

## Deacons: Economic Leadership

Most people think of a *deacon* as a servant, someone who gives out books at the door, tidies the chairs. Indeed in Cambodia, the translation of the word is of the lowliest *peon* (while the word *pastor* is a word translated as a leader of great authority). A brief reading of the calling, anointing, giftedness and lives of the first deacons, paints a very different story.

Deacons are skilled in redistribution of money from the rich to the poor. They are spiritual men and women (deaconesses), called to exercise those gifts in the management of the churches' funds for the poor. In 21<sup>st</sup> century jargon, they are economic experts, social workers, community development workers, budgeting advisors, with strong pastoral care for the needy. They must have good business heads and gifts of mercy.

The roles and qualities of deacons (Acts 6: 1-4 (follow the story of Stephen and Phillip); I Tim 3: 8-13) are well worth reflection. But these cannot simply be transported into the 21<sup>st</sup> century context. Theology first gets to grips with what the scriptures meant in their context. Then it asks how that can be translated into a dynamic equivalence in our culture and time. The following are some important questions for a congregation to grapple with:

- What would be the equivalent job description for deacons be in a 21<sup>st</sup> century city church? What giftedness and training would be needed?
- What kind of people have these character qualities in your church? What are they currently doing in ministry?
- How is your church currently engaged with the poor, the needy, the oppressed? How could your church open new dimensions of ministry that serve the needy in your community?
- What changes to the constitution, leadership definitions, and roles are needed to move the church into effective diaconal engagement?

### ***Expand the Role of the Diaconate***

If there is a commitment to be salt and light in society, who within your church has the mandate to work on such engagement? And as small local churches do not have sufficient members that are literate in these issues, who are others in the city seeking to do the same? What forums are needed for discussion of these issues by members of your congregation and city?

Deacons are to handle the economics of church life. In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, these need to become highly skilled. Have somebody read up on New Zealand and globalisation issues and present their findings to an economic diaconate in your church. Prepare discussions on how these relate to Biblical principles.

Discern where your deacons can be trained in cooperatives, economic redistribution, social work, economic theology and advocacy. A local church is unlikely to discern well on many public issues so needs to link with others be they denominational or across networks.