

### I. The Problem: The Deadly Danger of Grumbling (6:1)

*“Now in these days, when the disciples were increasing in number, the Greek-speaking Jews began grumbling against the native Hebraic Jews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution [of food].” —Acts 6:1, my translation*

#### A. The Greek-speaking Widows Overlooked (6:1)

#### B. The Neglected Begin to Grumble Against Others (6:1; Exo 15:22-23; 16:2; 17:3; Numbers 11:1; 14; 16:11, 41)

### II. The Solution: The First Deacons

#### A. Two Priorities Achieving One Goal:

1. The Apostles' First Priority: The Ministry of Word and Prayer (6:2, 4)
2. The Deacons' Priority: The Ministry of Mercy (6:1-2)
3. The Goal: The Unity and Care of Christ's Body

#### B. Principles for the Selection and Ordination of Deacons

1. Chosen by the Congregation, Ordained by the Apostles/Elders (6:3, 6)
2. A Plurality of Deacons (6:3)
3. Qualifications: Good Repute, Full of the Spirit and Wisdom (6:3; 1 Tim 3:8-13)
4. Men, Not Women (1 Tim 2:12; 3:8-13; Rom 16:1)

#### C. The First Seven Deacons of Jerusalem (6:5)

### III. The Result: The Ministry of Word Adorned with the Ministry of Mercy Brings Unity to Christ's Body and the Gospel Advances (6:7)

“Let us never forget this origin of the office of deacon. Deacons are those who protect the communal joy of the congregation, and who, therefore, see to it that the exercising of the communion of saints, with all that that implies, continues. Deacons are those who see to it that there are no forgotten or neglected people in the church of God, or that there be none who are so bound and oppressed that the joy of salvation and release from all bondage in Christ is no longer apparent. They make sure that everyone can fulfill his or her calling as parents or members of the church because they are not disadvantaged. It is therefore never just a matter of seeing to it that no one is without food, but it is a matter of seeing to it that the joy in the Spirit, as free children of God be realized in the communion of saints.”

—Dr. Cornelis Van Dam

From the OPC Form of Government:

The office of deacon is based upon the solicitude and love of Christ for his own people. So tender is our Lord's interest in their temporal needs that he considers what is done unto one of the least of his brethren as done unto him. For he will say to those who have ministered to his little ones: "I was hungry, and ye gave me to eat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me."

In the beginning the apostles themselves ministered to the poor, but subsequently, in order that they might be able to devote themselves wholly to prayer and the ministry of the Word, they committed that responsibility to others, having directed the people to choose men of good report, full of the Holy Spirit and of wisdom. Since the days of the apostles the church has recognized the care of the poor as a distinct ministry of the church committed to deacons.

The duties of deacons consist of encouraging members of the church to provide for those who are in want, seeking to prevent poverty, making discreet and cheerful distribution to the needy, praying with the distressed and reminding them of the consolations of Holy Scripture.

If they are to fill worthily so sacred an office, deacons must adorn sound doctrine by holy living, setting an example of godliness in all their relations with men. Let them walk with exemplary piety and diligently discharge the obligations of their office; and "when the chief shepherd shall be manifested," they "shall receive the crown of glory that fadeth not away."

Reflection and Application Questions (for personal reflection and family conversation):

1. Why is grumbling so deadly? How does it undermine the peace and unity of the body of Christ? What things tempt you to grumble against the Lord or others?
2. Why are deacons necessary? What is the role of the deacon?
3. Did you learn anything new about the office of deacon today?
4. What is the relationship between the ministry of mercy and the ministry of word and sacrament? How should the two work together? Is one more important? Can one exist without the other?