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"Our diaconate is a small group. It is a place where we 'practice' what it means to minister and to receive ministry."

FOR DISCUSSION:

- How is your experience of community similar to Acts 2:42-47?
- Share one way in which you personally have been ministered to by a fellow deacon.
- List some ways that you would like to grow as a community of deacons.

GROWING...

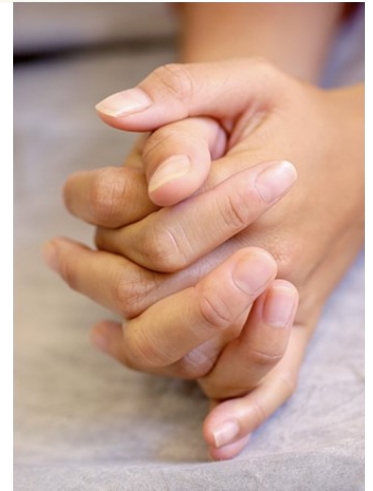
Just before Jesus finished His task on earth, He prayed, "My prayer is not for [my disciples] alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you." (John 17:20-21)

Jesus was praying that His intimacy, sense of purpose, and experience of community with God would also be experienced by His followers. Through His death and resurrection, this "new community" of life-giving relationships was made possible. In Acts 2:42-47, we read of the New Testament

community –the church- and what made them an effective group:

- they met together regularly
- they listened to God's Word and each other
- they prayed together
- they accepted each other and used their gifts
- they had a sense of purpose and mission
- they cared for each other
- they experienced unity
- they viewed each person as important
- they increased in number as others saw life in this church and joined.

Because we are participants in this "new



community," it is important that, when we gather together as deacons, we grow in our understanding, listening and responding to the Word. As we build relationships, we will become people of integrity, people who are open to God and to God's Spirit working in each of us. We will also grow in unity.

In the community of our meetings, as we are honest with God and

...IN OUR DEACONS MEETINGS

each other, as we share our joys, failures, hopes and pain, we will grow. God wants us to grow in our calling and in matters of the heart, knowing God and ourselves, listening to Him, letting Him minister to us and feed us with His Word.

Our diaconate is a small group, a place where we "practice" ministering and receiving ministry. It is here we can be ourselves, where we belong or find a caring community, and where we are able to do the work of ministry. God can use our meetings to

equip us and teach us how to minister to those in our church and community. The relationships in our deacons' meetings can be enhanced by setting an agenda which will strengthen our intimacy with God and each other, which will develop

...THROUGH OUR AGENDA

our caring and sharing, as well as accomplish the ministry tasks to which we are called.

By looking at each part of the agenda, we will understand and build an intimate “new community” where...

- we are open to God through reading, discussing and applying His Word.
- we are open to each

other by telling our story, through the application of Scripture to our current situations, and by praying for each other, and the needs of others.

- we do the work of ministry according to the task God has entrusted to us.

We will look at the following parts of our agenda:

- **Gathering Time**
- **Prayer and the Word**
- **Ministry Task**
- **Caring and Prayer**

At the beginning of each meeting, it is important to create an open atmosphere. Asking deacons to share is one way to help everyone present feel comfortable and valued.

“Remember that each person is unique and has valuable gifts to contribute. Accept each contribution as a gift.”

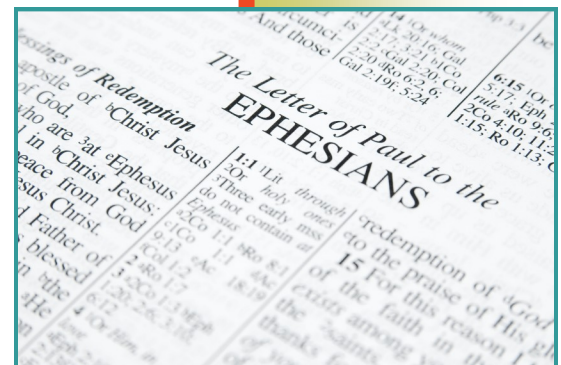
AGENDA: GATHERING TIME (5-7 MINUTES)

Invite each person to share something like the following:

- *What is the most enjoyable task for you as a deacon?*
- *What was the most meaningful thing you did in ministry since our last meeting?*
- *When did someone encourage you and how did they do it?*

Some people will speak immediately; for others, it takes a few minutes.

Remember that each person is unique and has valuable gifts to contribute. Accept each contribution as a gift.



AGENDA: PRAYER AND THE WORD (15 MINUTES)

Open the meeting with a short prayer, asking for a blessing and remembering what has already been shared.

The chair or assigned person should read an appropriate portion of Scripture and/or a devotional. It is helpful if

the Scripture or devotion speaks to an aspect of diaconal work or to a current joy, struggle or event. (devotions specifically written for deacons may be found on Diaconal Ministries Canada’s website: www.diaconalministries.com).

Remember that this part of the meeting is meant to facilitate a sharing of the living Word. It will help develop our language of faith and help us apply Scripture. It will also increase our ability to use Scripture as we minister.

Ask open-ended questions about the passage, which will allow for observations and opinions to be shared. We may ask how the passage is meaningful to us as individuals or to our work as deacons.

AGENDA: MINISTRY TASK (1 HOUR, 15 MIN.)

This part of our meeting will take up the majority of our agenda. We will keep our ministry plan in mind, identify issues, and give progress reports on current activities, etc.

It is important for us to encourage accountability by following up on tasks from the previous meeting(s). Also, as we discuss

various items and make decisions, we will seek God's Word and Will.

The overall calling of the deacon informs our goals for the meeting, as does our workplan.

A workplan helps to provide clarity and encouragement to the diaconate, helping to maintain focus.

Does your diaconate need to develop a workplan?

Diaconal Ministries Canada can help. Go online to find the Diaconal Coach for your Classis (who can meet with you) and also find free workplan resources online:

diaconalministries.com



Rachel Vroege, Diaconal Ministries' Regional Ministry Developer for Western Canada addresses Diaconal Coaches at their annual gathering for sharing and equipping.

AGENDA: CARING AND PRAYER (15 MINUTES)

The caring part of each agenda happens throughout our meetings, but we may designate a particular part of our agenda for it.

Caring often comes through active listening or being aware of a personal or ministry struggle or joy in one of our group members. Caring may be shown by a word of encouragement and certainly by bringing all things to our Heavenly Father in prayer.

In communal prayer time, begin with the most common experience of prayer and grow from there, using other ways of talking to, and experiencing God's presence in prayer. Do not neglect

this part, even though it may not be comfortable for everyone. Think in terms of growth and development. Appreciate progress, and from time to time, note how you are growing together.

Here are some ways in which we may pray for each other and the people with whom we minister:

- Divide into groups of 3 and pray together.
- Go around the group and pray for the person to the right.
- Have someone keep track of all items of concern and thanksgiving throughout the meeting and assign each item to various people

to remember during prayer time. Or, place all items individually into a box on the table, and distribute those items to deacons prior to the prayer.

- Say sentence prayers of adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication or submission
- Try praying using a different posture (standing, holding hands, kneeling etc)

(...continued on pg 4)

For Discussion:

1. Which new or familiar ways of prayer will you try at your deacons' meetings?
2. Discuss the benefits of laying out a prayer strategy as part of your planning for each year.



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For more information on Diaconal Ministries Canada, our work with deacons and churches, and our resources:

Email: dmc@crcna.org

or

Phone: **1-800-730-3490**

RELYING ON THE HOLY SPIRIT, DIACONAL MINISTRIES CANADA EXISTS TO INSPIRE, EMPOWER AND EQUIP DEACONS AS THEY ANIMATE THEIR CHURCHES TO JOIN IN GOD'S TRANSFORMING WORK IN COMMUNITIES ACROSS CANADA

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AGENDA: CARING AND PRAYER CONTINUED...

(...continued from pg 3)

- Ask what God is saying to each and develop communal listening skills.

As our intimacy with our Heavenly Father grows, we will sense God's presence and we will respond to His will. Love for each other will grow and people's needs will be met. Indeed, others will see a living Jesus and want to know Him more.

Growing in Prayer

Experience in, and level of comfort with communal prayer varies. It can feel threatening for some, but we can help each other appreciate the richness of diversity and use it in developing our individual and communal prayer life.

What has been the experience among your deacons?

- Rote prayers (a

learned/memorized prayer)

- Congregational prayer
- "Popcorn prayer"
- Silence before God
- Singing a prayer together
- Sentence prayers

Share your experience of prayer together; this will make it easier to grow as a diaconate.

Now consider what hindrances or barriers exist (for example, fear of fumbling the words).

Perhaps the chairperson might share first, and then offer the opportunity for others. This is an appropriate time to give these things to God in a prayer of confession, also asking for His leading and grace.

At future meetings, you may try different expressions of prayer as you grow together.