the person involved is fully willing to work on the addiction and checks and balances are in place.
- Be faithful in visiting.
- Do not condemn or judge: Christ died for repentant sinners, including those addicted!

- As a deacon you are not empty-handed. You serve a powerful God who hears our prayers. You can organize a prayer group around the addicted person and his loved ones. Don't give up, even if it takes months, or maybe years.

3. Bible passages:

- **Eph. 6:12-17** Pray for a precious human being caught up in the sin of addiction, feeling lost, alone, forgotten, mastered by the addiction.
- **Prov. 31:1-9** The enormous impact of being addicted.
- **James 4:1-10** Only God can make an addict realize that he/she needs to let go of his/her addiction.

4. Possible questions to ask:

- How can the church community stand by you in your battle to be liberated from the grip of an addiction?
- Do you realize that an addiction ultimately is idolatry that pushes God from the throne in your life?
- Can we assist in finding a (preferably Christian) rehabilitation facility in the vicinity?
- Does the family realize that any help is in vain if the person himself is not really willing to fight the addiction, even with proper professional care?
- Does the person as well as the family realize that fighting an addiction takes time?

5. Prayer Points:

- Ask the Lord to liberate the person from the addiction.
- Ask the Lord to give clarity about how to move forward.
- Ask the Lord to convict the heart of the person to acknowledge the addiction.
- Ask the Lord to convince the addicted person to accept professional help.
- Ask for patience for everyone involved.

5. Death
5.a. Deathbed

1. Why should a deacon be involved?
Deacons should be involved because there are many practical things that need to be considered as one nears the end of his or her life. You are equipped to help them "put their house in order".
2. Points of attention:
- While not the pastor, still be prepared to share words of comfort.
- Do family members need help to care for their dying loved one (transportation, help with children, meals, companionship, financial, or finding an experienced caregiver)?
- Have funeral/burial arrangements been made? These will differ depending on your culture. Be prepared to help.
- Has a will or estate plan been finalized? Or have the desires of the dying been clearly communicated to family members?
- What plans are in place for children, if any, who will be left without a parent? What about the spouse if there is one?
- Is the dying person a caregiver for a dependent adult? How will ongoing care for this person be handled?
- Are there broken relationships that can and should be addressed?
- Are there any outstanding costs for those left behind (for hospitalization, procedures, medicine, etc.)?

3. Bible passages:
- **2 Kings 20:1** "… Hezekiah became sick … set your house in order …"
- **Ps. 23** "… walk through … shadow of death … I will fear no evil."
- Rom. 8:38-39; Rom. 12:17-21; Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:12-14
- Ezek. 18:32; 1 Cor. 15:51-57; Eph. 5:33; Rev. 14:13

4. Possible questions to ask: See "Points of attention" (#2) above.
5. Prayer Points:
- Pray for wisdom, comfort, patience, alleviation of pain, and help with addressing all practical matters that have arisen during the visit.
- If other patients are in the room, pray for them too.
- Pray that the Spirit of the Lord would strengthen our faith in the promises of the Gospel of life everlasting with Christ, our Savior.

5.b. Funeral

1. Why should a deacon be involved?

The death of a family member is often an unexpected and emotional time when it can be most difficult to make rational decisions regarding the costly matters pertaining to burial. Deacons can bring a sense of calm and objectivity, while also offering any financial assistance a family might need.

2. Points of attention:

- Don't be absent. The ministry of presence is an important part of the ministry of mercy that the family needs at this time.
- Be empathetic to the heavy weight of the burden of grief.
- Be attentive to ways in which the church can be helpful, such as offering meals.
- Don't add extra burden such as them feeling they need to care for you.
- Do more listening than talking.
- Do be sensitive to different cultural practices involved with funerals.

3. Bible passages:

- **Ps. 23** "… As I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me …"
- **1 Thess. 4:13-14** Those in Christ do not grieve as those without hope.
- **1 Cor. 15** The hope of the resurrection.

4. Possible questions to ask:

What plans do you currently have in place for the funeral? Who is the key decision-maker? Are there unanswered questions that we can help with? Have the funeral arrangements been pre-paid or are there funds yet required? Are you aware of what arrangements are in place for funerals at our church? Are you receiving the pastoral care you need or can we facilitate more of that?

5. Prayer Points:

- That the Lord will bring peace at this difficult hour.
- That he will give the clarity of mind in making important decisions.
- That the bereaved would find comfort in the Lord.
- That Christ would be glorified in the funeral.

5.c. Miscarriage

1. Why should a deacon be involved?
The loss of an unborn child brings considerable grief and sadness. Deacons can bring comfort with the Word but may also assist in possible material needs. Deacons can also connect parents with other couples who have experienced the same.
2. Points of attention:
- Understand that the sadness in the loss of an unborn child may be as painful as the death of any family member.
- Acknowledge that the lost baby is a child of God and has his own soul, which is now with the Lord.
- The couple might like to consider naming the child.
- Never say, "the Lord will give you another child."
- Depending on how the miscarriage occurred, there may be the possibility of a burial, and the family may need assistance.

3. Bible passages:
- **2 Cor. 1:3-11** "comforts us in all our affliction."
- **Rev. 21:3-4** no more tears, death, mourning, crying.
- Job 19:25-27; Ps. 55:22; John 9:1-5; John 14:1-7
- Rom. 8:18-39; 1 Thess. 4:13-18

4. Possible questions to ask:
- How is each family member feeling (not just the mother)?
- How is the mother's physical well-being and health?
- Have you had the opportunity to talk to others who have been through a miscarriage? Would you like to be connected to someone in that way?
- Will there be a burial?
- How can the deacons help?
- Would meals be a help during this time?

5. Prayer Points:
Praise God, the Creator of life. Acknowledge that covenant children who die are taken to be with the Lord. Recognize God's sovereignty in all things (Rom. 8:28). Thank and praise God for his mercy and blessings in so many areas of life. Pray that the Spirit of the Lord would bring comfort to the family.

6. Diaconal Visits for Different Situations

6.a. Widows and Orphans

1. Why should a deacon be involved?

Widows and orphans are specifically designated throughout the Bible to be under the watchful care of the church, as a vulnerable segment of the body of Christ. They have lost their caregivers, providers, and protectors. They are not to be forgotten or overlooked (Acts 6:1-4).

2. Points of attention:

- Be conscious of and sensitive to their difficult stations in life. Visit in their homes. Visit with tools ready to address immediate physical needs. Look around to find ways to offer help while being careful not to offend. Don't promise things you can't fulfill; complete the things you agree to do. Involve other women when caring for widows. Think of ways widows and orphans can be used by the Lord in ministering to others. Don't forget about their family, how they might care for their family member. Don't displace their family in your care for the widow. Seek to preserve the dignity and autonomy of widows in your care for them. Those caring for orphans might need respite care. Don't undervalue simply visiting – the ministry of presence!

3. Bible passages:

- **James 1:27** Visit orphans and widows in their affliction.
- **Is. 1:17** Bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause.
- **1 Tim. 5:3-4,8** Honor true widows; provide for relatives.

4. Possible questions to ask:

- What is one immediate physical need today that I can seek to meet?
- Do you have family, and how are they involved in your life?
- What are your biggest concerns or fears at this point?
- How has your faith been impacted by what you are going through?
- Do you sense the Lord's care for you at this time?
- How can I be praying for you?

5. Prayer points:

For reliance on the Lord. That he will provide. Give thanks for a Savior who can empathize with our suffering. For wisdom and grace in the days ahead. That he would bring peace and comfort. That Christ would be glorified in the life of this saint.

6.b. Separation and Divorce

1. Why should a deacon be involved?
Separation and divorce are spiritual matters (pastor and elder) but also have practical consequences (deacon) such as the losses of income and/or housing, and receiving extra financial burdens. Pressure on everyday chores can increase, like the transport and supervision of children, cooking, etc. It can cause isolation and loneliness.

2. Points of attention:
- Interact with the pastor and elder about the situation.
- Be careful not to be pulled into the conflict by taking sides.
- Listen first and ask questions for clarification. Ask open questions.
- Do not forget to talk to the children about how it affects them. Build trust and make sure they can speak their hearts.
- Focus on practical consequences (short, medium and long term), especially on the most affected, who are often the children. Emphasize that they don't have to feel guilty when asking for help.
- Consult with fellow deacons before making decisions.

3. Bible passages:
- **Ps. 9:9** The LORD is a stronghold in times of trouble.
- **Rom. 12:17** Do not repay evil for evil, but always seek to do good.
- Deut. 14:29; Matt. 5:31-32; Matt. 19:9; Eph. 5:33; Heb. 13:4

4. Applicable questions:
- Are there consequences regarding housing (relocation, mortgage), loss of income, additional financial challenges (legal or educational costs), or transportation?
- Who will look after the children when the parent(s) are at work?
- Are both parties fulfilling their legal obligations?
- Is there any physical or emotional abuse?
- Has the will been updated?

5. Prayer points:
- Ask forgiveness for everything that is not according to God's desire for marriage and family life. Trust that the LORD can restore.
- Thank for the communion of saints, carrying the burden together.
- Pray that the LORD will protect, especially the children.
- Pray for ways and means to overcome practical challenges.

6.c. Loneliness

1. Why should a deacon be involved?
The first deacons in the Bible had to take care of the widows who were neglected (Acts 6:1). A deacon's work is to ensure that no one in the congregation has to live without comfort under the pressure of loneliness. Loneliness causes spiritual affliction but also practical challenges, which should not be carried alone.

2. Points of attention:
- What is the cause of the loneliness? Do not assume you know; ask open questions.
- The deacon can stimulate the congregation to visit the lonely regularly, for example by compiling a visiting roster.
- An unmarried person can struggle with specific things, such as a woman fixing a car, or a man mending clothes.
- A deacon ought not visit a single woman alone; take along a colleague, involve other sisters, or invite her to your family home.

3. Bible passages:
- **Ps. 25:16** The LORD will be gracious to the lonely and afflicted.
- **1 Cor. 12:26** If one member suffers, all suffer together.
- Josh. 1:9; Ps. 27:10; Ps. 68:8; Ps. 139:1-16

4. Applicable questions to ask:
- What are the practical concerns – transport, shopping, going to the hospital, attending church, etc.?
- How can this person reach out to others who are also lonely?

5. Prayer points:
- Thank the LORD that he gives the church as a family.
- Ask for contentment, focusing on blessings in all circumstances.
- Pray that the Lord will prevent isolation and will work willingness in the hearts of others to reach out.
- If the person is desiring marriage, pray that the LORD will grant a spouse.

6.d. Disaster

1. Why should a deacon be involved?

A disaster is typically an unforeseen event of catastrophic levels of destruction that requires a community to seek the help of those less affected. The help of the Macedonian Christians toward the saints suffering famine in Jerusalem is a wonderful precedent to follow (2 Cor. 8-9).

2. Points of attention:

- Don't get in the way of first-responders doing search and rescue.
- Be available and equipped to help as soon as it's safe to do so.
- Don't be overwhelmed by the scope of the disaster. Focus your attention first on the needs of the family of faith.
- Don't promise things you cannot supply. Carry through on the things you agree to do.
- Engage the assistance of many capable helpers.
- Seek to preserve victims' dignity in the midst of the chaos at hand.
- Consider taking up an offering in church for those suffering.

3. Bible passages:

- **Ps. 46** God is our help in times of trouble.
- **Ps. 50:10** God owns the cattle on a thousand hills; he can provide.
- **Joel 2:21-27** God can restore the years the locusts have eaten.

4. Possible questions to ask:

- Is any part of the damage covered by insurance?
- If displaced, do you have a place to stay for a while?
- What do you see as your immediate physical needs at this time?
- Do you have family nearby who can help you?
- Are you a member of a local church?
- How has your faith been impacted by this experience?

5. Prayer Points:

For reliance on the provision of the Lord. Thanks for a Savior who can empathize with our suffering, who has suffered the greatest form of disaster on the cross. For wisdom. That he would bring peace. That Christ would be glorified even through this disaster.

6.e. Refugee, Stranger, Foreigner, Beggar

1. Why should a deacon be involved?
Deacons should be involved because refugees and strangers are often in need of practical help, or may be overlooked, and the Lord requires his people to help those in need.

2. Points of attention:
- Be careful of giving money to strangers who ask for it.
- Find ways to help the stranger while not creating dependency (temporary food assistance, help them find a job, counseling, etc.).
- Assist a person that is addicted to find specialized help.
- Invite strangers and refugees into your home (hospitality) so as to get to know them.
- Be prepared to provide a Bible and recommend a passage or book.
- Work with members of your church to help refugees find shelter, work, schooling, and temporary finances. Show love for them.
- Consider the needs of your community and don't just wait for them to come to your church.

3. Bible passages:
- **Matt. 25:36** "… I was naked and you clothed me …"
- **Matt. 5:7** "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy."
- James 1:27; Deut. 24:19; Ps. 82:3-4; Acts 20:35; Heb. 13:1-3; Gal. 6:10

4. Possible questions to ask:
How are you doing today? What has brought you to church? What is your relationship with the Lord? Where are the other family members of yours, and what is your background? What help do you need? If you are struggling with addictions, how long has it been? What efforts have you made to overcome them? What changes would you like to see in your life?

5. Prayer Points:
Pray about the needs of the stranger/refugee that have been shared with you. Pray for patience in adversity, for the strength to make any necessary changes, for the desire for a relationship with God, for the desire to join a church, and for their extended family or family members 'left behind'.

6.f. Homeless

1. Why should a deacon be involved?
Homeless people are often neglected and overlooked, intentionally or not. As God's image-bearers, they deserve dignity and care. Deacons should be on the front line in ministering to "the least of these."
2. Points of attention:
- Beware of your own prejudices. There are various reasons for their homelessness - addictions, debt, rejection by family, disabilities, refugee and more.
- Treat homeless people with respect, regardless of the cause.
- Be cautious with well-intentioned advice. You are not homeless!
- Shame and mistrust are common for homeless people. Building a relationship is difficult and needs time and effort.
- Make a list of agencies who care for different homeless people and assist in making contact.
- Take care of life-threatening needs, like starvation, hypothermia or first-aid. Involve specialized people and agencies for secondary longer term needs. Homeless people may have a history of rejecting the care they really need.
- Invite them to church where they might become part of a family.
3. Bible passages:
- **Deut. 10:17-19** The LORD givers food and clothing to the sojourner.
- **Heb. 13:2** Show hospitality to strangers.
- Ps. 68:4-6; Ps. 146:7; Prov. 22:9
4. Possible questions to ask:
How are you doing (physically / emotionally / spiritually)? Do you have family or others who care for you? If not, why not? What are your biggest fears or concerns? Can I pray with you and read from the Bible?
5. Prayer Points:
Pray first and foremost for his eternal health – for faith and trust in God, and that the gospel will bring joy in his life. Pray for his 'daily bread' (immediate needs) and strength to overcome the daily challenges. Pray for people who can help, and for acceptance of that help.

6.g. Abuse

1. Why should a deacon be involved?
Abuse can be physical, sexual, emotional, or financial. It has spiritual consequences (ministered to by pastor and elders), but also physical and practical ones (deacon).
2. Points of attention:
- Victims often hide their injuries because of shame or fear of reprisal.
- Abuse is often difficult to notice. Be attentive to non-verbal communication. Assist when anonymous help is needed.
- Financial abuse can be the reason behind certain behavior, like poor church attendance or dropping out of school.
- Often victims regard an abusive situation as "normal" because of the lack of experience with what is actually normal.
- Men, husbands, fathers, brothers, cousins, uncles, etc. can abuse their position as the stronger sex to force sexual acts.
- Financial extortion does not befit a God-fearing person.
- Don't counsel beyond your call as a deacon or level of expertise.

3. Bible passages:
- Lev. 18:1-18 & Deut. 27:22 God protects the weak.
- 1 Pet. 3:7 & Eph. 6:4 Husbands to protect their wives and children.
- Prov. 6:16-19; Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 5:25; Col. 3:19

4. Possible questions to ask:
What has been the impact of abuse on your life? Has the abuse stopped? Has the abuser been properly dealt with (by church, civil authorities, family, etc.)? Is there a need for financial or medical help or a place of safety? How can the congregation help?
5. Prayer points:
- For comfort in Jesus Christ, who endured all kinds of hostility (Heb. 12:3). He knows how it feels.
- Pray for courage to face the truth and step out of an abusive situation.
- Pray for safe alternatives.
- Pray for a pure heart, not to repay evil for evil (1 Pet. 3:8-9).
- Pray for the abuser and for those who must deal with him/her.

Part III
Stewardship and Financial Planning

1. Introduction

Managing finances and teaching about it is an essential part of a deacon's work. While biblical principles are universal, their application may vary by culture and circumstances. This section aims to equip deacons around the world to instruct others on financial matters with wisdom, clarity, and faithfulness to Scripture.

2. Basic Principles of Stewardship

2.1. Everything Belongs to God. All that we have is from the Lord and belongs to him. We are stewards of God in all that we possess. Psalm 24:1 reminds us: *"The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein."* This means that in every financial decision we should ask: *"How does this honor God?"* Our giving, spending, saving, and even investing should reflect a desire to glorify him and support his Kingdom.

2.2. Money Is a Tool. Money itself isn't evil. It becomes dangerous when we love it (Ps. 62:10) or serve it. 1 Timothy 6:10 warns that the love of money leads to ruin. Instead, we must view money as a tool to provide for our needs, to serve others, and to invest wisely for God's purposes (Matt. 25:14–30). Decisions about money are spiritual decisions — revealing where our heart truly lies (Matt. 6:21).

2.3. Have a Plan. Financial disorder brings stress and instability. Luke 14:28 calls us to *"count the cost"* before starting a project. A clear plan helps manage weekly expenses, anticipate the future, and avoid debt. Without planning, even generous intentions can result in unnecessary hardship.

3. The Long-Term Financial Plan

Four progressive stages help bring order and security to a household's finances. Each stage builds on the one before and should only be advanced once the previous is accomplished.

3.1. Emergency Reserve. Set aside funds for the unexpected — a medical bill, a broken appliance, or urgent travel. Aim to save at least ¼ of one month's income. Keep it accessible, even in cash at home. If used, replenish it before progressing to the next stage.

3.2. Eliminate Debt. Debt is a burden and a form of bondage — "*the borrower is the slave of the lender*" (Prov. 22:7). As Christians, we are called to be free from anything on this earth, and only "*enslaved to righteousness*" (Rom. 6:18). That certainly includes debt, which is often fed by people living beyond their means. After setting aside your emergency fund, focus aggressively on paying off all debts - starting from the smallest. This will be done by consistently paying off as much as possible each month with the "surplus" from your family budget. To begin this stage there should be three columns: 1) name of debt; 2) minimum monthly payment; and, 3) total debt owed.

Example:

DEBTOR	**MINIMUM PAYMENT**	**TOTAL DEBT**
Uncle John	$10	$50
Mastercard	$10	$250
Cousin Ann	$10	$1,000
VISA	$20	$1,500
Car Loan	$150	$5,500
TOTAL	**$200**	**$8,300**

Once you see your debt gradually being paid off, this will give you greater motivation to see where you can further cut back on your monthly expenses in order to pay off debt even faster. The Biblical virtue of contentment is of great value in this stage – "*godliness with contentment is great gain*" (1 Tim. 6:6).

3.3. Savings Reserve. Once debt-free, build a larger reserve, equal to three months' income, as an "insurance" against major disruptions like job loss or illness. Keep it in a savings account that's safe and accessible, but still earns interest. This fund provides peace of mind and prevents falling back into debt.

3.4. Investing for the Future and the Kingdom. Now with a stable base, having accomplished the first three stages, you can begin investing surplus funds from your budget. You may want to consult with a professional financial advisor, but it is certainly wise to invest in what you are comfortable with and where the risk is very low. Long-term investing can support retirement, enable greater generosity (1 Jn. 3:17-18), and allow you to greatly bless your posterity: "*A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children*" (Prov. 13:22). Imagine how wonderful it would be if more Christians were financially able to contribute greater sums to the Kingdom work, such as theological education, local and foreign mission work, Christian education, publications, and so much more. However, it is essential to remember that wealth is a gift for us to faithfully steward. So, "*if riches increase, set not your heart on them*" (Ps. 62:10b).

4. The Family Budget

What is a budget? It is determining where money will be spent before you have the funds in hand. So, give each dollar a name: "tithes," "groceries," "electric bill," etc. A budget is simple math. The incoming total must always be more or equal to the outgoing total.

First, add up all incoming amounts and write that number down. That is your "tool". Then, list all monthly expenses in the household: "tithes," "groceries," "electric bill," "car payment," "tuition," "clothes," etc. Then try to establish what amount should be allocated for each expenditure. Now add all items up. The total monthly expenses must be less than or equal to the total monthly income. Simple math. If the total expenses are greater than your income, you need to decide where to cut back on

the expenses. Any "surplus" can be used to achieve each stage of your "long-term financial plan".

A budget is critical for financial organization. Scripture says: "*The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance*" (Prov. 21:5). Therefore, be diligent in organizing your budget and in faithfully sticking to it. And, if necessary, commit to making sacrifices today for future benefits tomorrow.

5. Marriage and Finances

In over half of all marriages, couples do not work collaboratively to manage their finances or make financial decisions. Research shows that financial disagreements contribute to 20% - 40% of all divorces. Even in Christian homes, money remains one of the leading sources of stress and conflict within marriages.

In many cultures, it's often assumed that the man is not only the primary provider but also the sole decision-maker when it comes to finances. However, while husbands and wives may have different roles, the Bible clearly teaches that in marriage, the two become one — united in beliefs, purpose, and financial matters.

Consider this passage from Proverbs: "*An excellent wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels. The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain. She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life.*" (Prov. 31:10–12).

When couples take the time to align their values and work together to manage their finances through open, honest communication, they create a strong foundation for deeper unity and mutual trust within their marriage. Financial harmony is not simply about balancing a budget — it's about shared vision, mutual respect, and collaborative decision-making. To achieve this, it's essential that both husband and wife set aside time to sit down together and intentionally plan for their future.

This planning process should include meaningful conversations around important questions such as: What are our short-term and long-term financial goals? Where do we hope to be financially and personally in the next 10 years? What steps must we take now to ensure a secure old age? How much do we feel called to give — to God, to our church, and to those in need? Are there specific charitable causes or ministries we are passionate about supporting? If so, how much can we give to those? What are our hopes and plans for our children, and how can we prepare financially to support their future?

A strong and healthy marriage includes walking together in every area of life — that includes finances. When couples plan together, give together, save together, and dream together, they build a stronger foundation of trust, unity, and purpose. Financial harmony doesn't happen by accident; it's built with intention, prayer, and teamwork.

6. Tithes and Offerings

"*Honor the LORD with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce; then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine.*" (Prov. 3:9-10).

Tithing and giving offerings are profound expressions of our gratitude and trust in God. Scripture clearly teaches that we are to honor God with our material blessings, acknowledging him as the source of everything we have. In Mark 12:41-44, Jesus illustrates a deep spiritual truth: "*And he sat down opposite the treasury and watched the people putting money into the offering box. Many rich people put in large sums. And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which make a penny. And he called his disciples to him and said to them, "Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the offering box. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on*." This passage reveals that the value of our offering is not measured by the amount but by the heart and sacrifice behind it.

Furthermore, in Malachi 3:8-10, God speaks directly about the sin of not giving tithes and offerings:

> "*Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, 'How have we robbed you?' In your tithes and contributions. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you. Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.*"

Giving to the Lord is a visible declaration that we trust in His provision and recognize Him as our provider — like a child trusting in the care of a loving father.

Paul also teaches believers to obey this command:

> "*Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come*" (1 Cor. 16:1-2).

This passage affirms that giving tithes and offerings is not just an Old Testament command — it is a biblical mandate to be practiced by all believers today also. And, while acts of service and prayer are vital to believers, they do not replace the biblical mandate to give. Choosing to give on our own terms rather than according to God's Word may reflect:

- Disorganization or lack of financial planning
- Disobedience to God's Word
- Ingratitude for his blessings

As Proverbs 28:20 reminds us: *"A faithful man will abound with blessings ..."* However, we must also be warned not to tithe merely to

show piety or in expectation of rewards. God desires offerings that flow from a grateful and sincere heart. Jesus warns in Matthew 23:23:

> "*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. Theses you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.*"

Let us treat the offering moment during worship not as a routine, but as a sacred opportunity to honor the Lord who graciously provides for all our needs. Thus, our giving must be both intentional and worshipful. It should be an integral part of a life devoted to God — expressed with joy, reverence, and thankfulness.

7. Conclusion

Faithful stewardship is an essential expression of our trust in God and our commitment to his Kingdom. By managing finances wisely, planning diligently, and giving generously, deacons can both lead by example and equip others for godly living. Financial decisions are ultimately spiritual decisions, revealing our hearts and priorities. May we steward all that God entrusts to us with wisdom, faithfulness, and joy for his glory.

Conclusion to the Toolbox

Ordination to the office of deacon is a high calling. The ministry of mercy is a visible expression of the Gospel, patterned after the service of the "Deacon of deacons," our Lord Jesus Christ, who served the least deserving in the ultimate way – by giving his perfect life and taking our sins upon himself. In that sense, there is no greater calling.

Our prayer is that, as you join your gifts and God's grace with the resources provided in this "toolbox," you will be well equipped to serve "the least of these." In doing so, you are serving Christ himself. May the Lord strengthen and sustain you for this noble task!

For further study on the office of deacon, we refer you to the website of the ICRC, where you can find a goldmine of diaconal resources (books, articles, websites, presentations etc.):

https://icrconline.com/resources/diaconal-resources/

The Deacon's Toolbox provides quick, practical guidance for moments when deacons need direction! It is not just another theological publication on diaconal ministry, but an accessible reference designed to equip deacons with biblical wisdom and practical insights for real-life encounters.

The way deacons minister must remain both rooted in Scripture and adaptable to the needs before them. May this resource strengthen their hands, clarify their calling, and above all, draw them deeper into the work of mercy that reflects the heart of Christ!

The Deacon's Toolbox was written by the members of the Diaconal Committee of the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC).

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