

The First Deacons

Scripture Reference: [Acts 6:1-7](#)



Suggested Emphasis: Today's lesson explores some of the "organizational" aspects of the church including deacons, elders, teachers, etc.



Background Study



Story Introduction



Telling the Story



Review Questions



Songs



Learning Activities



Other Online Resources

Story Overview:

Many Jews were becoming followers of Jesus in Jerusalem. Needy widows were given food every day but some were being left out. Instead of neglecting their teaching and preaching time to take care of this food problem, the apostles asked the Christians to choose seven faithful men to take care of the widows. Some refer to these servants as the first "deacons" in the church.

Background Study:

[Click here for an overview of the Book of Acts](#)

DEACON: The word "Deacon" comes from the Greek "diakonos" which means servant or minister. It is interesting to note that the Seven were not referred to by this title by the early church as "Deacons" but as "The Seven". Deacon as an official title did not develop until much later.

GRECIAN JEWS: Also known as Hellenists or Hellenistic Diaspora Jews, these were the Jews who were of the Diaspora. Diaspora is a term that means dispersion and it refers to the scattering of Jews throughout the surrounding lands dating back to the exile to Assyria and Babylon. Hellenistic Jews in Palestine were those that had migrated back to Jerusalem from where they had lived.

HEBRAIC JEWS: This group of Jews spoke Aramaic and/or Hebrew and retained Jewish culture and customs.

DAILY DISTRIBUTION: The daily distribution appears to be based on a Jewish practice called “Tamhuy” (meaning “The Tray”), where foodstuffs was placed on the tray and distributed to the poor.

WIDOW: A woman whose husband has died. Jewish custom declared that a widow was to either marry her late husband’s brother, or to be looked after by her family, as a woman was often not able to provide her own income. But there were many widows who had no family to look after them and needed the assistance of the faithful. Widows have always been special to God and God’s people have always been asked to look out for their needs ([Deuteronomy 10:18](#); [24:19-21](#); [26:12-13](#), [27:19](#); [Psalm 68:5](#); [Luke 7:11-17](#)). Later in Church History there were more specific guidelines provided in regards to looking after widows. (See [1 Timothy 5:3-16](#))

Since the early church in Jerusalem was composed of both Hellenistic (Greek speaking) and Hebraic (Aramaic speaking) Jews, the language and cultural differences between them resulted in creating tension and potential division between these two groups. The specific result that manifested itself was the neglect of the Greek speaking widows in the daily distribution of food. It is not sure whether or not the Hellenistic widows were neglected intentionally or unintentionally and the reasons for the neglect are debated among commentators. What the Bible does make clear though is that as the Church was increasing significant needs were not being met.

The apostles’ solution was for the church to choose seven men who were full of the Spirit and wisdom and then they would delegate them to take care of the situation. With the Seven to take care of daily widows need the apostles would be free to preach and teach. This decision indicates wisdom on the part of the apostles and is the first time we see any sign of formalised organisation in the early church. Structure and organisation are vital to making sure needs get met. In other places in Scripture the Church is referred to as a body ([Romans 12:3-8](#); [1 Corinthians 12:12,27](#); [Ephesians 3:6](#); [4:15-16](#)). The metaphor of the body reveals God’s plan for us to use our different gifts for His purposes, together meeting all the needs around us and together fulfilling the Great Commission. The apostles could not continue to meet the needs of the expanding church on their own. They needed help. Organisation and delegation meant that those needs could be met.

Paul gives details in [1 Timothy 3:1-13](#) and [Titus 1:5-9](#) about how to appoint overseers and deacons, and the qualities these men must have to be competent leaders in the Church. These passages indicate the example of organisation and leadership we need in the Church body to ensure that needs get met and God’s work continues to be done.

This Background Information submitted by Kayla Robinson- Thanks Kayla!



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Way to Introduce the Story:

Find out the names of all of the widows (and widowers) in our congregation and write them on the chalkboard (or whiteboard). Ask the children what all of these names have in common. See if the children eventually realize that they are and widower is a man whose wife has died. Now write the names of the deacons on the board. Ask the children if they know what these men have in common. “Today we are going to read from the books of Acts about both widows and deacons.”

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The Story:

The church in Jerusalem grew bigger and bigger every day. People heard about Jesus and then told other people. Soon hundreds and hundreds and even thousands of people decided to follow Jesus and were baptised.

The Apostles were very busy praying, preaching and teaching every day. They wanted everyone to know about Jesus!

But they were also very busy helping people. Christians brought money to the Apostles and the Apostles, in turn, would buy food and give it out to those who were hungry. This was very important because some people did not have any family to take care of them. One group of people who didn't have family were the widows. A widow is a woman whose husband has died. The Apostles gave food to the widows to help them.

But there was a problem. The Apostles were so busy that sometimes they couldn't get to everyone. Some widows were missing out and going hungry. The Jews that had travelled from far away said, "The widows in our group are not getting enough food! The other widows are getting the food first."

Many people were unhappy so the Apostles gathered everyone together. They said, "We don't want anyone to miss out on the food. But it takes a lot of time to buy the food and pass it out to everyone. If we spend all of our time passing out food then we won't have enough time to pray and to teach about Jesus. It would not be right to stop teaching about Jesus."

"We have an idea. We Apostles will stop distributing food so that we can spend our time praying, preaching and teaching. We want everyone to choose seven other men to be in charge of passing out the food. Make sure these men are faithful to God and full of the Spirit. Choose men who are wise because it will be their job to make sure everything is fair and that none of the widows misses out."

Everyone thought this was a really good idea so they chose seven men: Stephen, Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas. The Apostles prayed for these men and they began their work.

From then on the widows and everyone else received their fair share of food and the Apostles taught even more people about Jesus. Now that everyone was sharing in the work, the church grew bigger and bigger every day.

What jobs do people do in your church? Are there elders and preachers? Are there deacons or men and women who serve the church in special ways? What ways do you help the church?

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Ways to Tell the Story:

This story can be told using a variety of methods. Always remain true to the facts found in the Bible but help children connect to its meaning by using drama, visual aids, voice inflection, student interaction and/or emotion.

[Click here for visual aids and story-telling methods.](#)

[Click here to download the slideshow](#) or [click here to download the pictures to print.](#)

Each teacher is unique so only use the illustrations that best relate to the way YOU are telling the story in THIS lesson. Too many illustrations can be confusing so eliminate any that cover other stories or details you do not wish to emphasise in this lesson.

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Review Questions:

- What was the problem concerning the widows in Acts chapter 6? Some were not getting their food when it was passed out.
- What did the apostles do to make sure the widows were taken care of in the early church? They asked the people to choose seven faithful men to take care of feeding the widows.
- Why didn't the apostles feed the widows? They did not want to take time away from teaching God's word.
- What is a deacon? A man chosen to serve the church.
- What is an elder? An older man chosen to lead and care for the people in the church just like a shepherd cares for his sheep.

Song Suggestions:

- [Roll the Gospel Chariot Song](#)
- Refer to the [Song Page](#) on this website for more options.

Learning Activities and Crafts:

[\(How to choose the best learning activities for my teaching situation\)](#)

Activities:

- Invite the deacons from our congregation to visit your class today and talk about their area of work
- Write "thank-you" notes to the deacons in your congregation. Or send notes to anyone who helps the church in some way.
- Prepare small gift baskets for some widows in the congregation or community. You might want to prepare the baskets and have the children bring food items in next week.
- Help children go through the church directory to find the names of widows in your congregation.
- Arrange a visit to a widow in the congregation.
- It can be helpful to demonstrate the need to delegate and have organisation by getting the children to list various jobs that need doing so that the church keeps working and keeps serving God. Then you can ask them "Do you think one person could do all that all of the time?" Use this to show how God needs His people to share the load and organisation helps us to do that. Role playing chaotic situations that require organisation could be another way to communicate to the children how we need organisation every day.
Idea submitted by Kayla Robinson.

Check the [Teaching Ideas](#) page on this website for ideas that are adaptable to any lesson.



[Click here for "The First Deacons" printables to print \(A4 paper\)](#)
[Click here for "The First Deacons" to print \(Letter size-USA\)](#)

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Other Online Resources:

- [Various craft ideas for gift baskets at http://www.artistshelpingchildren.org/basketsartscraftsideasprojectskids.html](http://www.artistshelpingchildren.org/basketsartscraftsideasprojectskids.html) (scroll down the page once you link to it)
- [Custom, printable greeting cards at http://www.dltk-cards.com/custom.htm](http://www.dltk-cards.com/custom.htm)

<https://www.pinterest.com/marynnz/acts-beginning-in-jerusalem/>

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