

A Deacon Ministry on Steroids: An Overview of the Deacon Ministry of First Baptist Church Orlando

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*Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers **and deacons**: (Philippians 1:1, NIV, emphasis added)*

The role of deacon varies from congregation to congregation in churches across America. Some churches may acknowledge that such a function existed in first century churches described in scripture, but have no present-day deacon ministry in their own local church. In contrast, other congregations may see the office of deacon as vitally important to their church culture and have a well-defined description of deacon ministry.

The presence, opinion, and practice of deacon ministry differs not only among churches, but also among denominations. Congregations steeped in the Southern Baptist tradition are well-familiar with the presence and significance of the role of deacon in their churches. One would have to search long and hard among the over 42,000¹ Southern Baptist congregations to find a church that did not recognize and utilize the role of deacon.²

Regardless of how deep-rooted a church or denomination's tradition may embrace the function of deacons, few churches have a deacon ministry on the level of that of First Baptist Church of Orlando, Florida. This central Florida church has a healthy and thriving ministry of deacons that greatly benefits the widows, in particular, and the church and pastoral staff, in general. Read on to consider a deacon ministry worth emulating.

¹ <http://www.sbc.net/aboutus/default.asp>, accessed July 14, 2007

² Even the widely-used internet encyclopedia, Wikipedia, touts the noteworthy role of deacons in its description of the Southern Baptist Convention: "Generally, Baptists recognize only two Scriptural offices: pastor-teacher and deacon."

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Southern_Baptist_Convention#Polity_and_organization accessed July 14, 2007.

First Baptist Church of Orlando, Florida

In the sunny city known for big entertainment and big theme parks stands big First Baptist Orlando. A glance at the “Fast Facts” on the church website provides a quick insight into the size and influence of First Baptist Church Orlando.

First Baptist Orlando Fast Facts

- Established in 1871 with 18 people
- Located on 140 acres with land and buildings of current net worth near over 50 million dollars
- Worship Center has seating for over 5,500
- Annual budget over \$17 million
- Give approximately 1.5 million per year to missions, the largest contributor of any Southern Baptist Church in the U.S.
- Membership – 14,000
- Average Sunday morning Bible study attendance: 3,800
- Approximately 7,000 in worship attendance on Sunday mornings in three worship services
- About 140 full-time staff, plus about 215 part-time
- 24 pastoral staff
- Purchased former RC Cola bottling plant, adjacent land, Fall 2001; over \$3 million given in two months
- Planted two new churches in 2001, Fellowship of Orlando and Keystone Community Fellowship, outside of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
- April 15, 2007 two new worship services launched to provide for expansion, a more intimate setting, and for those who cannot attend on Sunday mornings³

The Role of Deacons at First Baptist Orlando and in Southern Baptist Tradition

As strong and healthy a church as First Baptist Orlando is today, there was a time, in the not too distant past, when their understanding of deacon ministry did not mirror the biblical description of the first deacons in Acts chapter six.

Dr. Jimmy Knott, Teaching Pastor, and Pastor of Assimilation and Leadership Development at First Baptist Orlando, stated that in previous decades the deacons

³ First Orlando Fast Facts, <http://myfirstorlando.com/About/FastFacts/tabid/298/Default.aspx>, accessed May 11, 2007

functioned as a “board of directors making decisions . . . Twenty-five years ago they would have chosen the color of the carpet.”⁴

Such was the practice of many Baptist churches in that era. In his study of the role of deacons, Derek Gentle, under the heading, “The Drift Among Baptists From the Biblical Model”, cites a book published by the Baptist printing house, Broadman Press in 1979.

In the later half of the eighteenth century, a new concept of Baptist deacons emerged *and continues to exist in many churches today*. This was the view of deacons as a board of church business managers. This view stressed to a seemingly excessive degree the administrative function of deacons . . .⁵

A Trusted Leader Transitions Deacons From a Board of Directors to a Body of Servants

First Baptist Orlando did not become the church it is today without good leadership. Jim Henry came to serve as Senior Pastor in September 1977.⁶ During his nearly thirty years of service, First Baptist Orlando relocated, built multiple buildings, grew exponentially, added staff, and significant ministries.⁷ He also led the church and deacons to a new understanding and practice of deacon ministry.

Jimmy Knott has served on the pastoral staff at First Baptist Orlando since 1980 and has overseen the ministry of deacons since 1990. Having known Jim Henry for well over thirty years, and having direct leadership over the deacon ministry for seventeen years, Knott has an excellent perspective of how the role of deacon at First Baptist Orlando has evolved. He says that Jim Henry slowly, lovingly helped the deacons set their eyes on a more biblical understanding of their role.

Jim taught a time or two in those first three or four years on the role of the deacon, being more of a servant, ministering to the body, supporting the elders, the pastors. And he didn't pound it – Jim wasn't one to pound it. ‘Let's just see what the Word of God says.’ And he found a very receptive hearing. . . and eventually the mindset began to change.⁸

⁴ Interview of Jimmy Knott on June 3, 2007.

⁵ Deweese, Charles W., *The Emerging Role of Deacons*, Broadman Press, 1979, p.34, cited in Gentle, Derek, “A Study in the Biblical Role of Deacons”, p.8, emphasis added.

⁶ Interview of Jimmy Knott.

⁷ First Orlando Fast Facts, <http://myfirstorlando.com/About/FastFacts/tabid/298/Default.aspx>, accessed May 11, 2007.

⁸ Interview of Jimmy Knott.

Henry's pastorate was rooted in strong biblical teaching. He also understood that effective pastoral leadership required actions to implement scriptural concepts. "Jim got more involved in who would be selected to be a new deacon and even become officers. That helps you transition well, when you get people who are more likeminded."⁹

When a wise, gifted leader lovingly and patiently builds relationships, garners a supportive leadership team, and proposes new ideas from a biblical point of view, unified change is possible. Knott says the deacons changed from being a board of directors to being a body of servants. "In '90, Jim handed that responsibility (leading the deacons) to me, but . . . by the time I had inherited there was a real sense of, 'We are here to serve. How can we help? What do you want us to do?'"¹⁰

The Deacon Family Ministry Plan Adopted

Like many other Southern Baptist churches who wished to see their deacons serve rather than be administrators in their churches, First Baptist Church Orlando adopted the Deacon Family Ministry Plan in the early 80's.

Rolen C. Bailey, a Certified Deacon Trainer for the Virginia Baptist Convention, defines the Deacon Family Ministry Plan as "a systematic plan for reaching every family unit in the church through personal ministry."¹¹

The Deacon Family Ministry Plan Exemplified in Another Church

One can understand potential ways the Deacon Family Ministry Plan can effectively impact a church by viewing the implementation of the plan at contemporary churches. North Addison Baptist Church in Spokane, Washington provides a thorough description of their Deacon Family Ministry Plan on their web site.

What is the Deacon Family Ministry Plan? It is a plan through which the deacons can join the pastor and church staff in ministering to the physical, spiritual and emotional needs of each church member and family. The resident church families are divided into groups of ten or more families. Each group of families is then assigned to a deacon who will minister to them over a period of time.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Bailey, Rolan C., Training for Servanthood: A Basic Training Guide for Baptist Deacons, <http://www.vbmb.org/uploads/DeaconTraining.pdf>, accessed July 14, 2007.

A part of each deacon's meeting is spent praying about specific needs of families and in rejoicing over needs met and victories won. Another part of the meeting may be used in developing deacon's skills in ministering to family needs.¹²

The Deacon Ministry Family Plan has a stated purpose and delineates how the deacons will fulfill the plan. The North Addison Baptist web site describes the ministry with nine points, each illustrative of their Deacon Family Ministry Plan.

How can a deacon help you? Of course, you are the only one who can answer that question. However, there are some specific ways your deacon wants to try to help.

- *Visiting you.* – The first visit will be a get acquainted visit with you and your family. However, your deacon will make other visits throughout the year when 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.¹³

Congregational care and witness to unbelievers is ministry that supplements that of the church staff. The deacons at the Spokane, Washington church also provide emotional support to church members.

- *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 who cares.
- *Giving support in times of crisis.* – Sometimes your deacon can help you through the crisis by listening and giving support. Other times (sic), your deacon will know someone else or a community agency that can help.¹⁴

The deacons are not only available to offer emotional encouragement, they are also a resource to help members grow and connect with others in the church body.

¹² <http://www.nabcsokane.org/templates/System/details.asp?id=25612&PID=112969>, accessed July 18, 2007.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

- *Answering questions about your faith or about your church or denomination.* – Your deacon will try to find the answers for you.
- *Helping you know and have fellowship with other members and families in the church.* - Your deacon will encourage you to participate in social occasions when families in the assigned group or other church members get together for fun and fellowship.¹⁵

Under the guidance of a deacon, church members are also pointed toward ministry in the body and have a committed prayer partner.

- *Helping you find ways to serve in and through the 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.

In the Deacon Family Ministry Plan, every member and every family have a deacon.¹⁶

The Deacon Family Ministry Plan provides a comprehensive structure for needs to be met by servant leaders in local churches. When a church chooses to define the role of deacon in such a clear manner, the entire church benefits. Deacons, staff, and members all understand that the role of deacon is one of service to the local church.

The Plan Loses Effectiveness at First Baptist Orlando

The adoption of the Deacon Family Ministry Plan at First Baptist Orlando called for deacons to serve as shepherds to families in the church. The deacons embraced their role as servants to the families of the church. For a season, deacons were able to effectively care for the members of the church. However, as the church grew, this particular strategy for deacon ministry no longer fit their particular church context. Jimmy Knott describes why this model of deacon ministry became ineffective.

(The Deacon Family Ministry Plan) was experiencing a lot of discomfort because the church was growing rapidly. And we just could not keep up with enough deacons to service it. By the time I inherited it, I think we had deacons who had probably a hundred or 120 families. . . everybody knew, we (had) a problem. I am a real proponent of the Deacon Family Ministry Plan.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

The problem is, in a church like ours, . . . it's just not practical anymore. . . So we moved away from that in the early 90s.¹⁷

Three Timeless Functions

Jimmy Knott knew that, while the Deacon Family Ministry Plan no longer met their needs, a group of servant-minded, spiritual leaders in the church could still have a significant ministry in the life of First Baptist Orlando. Studying Acts six, Knott saw what he regarded as timeless biblical principles for the ministry of deacons in any church.

Deacons have three primary functions. Number one is to serve the widows. If there's anything clear in Acts six, they were given the responsibility to take care of widows. And years ago we looked at that seriously and it is their number one responsibility. If you want to be "un-deac'ed", if you want to be asked to resign, ignore your widow. We will ask you to resign. We are going to take care of the widows.¹⁸

Ministry to widows became a central, unchanging function for every deacon at First Baptist Church Orlando. Knott describes the second timeless function of deacon ministry.

And number two . . . is to support unity in the body, suppress negativism, . . . develop harmony and oneness, encourage peace. You're a deacon. You're always to be a source of harmony and peace and building bridges. You're never a source of disunity or negativism.¹⁹

Deacons are to support the church by being positive examples of and promoters of unity. Jimmy Knott indicates that the third function is one of support to the leaders of the church.

And the third thing they did in Acts six is to support the pastor, or the elders. Now, how they do that, there'll be . . . differences from church to church. What I've always encouraged the churches that I've gone to is . . . Take care of the widows; be a source of peace; and support the pastors. And the pastor really ought to sit down, periodically, . . . once every two or three years and ask this question, "We've got fifty, seventy-five spiritual men. What can we ask those men this year to help us?" Now some of that may stay the same every year. . . but some of that may change based on need.²⁰

¹⁷ Interview of Jimmy Knott.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

Knott continues to describe ways that deacons have helped the pastors at different times or seasons of ministry at First Baptist Orlando.

. . . every four or five years we'll take our church roll and we'll divide and give this much (indicating a significant portion with his hands) to each man . . . and give them four months (to) call every family on (their) roll. "Tell them you're calling on behalf of the pastor, and you're calling to verify all of their personal information so we can keep the data base accurate." We want to know if there's anything they'd like to know about the life of the church, if they have any questions. . . And the last thing, "Is there anything going on in your life, in your family, that we can pray for?" And pray for them right then and there on the phone. So we've accomplished a ton of things in taking those four or five months to do that.²¹

Knott excitedly explains the benefit of having "spiritual leaders" who under gird and support the pastors. Deacons at First Baptist Orlando eagerly accept the opportunity to care for widows, promote unity, and support the pastors of their church.

Six Core Ministries

While Dr. Jimmy Knott views the three functions as timeless and unchanging, each year he identifies specific core ministries for the deacons at First Baptist. During the 2007 calendar year, deacons at First Baptist Orlando have six core ministries. These specific assignments are described in their forty-six page Deacon Ministry Information Book:

1. Widows Ministry
2. Sunday Morning Prayer Room
3. Prospect Visitation
4. Serving the Lord's Supper
5. Meetings
6. Pastor's Call to Prayer²²

Knott explains that other than Widows Ministry, the list is subject to change from year to year. At times deacons have been asked to serve in as many as ten core ministries. Other times the list has been as short as five core ministries.

The Deacon Ministry Information Book provides explanations of the expectations for each of the above ministries.

²¹ Ibid.

²² "Deacon Ministry Information Book" of First Baptist Church of Orlando, p.8.

1. Widow's Ministry

Duties. The Widows Ministry Director will assign each deacon one or more widows for whom the deacon will be responsible. . . The deacon will maintain regular, monthly contact with each of his widows through visits, phone calls, or cards, etc. The following are MINIMAL duties; the needs of individual widows will vary. The deacon is to be sensitive to effectively serving his widows when it is necessary for him to go beyond these prescribed duties.²³

The minimal duties include making monthly contacts with each assigned widow, taking them to the annual Widow's Banquet, sending a birthday card, and reporting any changes in a widow's status to the Deacon Secretary.

2. Sunday Morning Prayer Room

Duties. Deacons and Yokefellows are assigned to the prayer room . . . to pray during the Sunday Morning worship services. The minimum time to serve is the first thirty (30) minutes of either the 9:00 AM or 10:45 worship service. The Deacon Secretary prepares the assignment schedule. If a deacon cannot fulfill his assignment, he will obtain a replacement, and notify the Deacon Secretary.²⁴

A yokefellow is a man from the church family who assists the deacon in his ministry as a deacon. All deacons at First Baptist Orlando are asked to select a yokefellow. The third assigned deacon ministry is to follow up with church prospects.

3. Prospect Visitation

Duties. This function is responsible for contacting prospects, either by phone or a personal visit. Assignments are made by the Deacon Secretary. If a deacon cannot fulfill his assignment, he will obtain a replacement, and notify the Deacon Secretary before Thursday preceding the assigned date.²⁵

The Deacon Secretary at the church e-mails the visitation assignment or places it in the deacon's mailbox. Each deacon has their own box in the Deacon Room at the church. A photo of this room is provided in Appendix III. Deacons are expected to make contact and report results back to the church within a week.

²³ Ibid, p.9.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid, p.10.

4. Serving the Lord's Supper

Duties. The scheduled dates for serving the Lord's Supper are shown on the Calendar, p. 7. All deacons and yokefellows are expected to serve the Lord's Supper. They are to report to their Team Leader in the Narthex 20 minutes before each service. Assignments to serve a particular area are made by the Administrative Director and Serving Team Leaders.²⁶

First Baptist Orlando obviously has a high view of the role of deacons in serving Communion. The Deacon Ministry Information Book includes a calendar of assigned Lord's Supper dates and Knott has Deacon Officers who organize and assign deacons to specific sections in the worship center. The importance of this ministry is also seen in the expectation to serve regardless of other Sunday morning responsibilities.

When the Lord's Supper is scheduled for the morning services, all deacons are **EXPECTED** to serve at **both** services, even if they have duties elsewhere, such as teaching a LIFE class. The serving of the Lord's Supper is to have priority. There are usually not more than three AM observances of the Lord's Supper each year, and they are very important worship experiences. The deacon is to find a substitute to fulfill his other duties.²⁷

A deacon's assignment to serve the Lord's Supper on a Sunday takes precedence over a teaching role! The responsibilities of deacon ministry are highly regarded at First Baptist Orlando. In addition to serving in the above capacities, the deacons also meet regularly for training, information, and fellowship.

5. Meetings

Duties. All deacons and yokefellows are expected to attend the Deacon/Yokefellow Meetings (see Calendar, p. 7 for dates, times, and locations.) The Deacon Secretary will send a reminder to each deacon and yokefellow prior to each meeting. Minutes of the meetings will be posted in the Deacon Room, WC-141.²⁸

The calendar of meetings lists eight scheduled meeting times during the 2007 calendar year. These meetings keep deacons connected to one another and provide ongoing teaching on the character and competencies needed in the life of a deacon. The last of the six core ministries is an opportunity for the deacons to pray during an altar call.

²⁶ Ibid, p.11.

²⁷ Ibid. Emphasis included in the original document.

²⁸ Ibid, p.12.

6. Pastor's Call to Prayer

From time to time, as the Holy Spirit leads, the Pastor will invite anyone in the congregation who has a particular prayer need or concern to come to the altar and pray. When the Pastor desires the deacons and yokefellows to participate, he will say something like, **“The deacons will join you as you come.”** This will be the signal for all the deacons and yokefellows to come forward to kneel and pray. . . ²⁹

Dr. Jimmy Knott refers to the deacons as “spiritually minded men”. The pastor recognizes the spiritual impact and respectability of these men and will periodically have them lead the way when he calls the church to pray.

Deacon Accountability

The clearly defined roles and responsibilities of deacons would mean nothing if those selected to serve did not actually serve in their core ministries. At First Baptist Orlando, the expectation to serve is high. Jimmy Knott has developed an unambiguous plan of accountability for the deacons he oversees. “I’m just big about accountability. . . I’m trying to hold people accountable. . . back years ago, when they had parking lot responsibility, they had to sign in. I wanted to know that they showed up and did it. . . . That’s just how I’m wired.”³⁰

The Deacon Ministry Information Book clearly spells out the expectations to serve.

When a man agrees, and is set aside to serve as a deacon, he assumes the responsibility for faithfully discharging his duties, and will be held accountable for doing so. Accountability, including appropriate, timely reporting either in writing or electronically to the Deacon Secretary once the various ministries have been fulfilled, will be measured.³¹

The deacons at First Baptist Orlando know their responsibilities and understand that they will regularly report their ministry activities. The Deacon Ministry Information Book also underscores the consequences if one does not serve or report their service.

It is our prayer that every deacon will be faithful in his commitment to serve. Beginning in April, the performance of each deacon will be reviewed and

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Interview of Jimmy Knott.

³¹ “Deacon Ministry Information Book,” p.8.

evaluated by the Deacon Officers at each Officer's meeting. If unsatisfactory service is noted, it will be addressed as follows:³²

In many areas of life, if performance is not measured, the natural tendency is to settle in to lower levels of commitment. Knott and the deacons he leads understand that such a pattern is unacceptable for deacons who serve the Lord at First Baptist Orlando. They have developed a three-step process of accountability for those deacons who do not fulfill their ministry responsibilities.

1. A notice from the Widow's Ministry Director will be placed in the deacon's mailbox to remind him that he has failed to meet the minimum performance standards for a deacon.
2. If no improvement is noted by the middle of the following month, a letter will be sent to the deacon from the Deacon Chairman.
3. If no improvement is noted by the middle of the second month, a Deacon Officer and one of the Staff Pastors will meet with the deacon. Should the situation reach this point, the deacon will, in all likelihood, be asked to resign.³³

Pastor Jimmy emphasizes that while they implement the accountability plan without apology, they also do so with great grace. When meeting with a deacon who has not been fulfilling his responsibilities, the approach is always positive and ministry-focused. Jimmy knows the man likely regrets that he has not been serving as he agreed to do. When discussing the situation, Knott asks the man what is preventing him from serving and how he or the church can help him. The deacon has opportunity to express his needs and receives compassionate prayer and an offer for help. Then, unless the circumstances preventing the man from serving effectively have been clearly resolved, the man is asked to resign from his position as a deacon. That decision enables the resigning deacon's ministry responsibilities to be met by other deacons.

The Deacon Ministry Information Book also provides specific instructions of how to report the accomplishment of assigned tasks. Each of the six core ministry descriptions includes a section describing the accountability plan of that particular ministry. As one might expect, given the understanding of the importance of deacons serving his assigned widow(s), the most detailed accountability plan accompanies the Widow's Ministry core ministry description.

³² Ibid.

³³ "Deacon Ministry Information Book" of First Baptist Church of Orlando, p.8.

Accountability.

1. Each deacon must submit a monthly report by the 10th of each month for contacts/ministries conducted during the previous month.
2. Reports are to be submitted electronically either through the church website at [firstorlando.com/ministries/deacons/Widow Accountability Report](http://firstorlando.com/ministries/deacons/Widow%20Accountability%20Report), or via email.³⁴

Appendix II shows the online Widow Accountability Report that deacons submit. The Deacon Ministry Information Book also describes how deacons can use computers in the church's Welcome Centers to submit an online report or turn in a typed or handwritten report form. The accountability for Widows Ministry continues:

3. Reports will be submitted to the Deacon Secretary, who records the information and then sends the report to the Widows Ministry Director.
4. The Deacon Secretary will post the Deacon Accountability Summary report monthly in the Deacon Room, WC-141.³⁵

Not only is a deacon's fulfillment or lack of fulfillment of his tasks reported to the Widows Ministry Director, it is also published on a list in the church's Deacon Room! The accountability plan helps assure that ministry by deacons continues without interruption. Knott reports that out of approximately 100 deacons, only two or three deacons are typically asked to resign from their positions each year.

An Investment in Ministry

Ministry leaders know that ministry has the best possible opportunity to succeed if they provide adequate resources to support the ministry. First Baptist Orlando takes the ministry of deacons seriously and, therefore, supplies staff, financial, and material resources to enable and sustain this significant ministry.

Pastor Jimmy Knott, who is a member of the Senior Management Team at First Baptist Orlando, has not assigned the oversight of deacon ministry to a member of the staff team he leads. Rather, he personally invests his limited time and energy to the deacons. He routinely attends the Deacon Officer's meetings, leads a Bible study at each deacon's meeting, and is vitally involved in the nomination and selection process of new deacons each year. He estimates that he invests approximately ten hours per month in deacon ministry in the first nine months of the year. In the fourth quarter of the year, during the selection process of new deacons, he dedicates approximately fifteen hours per month. Knott obviously believes that deacon ministry merits his efforts to train, encourage, motivate, and select wise and faithful deacons.

³⁴ Ibid, page 9.

³⁵ Ibid.

In addition to pastoral leadership, First Baptist Orlando funds a part-time Deacon Secretary to support the deacon ministry. Gloria Wade works twenty to twenty-four hours per week to take care of many administrative details associated with the ministry of deacons. Much of her time is spent tracking the many accountability report forms for the deacons, preparing summary reports of the deacons' ministry, preparing mailings for the deacons, and making assignments for prospect visitation.

In addition to the salaries of these two staff members, deacon ministry is included in the annual church budget. The allocation for deacon ministry in the 2007 budget is \$8,360. These funds provide everything from training literature and printing to meeting supplies and refreshments.

First Baptist Orlando also provides a dedicated space to enhance deacon ministry. The Deacon Room is located just outside the church's worship center. This large room provides each deacon his own mail slot. Material resources are also on hand to help deacons fulfill their assigned ministry responsibilities. Deacon ministry stationery is available for writing notes to widows and prospects. Deacons can also take a supply of deacon business cards to personalize and offer to those to whom they are seeking to minister. Appendix III provides a glimpse of the Deacon Room. Appendix IV shows some of the printed materials available to deacons.

Guiding Principles

What makes the ministry of deacons at First Baptist Orlando so successful? Why do the deacons of First Baptist Church Orlando embrace the call to serve? The following factors, clearly observable at First Baptist Church Orlando, can be applied in other churches to develop and enhance an effective ministry of deacons.

Church leaders must develop a biblically informed description of deacon ministry. When the church and its deacons understand that the role of deacon is one of service, unity of purpose is achieved. Further, when those in leadership clearly define the expectations and ministry assignments of deacons, the groundwork is laid for effectual ministry. This step of communication and clarification is vitally important.

Once ministry tasks are communicated, a means of accountability is needed. Deacons who are the most conscientious will serve whether or not a plan of accountability is in place. However, without such a plan to hold them responsible, many, if not most deacons, will tend to find their motivation for ministry decreasing as months and years pass. A clear process of accountability is critical for deacon ministry to continue over an extended period of time.

Once the church's leadership has helped its deacons understand their roles and responsibilities, the church must allocate the appropriate resources to support the ministry of deacons. When a staff member commits time to overseeing, training, and encouraging these servant leaders, the staff member's and church's ministry is multiplied many times over. The deacons will also sense the value of their ministry and be better equipped to fulfill their ministry when the church also provides material resources to enhance their service.

Communication, accountability, and the allocation of resources have helped create and sustain an effective ministry of deacons at Orlando's First Baptist Church.

Does It Work?

Deacon ministry at First Baptist Church of Orlando is alive and thriving. Gary Haskell, the Administrative Director Officer for the deacon ministry loves serving as a deacon. When asked what he would like to change about deacon ministry at First Orlando, he struggled to come up with anything that was not functioning well in deacon ministry. When asked what he loved about the ministry of deacons in his church said,

First of all, the fellowship with the other deacons. They are a great group of Spirit-led men. Second, being able to serve. . . I was a deacon in St. Louis before we moved here. We were in a congregation of about 300. As deacons, we were the business side of church. We were called on when it came to business decisions, about the bylaws or constitution. Here we don't do that. . . we are here to be servants.³⁶

Well said, Gary. To serve others is to follow in Jesus' footsteps.

⁴² But Jesus called them to Himself and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. ⁴³ Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. ⁴⁴ And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve . . . (Mark 10:42-45, NKJV)

³⁶ Interview of Gary Haskell on June 3, 2007.

Appendix I – First Baptist Orlando Mission, Vision, and Values³⁷

Our Mission Statement:

Make disciples of Jesus Christ

Our Vision Statement:

A Passion for God, a Passion for People, a Passion to Serve

Our Core Values:

We have six core values that guide us. These values describe the culture we desire to create at First Orlando:

- **WORSHIP** as a Lifestyle (Romans 12:1-2; John 4:20-24)
- **EXCELLENCE** in All We Do (Malachi 1:6-11; Colossians 3:17, 23; Philippians 4:8; 1 Corinthians 3:13; 2 Peter 1:5)
- **ALL PEOPLE** Matter to God (Romans 1:16-18; Genesis 1:27-28; John 3:16; Psalm 139:13-16; Luke 19:10; Galatians 3:28; James 2:1; Acts 10:9-15)
- **Authentic Biblical COMMUNITY** (Acts 2:42-47; John 13:34-35; Romans 15:1-7)
- **Every Believer SERVING** Others (1 Peter 4:10-11; Ephesians 4:11-16; Romans 12:5-8; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27; Galatians 5:13; Matthew 20:26-28)
- **OBEDIENCE** to Scripture (1 Samuel 15:22; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Hebrews 4:12; James 1:22; 1 John 2:3-6)

³⁷ <http://myfirstorlando.com/About/MissionVisionCoreValues/tabid/297/Default.aspx>, accessed May 11, 2007.

Appendix II – Online Deacon Widows Ministry Accountability Report³⁸

The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying the 'Online Deacon Widows Ministry Accountability Report' form. The browser's address bar shows the URL: <http://myfirstorlando.com/Ministries/Deacon/WidowAccountability/tabid/439/Default.aspx>. The website header includes the 'FIRST BAPTIST ORLANDO' logo with the tagline 'passionate about life' and navigation links for Home, About, When, Communities, and Ministries. A search bar is also present.

The form is titled 'Online Deacon Widows Ministry Accountability Report' and is divided into several sections:

- Deacon Information:** Includes fields for Name, Email, and a dropdown menu for 'Month: Select Report Month'.
- Widow's Information:** Includes a table with columns for 'LastName', 'Visits', 'Calls', and 'Cards Needs and Comments'. The first row shows '1' in the 'LastName' column, and '0' in the 'Visits' and 'Calls' columns.
- Have Another?:** A link that says 'Click Here if you have information for a Second Widow.'
- Deacon Comments:** A large text area for entering comments.

The browser's status bar at the bottom indicates 'Internet' and '100%' zoom.

³⁸ <http://myfirstorlando.com/Ministries/Deacon/WidowAccountability/tabid/439/Default.aspx>, accessed July 19, 2007

Appendix III – Deacon Room at First Baptist Orlando



Appendix IV – Ministry Supplies in Deacon Room at First Baptist Orlando

