

Deaconesses Final Document

The subject of ‘deaconess’ was first addressed in this church in the 3rd General Assembly as follows:

“It was decided that women who are qualified and feel the call to the work as given in Romans 16:2 in connection with Acts 6:3, which indicates that she is a female deacon and her work similar to a deacon, should be appointed by the church to minister. We further recommend her as the woman mentioned in Titus 2:3-5, which duty she should exercise as directed by the Spirit. She may also, along with the elder men, take her part of 1 Peter 5:1–4” (Book of Minutes, 3rd Assembly, page 28).

The 4th Assembly readdressed this subject in the following manner:

“It was decided that female ministers had their place in the Lord’s vineyard in the days of the apostles and must be recognized in these days, but for lack of precept and example for ordination in the New Testament, the Assembly advises for the present that the wives of deacons be considered deaconesses by virtue of the position and ordination of their husbands.” (Book of Minutes, 4th Assembly, page 33)

Under further examination, we have found no evidence in Scripture of a woman being given a ministerial title based on her husband’s ministry.

Concerning the deacon, the 89th Assembly stated that *“He is to be a male and at least 30 years of age.”* (Book of Minutes, 84th Assembly, page 35)

A careful examination of I Timothy 3:8–13 identifies three groups of people. In verses 8–10 it refers to male deacons, verse 11 refers to female deacons, and verse 12 mentions the wives of deacons. In verse 11, the phrase “even so must their wives” (KJV), in the Greek simply says “women.” In the context of the passage, verses 8–10 give us the qualifications of the male deacon. However, since the word for deacon in the Greek “diakonos” is the same for masculine and feminine gender, Paul is using the term “women” to refer to the female deaconess. This could not be a reference to the wife of a male deacon for the following reasons:

1. If Paul deemed it necessary to give the qualifications of a male deacon’s wife, he would have also given the qualifications of a bishop’s wife in the proceeding verses.
2. Even if Paul chose to give only the qualifications of a deacon’s wife, he would have done it after verse 12 where he specifically makes mention of a deacon’s wife.

In Romans 16:1, mention is made of Phoebe, who is referred to as “diakonos” in the Greek. In the King James, this is rendered as “servant.” Even though the word “diakonos” does carry the meaning of servant, the primary meaning is deacon, which could also mean deaconess. “I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchrea.” (The New Revised Standard, NLT)

Further research shows that the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia also renders the word “servant” in Romans 16:1 as “deaconess.” Barnes further states in his notes on the New Testament (Romans 16:1) that the phrase, “*Which is a servant,*” in the Greek is “Who is a deaconess.” He also states, “*It is clear from the New Testament that there was an order of women in the church known as deaconesses*” (Barnes Notes on the New Testament, Quick Verse 7, CD-Rom).

Philip Schaff acknowledges that there were deaconesses in the early church and especially in the Eastern churches, it continued until the end of the 12th Century (History of the Christian Church, Quick Verse 7, CD-Rom).

Given there is Scriptural evidence that supports having “female deacons,” called “deaconesses,” we recommend women who qualify as “deaconesses,” be set forth by the local church in the same manner and according to the same requirements as their male counterparts.

Furthermore, after careful and prayerful examination of the age limit currently placed on deacons to be “at least 30 years of age”, we find this has no Scriptural support and is inconsistent with our present rulings that allow a licensed minister to be set forth at whatever age the local church and pastor determine is appropriate. Therefore, we recommend that the age of deacons and deaconesses be left to the discretion of the local church and pastor with consultation with their national/regional/or state overseer. These candidates should be mature individuals who have proven themselves faithful.

The Assembly Committee for Biblical Doctrine and Polity for the Church of God of Prophecy humbly submit this document with deep prayer for your review and consideration for 94th General Assembly.

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