

Concerning Female Deacons: A Statement From the Elders of Bellicose Church // **4.18.2026 // B.A. Purtle**

The question of whether or not women may be appointed as deacons is not novel. It has been a conversation since early Church history. At *Bellicose Church* we hold to the legitimacy and sanctity of qualified female deacons, though there have been supporters and objectors of that conviction for centuries. This paper spells out why we hold to the view that women can and should serve in the diaconate.

I. Our Exegesis of 1 Tim. 3.9-13, Especially v. 11

8 Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. 9 They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. 10 And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. 11 Their wives [Γυναῖκας - Women] likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. 12 Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. 13 For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus. (ESV)

-We understand verses 8-10 as referring either to male deacons or to deacons in general.

-We understand verse 11 as referring not to women generally, nor to the wives of deacons, but to women who would serve as deacons.

-We understand verse 12 to be referring to male deacons, and verse 13 as referring to deacons in general.

-We understand that Paul is not giving an *exhaustive* list of all the qualifications for deacons in 1 Tim. 3.8-13. The flow of the text seems to show that he is giving attributes of godliness as qualifications for the diaconate and that he moves from deacons in general, to female deacons, to male deacons, then back to the general.¹ As a unit, he's not giving an exhaustive statement, but more of a "these are the types of saints who ought to serve as deacons" kind of statement. This is true of the qualifications for overseers in previous verses. The lists aren't exhaustive, but representative.²

Here are the primary reasons for our interpretation and conviction:

a. Γυναῖκας in v. 11 cannot be decisively translated "wives" in this context. It's a viable option, of course. About 1/3 of the time the root-term and its variants are used in the New

¹ The argument that Paul's use of "deacons" in v. 13 rather than "male deacons" is one of the stronger arguments against female deacons, but it is not decisive enough (in light of the wider conversation) to forbid female deaconhood altogether.

² The fact that Paul's list in vv. 1-7 isn't identical to his list in Titus 1.6-9 is proof that he's not giving exhaustive lists.

Testament it refers to *wives*. About 2/3 of the time it simply means *women*. Context must be determinate. In this case, it may go either way. We think it's best translated *women* here, for reasons that we (and the biblical scholars cited below) will give.

b. “Their” in v. 11 is an addition from the translators of the ESV (and other translations which have it - e.g., NLT, KJV, NKJV, NET). The fact is, it's simply not in the Greek text. It's not necessarily a poor translation for this reason, *but it is an interpretive translation* which isn't an air-tight rendering in terms of the Greek text itself. Hence, other translations: **“Women must likewise be dignified...”** (NASB-95); **“Women must likewise be dignified...”** (LSB); **“In the same way, the women are to be worthy of respect...”** (NIV) et al. On a different note, **“Wives, likewise, should be worthy of respect...”** (CSB)³

In other words, when English readers find “Their wives” in their bibles in this text, they shouldn't assume that it's quite so clear in the Greek. “Their” isn't in the original, and Γυναῖκας could be either *women* or *wives*. If *wives* is meant by Paul in v. 11, it seems to us that he would've included *Their* (αὐτῶν) to make it clear that he was addressing the wives of male deacons. If he meant *women* in a general sense, as in *all Christian women*, that wouldn't fit the context either. *Women* as deacons seems to fit best, as we understand it, and of course, this is not a novel interpretation.

c. “Likewise” in v. 11 (ὡσαύτως) suggests that Paul is addressing a new category of people (namely, female deacons), just as he uses ὡσαύτως in v. 8 when he moves from overseers to deacons. It is entirely plausible (and we believe favorable) to interpret Paul's usage of **“likewise”** in v. 11 as a way of indicating that he's moving from male deacons (or the diaconate more generally) to giving a few specific qualifications for women who would serve in the diaconate.

d. If the wives of deacons are in view in v. 11, it doesn't make sense that Paul wouldn't give a similar (if not more thorough) list of qualifications for the “wives of overseers” in vv. 1-7. But Paul doesn't give qualifications for elders' wives. It seems strange, to say the least, that Paul would give qualifications for deacons' wives without giving qualifications for the wives of overseers. Since overseers bear the greater responsibility of governing the affairs of the church, we would ask: *Wouldn't it make sense that Paul would be concerned to give qualifications for elders' wives if that what he was doing concerning deacons' wives in v. 11?* We believe so, and thus, it makes more sense to us that he's giving qualifications for female deacons in v. 11, rather than the wives of male deacons.

e. Some of the qualifications for the women in v. 11 are repetitions of the qualifications given in v. 8. For instance, “[must be] dignified” (σεμνούς - σεμνάς) is used in both verses 8 and 11. While Paul *could* be saying this concerning deacons' wives, it strikes us as most likely that he

³ The CSB translators probably should've added *their* since they went with *wives*.

is holding forth this quality as necessary for women who are serving in the diaconate, just as he does for men serving in that capacity in v. 8.⁴

Here are a few more statements from New Testament scholars along these lines:

Patrick Fairbairn (1805-1874) -

“...the mode of expression employed in introducing the women, *Γυναῖκας ὡσαύτως*, apparently marking a transition to another class (as at ver. 8, ii. 9; Tit. ii 3, 6); also the absence of either the article (τάς) or the pronoun (αὐτόν) to connect the women with the men spoken of before; and further, the mention only of such qualifications in respect to the women as might fit them for confidential employment in deacon-work, while nothing is said of those more directly bearing on domestic duties; - these considerations seem very much to favor the view adopted already by Chrysostom, - adopted as too obvious to require any explanation, - and followed by Theophylact, Grotius, De Wette, Ellicott, Alford, etc.: that *not deacons' wives, but female deacons, are meant*.

....Anyhow, it ought to be understood of women who, in the one character or the other, were actively engaged in the kind of work which was proper to deacons. And considering the greater separation which then existed between the sexes, and the extreme jealousy which guarded the approaches to female society, it was in a manner indispensable that women, with some sort of delegated authority, should often be entrusted with various kinds of diaconal services.”⁵

Stanley Porter -

“As far as the argument of 1 Tim. 3.8-13 is concerned, the mention of women does not pose a problem if deacons could be either male or female (there is no feminine form of Διάκονος, so it could apply to both sexes). Paul first establishes the general characteristics for all deacons (3.8-10), then specifies that women deacons are expected to exhibit similar characteristics (3.11), and finally returns to the category of all deacons (3.12) and concludes with a general statement regarding service (3.13).

....It is not that Paul is addressing particular problems caused by the Ephesian situation; rather, *he wishes to ensure that the female deacons in Ephesus understand that their function is the same as that of all the deacons*.”⁶

Andreas J. Köstenberger -

“While Paul didn’t permit women to serve as overseers (2.12; cf. 3.2), he here stipulates qualifications for women deacons (the most likely understanding of v. 11). This underscores the biblical pattern of *male leadership* and *male-female partnership*.

⁴ See also John MacArthur’s short teaching here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5-MfqVRorDI&t=385s>

⁵ Fairbairn, *1&2 Timothy and Titus: Geneva Series of Commentaries*; The Banner of Truth Trust, 2002; pp. 150-151

⁶ Porter, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary On the Greek Text*; Baker Academic, 2023; p. 294

...v. 11 turns to women (whether deaconesses or deacons' wives, the former being more likely)...

...On the whole, 'women deacons' is *preferable*, for the following reasons:

1. The absence of qualifications for overseers' wives;
2. The adverb ὡσαύτως ("too") indicating an office similar to that of male deacon;
3. The parallel sentence structure and characteristics in vv. 8 and 11;
4. The absence of a qualifier for Γυναικας such as 'their.'

The reason Paul didn't call these women 'deaconesses' is that in his day the word Διάκονος (plus the respective article to indicate gender) was still used for both males and females; the term *diakonissa* (deaconess) was coined only later (*Apos. Con.* 8.19, 20, 28). Phoebe is called a Διάκονος of the church at Cenchrea in Rom. 16.1. Later (ca. AD 115), Pliny the Younger refers to two female deaconesses (*ministrae*) in Bithynia under Trajan's rule (*Ep.* 10.96.8). Paul's reference to deaconesses coheres well with his earlier prohibition of women serving in teaching or ruling functions over men (2.12) and reference to male overseers in vv. 1-7. ***Since serving as a deacon doesn't involve teaching or ruling, both men and women are eligible to function in this capacity. The requirements for deaconesses are therefore similar to those for male deacons.***⁷

Our exegesis runs within the train of thought held by scholars like these. The opposite view, that v. 11 has to do only with the wives of deacons, is held by other men of godly repute. We do not regard it a matter of orthodoxy, but these are our exegetical conclusions as elders at *Bellicose Church*, and we aim to shepherd accordingly with conviction and joy.

2. Our Understanding of "Office" and Authority

We are convinced that the historic development, identification, and overuse of the diaconate alongside eldership specifically as "offices" has sent mixed signals to many about the nature of authority as exercised in the local church. In other words, Deacons have often been confused with elders in various traditions, often being given authority that is foreign to the New Testament concept of the diaconate. The emphasis of deaconhood as an *office* has sometimes contributed to this confusion, at least when "office" is being unnecessarily used in terms of governance.

While Philippians 1.1 and 1 Tim. 3.1-13 show the indispensability of both *overseers* and *deacons* in their united efforts to care for the churches, *the term "office" (as ἐπισκοπήν is sometimes translated) is never directly used concerning deacons in the New Testament.* And even if one is comfortable using the term "office" in reference to deacons, the role of deaconhood does not entail exercising authority in the same way that apostolic church-planters and elders/overseers do.

⁷ Köstenberger, *Biblical Theology For Christian Proclamation: Commentary On 1-2 Timothy & Titus*; B&H Publishing, 2017; pp. 132-134, italics mine

If our use of the term “office” has within its meaning the **overseeing authority** of church governance, it shouldn’t be applied to deacons. If it means merely “position” or “stewardship,” it can be appropriate. Strictly speaking, biblically, the term we translate “office” (ἐπισκοπήν; ἐπισκοπή) is used of apostles and elders/overseers (cf. Acts 1.20; 1 Tim. 3.1), but not of deacons. Thus, as we understand the Scriptures, elders and apostles must be men (so as not to transgress the created order), as they must exercise authority over both men and women in the churches, but the role of the deacon is open to both sexes, for it doesn’t connote nor carry authority in the same way.

How we understand authority in relation to “office” determines whether or not “office” should be used in reference to deacons.

To repeat, it is not erroneous in a certain sense to attach the term “office” to the diaconate, especially if by it we simply meant “appointment/position.” But “office” often conveys the exercise of authority, and in no uncertain terms, women are prohibited from exercising authority over men in the Scriptures (cf. 1 Cor. 11; 1 Tim. 2). So, you see, there’s a lot resting on just how one is using the term “office” when speaking of the diaconate.

Since the New Testament never directly uses ἐπισκοπή (“office”) to refer to deacons, we see no need to either. Apostolic Church-Planters and Elders/Overseers exercise godly authority over and with respect to local churches (especially depending on the season of maturity in which each church finds itself). Deacons, rather than holding authoritative “offices” as *exercisers of authority*, are better thought of as appointed by God to function as *exercisers of service*—under the authority of and in aid to apostles, elders, and the local churches they are laboring to build up.

“Unlike elders, deacons are not charged with shepherding the whole flock (Acts 20.28; 1 Pet. 5.2). Unlike elders, deacons need not stand ready to ‘give instruction in sound doctrine and ... rebuke those who contradict it’ (Titus 1.9). Unlike elders, deacons will not answer to God for the spiritual welfare of individual souls (Heb. 13.17). Never once do we read a verse like ‘Be subject to the deacons,’ or ‘Obey your deacons and submit to them (see Heb. 13.17; 1 Pet. 5.5), for such language is exclusively applied to the office of the elder.”^{8 9}

Once the nature of the Diaconate is clear (when compared with that of apostles and elders in terms of office/authority), we are convinced that the role of deacon being open to both sexes becomes clearer also.

3. The New Testament Example

⁸ Matt Smethurst, *Deacons: How They Serve and Strengthen the Church*; Crossway, 2021; p. 142

⁹ We would add that church-planting apostles hold this kind of authority in a temporary sense as well, especially as a church is being established and awaiting the appointment of qualified elders.

Without giving a thoroughgoing survey of the New Testament example, it must suffice to say that the role of the deacon is one of serving the church within an example-setting capacity— In other words, *deacons* take specific ways of serving the church seriously— they get things done, and set an example for the flock in terms of *service*. Of course, both the men and women of the local church must learn how to serve Christ and His Church.

Male and female deacons are simply those whose godly example of *life and service* are put before the flock, so that the affairs of the church (which the elders have directed) may find their outworking through every member. Deacons lead the way in this. They are to be men and women set apart for serving in such a way that sets an example to the flock, *and* makes room for apostolic church-planters and elders to give themselves more freely to the work of planting and shepherding the church.

The earliest expression of this is in Acts 6.1ff, when men were appointed to **“serve tables”** in the **“daily distribution.”** Upon the appointment of these “servers,” the apostles concluded, **“but we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”** (6.4) The verb form of “deacon” is used in v. 2 (διακονεῖν) for “serve” or “attend to” tables, though the men are not formally titled “deacons” in the text.

While examples of deacons are few in the New Testament, **Rom. 16.1-2** presents us also with Phoebe.

“I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant (διάκονον - “a deacon”) of the church at Cenchreae, that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a patron of many and of myself as well.”

Phoebe is one of the few who are called deacons in the New Testament. One may plausibly argue that *deacon* is being used in Rom. 16.1 in a general sense, such that Phoebe is simply an exemplary servant in the local church. The term can be used (and often is) in just that way. But combined with our exegesis of 1 Tim. 3.11 it makes good sense that Paul is likely commending a woman in the church at Cenchreae who has been appointed to the role of a deacon. And even quite apart from our exegesis of 1 Tim. 3.11, Paul’s commendation of Phoebe does seem to stand out more than the mere recognition of general service that should characterize the majority in the Cenchreaen church. It’s completely possible, and we think most likely, that Paul is recognizing Phoebe as a noteworthy member of the diaconate in her local church.

Of course, the *overseers* and *deacons* are addressed together in Philippians 1.1, which underscores the vitality of each role, but neither proves nor disproves the validity of female deacons.

Beyond this, we don’t have a great deal more to draw from the New Testament, and feel no need to further speculate.

4. The Witness of Church History

Beyond the immediate time of first apostles, Female deaconhood has been affirmed in documented form since the early 2nd century. In contrast, the earliest extant written prohibitions against female deacons come from the 4th century (Council of Laodicea, c. AD 343–381, Canon 11 and Epiphanius of Salamis, c. AD 315–403, etc.). This is at least noteworthy.

Here is “a historical sampling” which demonstrates that female deacons functioned since early on: ¹⁰

Pliny the Younger, Governor of Bithynia, Letter to the Emperor Trajan (AD 111–113):

“Accordingly, I judged it all the more necessary to find out what the truth was by torturing two female slaves who were called deaconesses. But I discovered nothing else but depraved, excessive superstition.”

Clement of Alexandria (AD 150–215):

“We are also aware of all the things that noble Paul prescribed on the subject of female deacons in one of the two Epistles to Timothy.”

Origen of Alexandria (AD 184–253):

“[Romans 16.1] teaches...two things: that there are...*women deacons* in the church, and that *women*, who have given assistance to so many people and who by their good works deserved to be praised by the apostle, *ought to be accepted in the diaconate*.”¹¹

Olympias (AD 368–408):

“Olympias, a widowed deaconess of the church in Constantinople, leveraged her immense wealth to become a generous patron of the church. She donated many of her estates to the church, supported the ministries of such church leaders as John Chrysostom and Gregory of Nazianzus, ransomed exiled captives, sustained a community of 250 virgins, and cared for the poor.”¹²

Apostolic Constitutions (AD 380):

“Ordain also a deaconess who is faithful and holy, for the ministrations toward women. For

¹⁰ This list is taken from Smethurst’s book, cited in footnote 5 (pgs. 149–151)

¹¹ And for those who would ask, “Bryan, haven’t you lamented the especially allegorical hermeneutic of Origen? How can you commend this quote?” I answer, “I’m happy to say he’s not being unhealthily allegorical here! He’s taking Scripture at face value and concluding that ‘women... ought to be accepted in the diaconate.’”

¹² Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine*; Zondervan Academic, 2011; pp. 25–26

sometimes we cannot send a deacon who is a man, to the women, on account of unbelievers. Thou shalt therefore send a woman, a deaconess, on account of the imaginations of the bad. For we stand in need of a woman, a deaconess, for many necessities.”

John Chrysostom (AD 349-407):

“Some have thought that [1 Tim. 3.11] is said of women generally, but it is not so, for why should Paul introduce anything about women to interfere with his subject? He is speaking of those who hold the rank of deaconesses.”

Jerome (AD 347-420):

“Salvina, however, consecrated her life to deeds of piety, and became one of Chrysostom’s deaconesses.”

John Calvin (1509-1564):

“Deaconesses were appointed, not to soothe God by chantings or unintelligible murmurs, and spend the rest of their time in idleness, but to perform a public ministry of the church toward the poor, and to labor with all zeal, assiduity, and diligence, in offices of charity.”

Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892):

“Deaconesses, an office that most certainly was recognized in the apostolic churches.... It would be a great mercy if God gave us the privilege of having many sons who all preached the gospel, and many daughters who were all eminent in the church as teachers, deaconesses, missionaries, and the like.”

This is just a sampling, not an exhaustive list. One could gather a smattering of quotes from the 4th century onward that would disagree with our view. These quotations aren’t the ground for our convictions, but they *do* show that our convictions aren’t a novelty to historical theology, and in fact, some of them carry respectable weight since the prohibition of female deaconhood didn’t develop until a few centuries later, as far as we can tell.

There were others, from the 3rd century onward (e.g. Tertullian, Hippolytus, and the Council of Nicaea), who affirmed deaconesses, but regarded them more like assistants to male deacons. Others have taken this view from time to time in church history. This is often connected to the practice of distinguishing *clergy* and *laity* within the diaconate conversation. As early as the 4th century, in certain circles male deacons were considered “clergy” while female deacons remained “laity.”

Since we hold to strong male/female distinctions we understand the impulse for such nuance. The problem is that we don’t see this “clergy/laity” distinction spelled out in the New Testament, particularly with regard to male vs. female deaconhood. Not only that, the idea doesn’t seem to come along unto the 3rd or 4th century. It’s an understandable

distinction, but not a clearly biblical one. *We prefer rather to affirm deaconhood as viable for both sexes, and to reiterate (as we would in all contexts of life and ministry) that within the sphere of deaconhood, men ought to act like men and women ought to act like women.*

These historical quotations don't necessarily establish that female deaconhood is most certainly warranted by Scripture (though we believe it is for exegetical reasons already given), but they do establish this: *Since very early on, female deacons were recognized in many places by many of the Church's most highly regarded leaders.* We believe in Sola Scriptura (Scripture alone is ultimately inerrant, sufficient, and authoritative), *not* Solo Scriptura (which posits that historical theology and testimony don't matter). In the least, what we can see here is that the female diaconate is not a novelty. It is far from being the product of post-modern egalitarianism or feminism.

Female deacons have been in certain churches since very early on, even a few hundred years before the earliest documented opposition to the female diaconate emerged.

Again, this neither proves nor disproves our conviction, but it assures us that we aren't dealing with the matter in a way unheard of in the broader testimony of historical theology. Understandably, we find a measure of solace in this, notwithstanding its limitations.

5. Female Deacons As One Aspect of the Importance of the Female Contribution to Church Life

Lastly, a brief word on the importance of the female contribution to the church's upbuilding.

At Bellicose Church, we hold to Complementarianism. The men image God and lead the way in the home, in the churches, and in society — And the women also image God, while fulfilling their own distinctive roles of helping, nurturing, teaching, and serving in various capacities.

In the church context, we hold that apostolic church-plant leaders as well as elders/overseers/pastors must be men. Their roles entail the exercising of godly authority in a decisively masculine way that women should *not* assume, lest they distort the witness of the order of creation. On the flip side, of course, the men mustn't carry themselves like women. For us, there is no contradiction between all of this and the reality of female deacons (so long as the female deacons don't seek to exercise authority over men).

We also hold to the priesthood of *all* believers, both men and women, which means there are variegated ways in which women, like men, should be permitted and encouraged to minister. Partnership in the Gospel matters for both sexes. Wives/mothers have a particular role in the home, while married and single women may serve the church in a host of ways, most of which are dependent upon their qualifications and giftedness.

Women may pray and prophesy in the gathering of the saints (1 Cor. 12-14; Acts 1, 4,

12.12ff, et al), evangelize and encourage the saints (see Priscilla's service in Acts 18, for instance), teach women and children (Titus 2), contribute as patrons (Rom. 16), and minister in many other ways.

It is our conviction that women who are qualified may serve as deacons as well, and we are grateful for their eagerness to do so. Female deacons have already been a great blessing to our church (as have the male deacons), and we pray that God would equip and appoint more.

No, women should not serve as apostolic overseers of a church-planting team, nor as elders/overseers/pastors, but their contribution to the work of the local church and the great commission is invaluable. Indeed, it is precious to God Himself.

Female Deaconhood is just one of the many glorious ways in which the daughters of God, through Jesus Christ, may serve and edify the Church. For all these exegetical, historical, and practical reasons, we affirm that women whom the church affirms and God appoints should serve as Deacons.

Q&A

Why do we not differentiate with respect to titles - deacons for men, deaconesses for women?

We are not opposed to the use of “deaconess,” though we tend either to use “deacon” or “female deacon.” Neither from the Greek NT, nor from English translations of Scripture, nor from Church History do we find adequate warrant to insist on the use of “deaconess.” And since we do not see female deaconhood as distinct from deaconhood more generally, we aren’t sticklers on the terminology. We use “deaconess” less because its use (for some) supports the idea that female deaconhood is altogether different from male deaconhood, and we don’t agree with that distinction, particularly because no such distinction is taught in the NT.¹³

Do you view the role for women as the same office/title and scope of ‘deacon’ as men, or as a distinct, subordinate, and complementary role?

We see it as the same. We find no warrant in the NT to separate them. Though, as in all roles (being a wife, being a mother of sons, prophesying, teaching, et al), we encourage female deacons to be mindful that the way they’re carrying themselves isn’t grinding against the created order—in other words, that they’re carrying themselves with godly femininity (see 1 Pet. 3.1ff) rather than seeking to exercise authority in a masculine way. Whenever women act like men it emasculates men and dishonors God, just as men acting like women puts pressure on women to fill masculine roles and traits. We are opposed to disorder along these lines in every respect.

In the early church, historical sources often describe deaconesses as a separate order from male deacons, with gender-specific duties like assisting women in baptisms or visiting female members for modesty and cultural reasons. Why does our church appoint women to the deacon role without maintaining that kind of gender-specific distinction or limitation?

It’s true that female deacons are **sometimes** described in this way at different points in church history from the 3rd century on. But in the NT this separation is nowhere prescribed specifically with reference to deaconhood. In various ways we train our people to be mindful of the distinction of the sexes—Thus men typically pray with men and women with women, men typically baptize men and women baptize women, one on one counseling is male-to-male and female-to-female, we have separate MC threads for men and for women, separate Sunday school classes for women teaching women, etc.

That said — Nothing in the NT sets deacons (male or female) apart for the work of baptisms, visitation, or those kinds of functions. The idea of male deacons being “clergy” while female deacons were “laity” developed centuries later. So did the idea that deacons specifically should be the ones baptizing or making visitations. On a handful of occasions the idea of sex-specific roles for deacons (like baptism and visitation) came up in Church

¹³ To repeat Köstenberger: “The reason Paul didn’t call these women ‘deaconesses’ is that in his day the word Διάκονος (plus the respective article to indicate gender) was still used for both males and females; the term *diakonissa* was coined only later (*Apos. Con.* 8.19, 20, 28).”

History, and while we don't think it's a bad thing (unless it stifles the function of non-deacon members), we certainly don't see it prescribed in Scripture and see no need to require it in such a way that it creates a "new order" or "office" for deaconesses as distinct from deacons.

What biblical or theological convictions led our eldership to treat the deacon office as gender-neutral today, rather than preserving a complementary but differentiated approach like the early church?

This question is based on the false premise that "the early church" prohibited female deacons (or that it always held deaconesses as "laity" with male deacons as a form of "clergy"). As already noted, the prohibition of female deacons emerged in some places in the 4th century. Female deacons as deacons were recognized for a few hundred years before that. In our conviction, we are simply working with the testimony of this matter as consistently expressed in the first few centuries. More importantly, we are convinced that this is the testimony of Scripture. Practical decisions obviously have to be made by elders who are seeking to be obedient in governing the affairs of the church. The theological conviction that led us to a "gender-neutral" diaconate has already been articulated above.

Are the elders open to considering a distinction in title—such as using "deacon" for men and "deaconess" for women? Or is the current approach a settled conviction?

As noted, the settled conviction is that *deacon*, *female deacon*, or *deaconess* can be used in reference to women who are a part of the diaconate. We see no need to insist on one term or the other, but favor the first two for reasons already given. A partner in our church may prefer the term "deaconess," and they are free to prefer it. We prefer "female deacon" or simply "deacon" as we believe it comports best with Scripture.

If an elder's (or aspiring elder) conviction against women deacons was strong enough that they could not in good faith participate in appointing or overseeing women deacons, would the rest of the elders be open to the church no longer having women as deacons in order to maintain elder unity and allow that brother to continue serving? Or would the eldership see maintaining women deacons as non-negotiable, such that the dissenting elder (or aspiring elder) would need to step aside or not be affirmed?

We would not bar women from the diaconate because of an aspiring elder who differed with our convictions and insisted upon our changing them; convictions, which, by the way, have been held since the inception of *Bellicose Church* in 2011. If a current elder changed his mind on the matter that's something we'd have to seek the Lord's wisdom on.

If a qualified brother in our church expressed a desire to serve as a deacon but could not in good conscience affirm or work alongside women as deacons, would the elders be willing to explore changes to our current approach—such as not having women deacons or implementing a distinct deaconess category—to preserve his ability to serve? Or is the current practice of appointing women as deacons seen as essential enough that he would not be able to serve as a deacon in our church?

Our conviction concerning female deacons is not "seen as essential" in a way that equates it with matters of orthodoxy. But it is the unanimous conviction of all the elders, and has been since the beginning of *Bellicose Church*. If an otherwise qualified brother wishes to serve as a deacon but is unwilling to "work alongside women as deacons," the larger issue would be his

unwillingness or inability to submit to the authority of the elders to shepherd the flock as they best see fit concerning a matter that isn't one of orthodoxy.