

BIBLICAL MINISTRIES FOR WOMEN

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1. The general ministry of all baptized believers

Every truly Christian person was anointed and appointed and called to the general ministry or office of all believers at his or her baptism. Matt. 28:19 & Acts. 8:12 cf, Ex.19:3-8 & Num, 11:29 & Joel 2:16,28-29 & Acts 2:17,38-39 & I Cor. 12:13-20,26 & Gal. 3:27-28 & Eph, 4:4-5,12-13,16 & I Pet, 2:9, So also Martin Luther, the *Belgic Confession*, the *Heidelberg Catechism*, the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, and the *Westminster Larger Catechism*.¹

By virtue of this general ministry, all Christians are to be Christ's prophets and priests and kings at all times and in everything they do. Hence, all female Christians too are "heirs together" with all of their Christian brothers, and, are themselves to be Christ's prophetesses and priestesses and queens — all the time. I Pet. 3:7 cf. I Cor. 10:51 & Eccl. 3:1-13 & 5:18-20 & 9:7-10. Cf. also F.N. Lee's 1977 *Principles of Biblical Church Government*, and especially the section there on *The Office of All Believers*. Indeed, every human being should be involved in serving God as a "minister" alias a "servant" of the Lord. Rom, 13:4 cf, I Tim, 1:12 & I Pet, 4:10-11.

2. The general ministry of all "sisters in Christ"

Godly Christian women conscientiously occupying the general office of all believers, do wonderful work for the Lord and His people. One need only think of many of the very "elect ladies" mentioned in Holy Scripture (cf. II John 1,5,13).

For Sarah was the very "mother" of all truly Christian women — even as regards her respectful obedience to her husband Abraham. Cf. I Pet. 3:6 & Heb, 11:11. The penitent Rahab risked her very life to further the extension of God's Kingdom. Josh. 2 cf, Heb, 11:51 & Jas, 2:25. Under the influence of her godly mother-in-law Naomi, Ruth even abandoned her own nationality — in order to become an ancestress of Jesus. Matt. 1 & Ruth chs. 1 to 4. And Esther Queen of Persia risked dethronement — rather than not protest the persecution of the people of God. Est. 4:14-16.

Moreover, Mary the mother of Jesus gladly accepted the slander of evil men in exchange for the great privilege of bearing the Saviour in her own body. Luke 2:34-38 & John 8:18-42. Mary Magdalene and Johanna and Susanna and many other women "ministered" to Jesus with their possessions and through their services, both during His lifetime and after His death. Luke 8:2-3 & 23:56 to 24:10.

Both the female tentmaker Priscilla and the wealthy businesswoman Lydia — placed their homes at the disposal of Paul and other preachers. Acts 16:14,15,40 & 18:2-26. And Timothy's mother Eunice and grandmother Lois gave that dedicated

¹ 1968 Reformed Ecumenical Synod: *Report*, p. 152; *Belgic Confession* art. 28 & 31; *Heidelberg Catechism* Q. 32; *Westminster Confession of Faith* 28:1; *Westminster Larger Catechism* Q. 167.

preacher his first infant groundings in the God-breathed Scriptures which they themselves had absorbed. II Tim. 1:5 & 3:14-17 cf, I Tim, 2:15 & Tit, 2:4-5.

3. The triple ministries of the special male offices: Preacher-Elder-Deacon

In addition to the above general office or ministry of all male and female believers, there are also three special male offices or ministries. These all seem to root in the "triune office" of the male Christ Jesus and in His prophethood and kingship and priesthood. Cf. Luke 4:18.

Now these three special male church offices are: the Ministry of the Word and Sacraments; the Ruling Eldership; and the Diaconate. Cf. F.N. Lee's *Principles of Biblical Church Government* — and specially its two sections 'What is a Church Office?' and 'The Triune God and the Triune Office.' Thus, according to the infallible teachings of Holy Scripture, all Preachers (in the Ministry of the Word and Sacraments) and all Governors (in the Ruling Eldership) are to be suitably-qualified adult communicant males. I Tim. 2:7 to 5:7 & Tit. 1 :5-13. And so too are the Deacons (in the Diaconate). Cf. Acts 6:1-8 & Phil. 1:1 & I Tim, 3:12.

4. The Biblical Diacomate of male Deacons: often helped by auxiliary fulltime Deaconesses

It must be noted that the first New Testament Deacons were all males — even though elected to take care specifically of neglected widows. Acts 6:1-8 & 7:2,21 cf. I Tim. 5:8-13. Yet even in apostolic times, it is certain that specially-qualified Christian ladies helped those male Deacons. And they did so in the ladies' own fulltime auxiliary church ministry — as Deaconesses. Cf. I Tim, 3:8-11 & 5:9-11 & Rom. 16:1-2.

Thus the same Paul mentions "the women" qualified to assist the male Deacons in I Tim. 3:8-11. Indeed, it is them whom he probably mentions again in 5:5-16, where they would seem to be mature women and especially diligent widows sixty years old and above. He also describes "our sister" Phebe not only as a patroness or "a succourer of many" but also as "a *diakonos* of the church at Cenchrea." Rom. 16:1-2.

Again, in the church at Lydda, Peter encountered the woman Tabitha or Dorcas who, by making "coats and garments" for impoverished widows, helped them in a similar way to the manner in which the first all-male Deacons did. Acts 9:56,59,41 cf. 6:1-8. Thus, not only the male Deacons but so too the "women" who obviously helped them, were to be respectable; unloquacious; circumspect; trustworthy in everything. I Tim. 3:8-11 cf. 2:9-11. Deaconesses' tasks apparently included especially: caring for widows and orphans; showing mercy to the sick; providing hospitality; and succouring many. I Tim, 3:8-11 cf. 5:3-16 & Jas, 1:27 & Rom. 12:4-13 & 16:1-2.

5. Deaconesses in early church history

Already in the later Pre-Christian synagogues, the office of Deaconess seems to have been developing (cf. the *Talmud*); and Paul discusses it as well established in the New Testament Church. Rom. 16:2 & I Tim. 5:11 & 5:9ff. Pliny mentions church *diaconissae* or *ministrae* in his 112 A.D. *Epistle to Trajan*; and so too do Ignatius, Hermas, Polycarp, Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Theodore of Mopsuestia, the *Apostolic Constitutions*, and Chrysostom.

The *Apostolic Constitutions* give the following prayer "concerning a Deaconess" at the time of her church appointment: "O bishop, you shall lay your hands upon her in the presence of the Presbytery, and of the Deacons and Deaconesses, and shall say: 'O Eternal God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Creator of man and of woman, Who did replenish with the Spirit Miriam and Deborah and Anna and Hulda (Ex, 15:20, Judg, 4:4, Luke 2:16, II Kgs, 22:14); Who did not disdain that Your only begotten Son should be born of a woman; Who also in the tabernacle of the testimony and in the temple did ordain women to be keepers of Your holy gates (Ex, 38:8ff, I Sam. 2:22, cf. Joh. 18:16-17) — do now also look down upon this servant of Yours who is to be ordained to the office of a Deaconess, and grant her Your Holy Spirit and cleanse her from all filthiness of flesh and Spirit (II Cor. 7:1), so that she may worthily discharge the work which is committed to her to Your glory, and the praise of Your Christ with Whom glory and adoration be to You and the Holy Spirit for ever! Amen.'"²

6. Schaff on the early church's Deaconesses

The renowned Swiss-American Presbyterian Church History Professor, Rev. Dr. Philip Schaff, has the following to say in his monumental work *History of the Christian Church*: "The office of Deaconess which under the strict separation of the sexes in ancient times and especially in Greece was necessary to the completion of the Diaconate, and which originated in the apostolic age (cf. Rom, 12:1-13), continued in the Eastern Church down to the twelfth century. It was frequently occupied by the widows of clergy..... Its functions were the care of the female poor, sick & imprisoned; assisting in the baptism of adult women; and, in the country churches of the East, perhaps also of the West, the preparation of women for baptism by private instruction. Rom. 16:1f.

Formerly, from regard to the apostolic precept in I Tim. 5:9, the Deaconesses were required to be sixty years of age (cf. Tit. 5:3-5, and the *Theodosian Code* 16:2:27).... The noblest type of an apostolic Deaconess which has come down to us from this period (before 450 A.D.), is Olympias the friend of Chrysostom and the recipient of seventeen beautiful epistles from him. She sprang from a respectable heathen family, but received a Christian education; was beautiful and wealthy; married in her

² Pliny's *ad Tra.j.* X:57; Ignatius's *Ad Smyrn.* 6,13; Polycarp 4; Justin Martyr's *Apol.* I ch.. 67; Hermas's *Vis.* 2:4; Tertullian's *Ad Uxor.* 1:7; *Mand.* 8; *Sim.* 15:5; 9:26-27; H. Bavinck's *Woman in Modern Society* (Kampen: Kok, 1918), p. 53; Marie Zeeman's *Woman in the Church* (Bloemfontein: Sacum, 1965), pp. 88ff; Susan Foh's *Women and the Word of God* (Phillipsburg N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed), 1979, pp. 97, 255-56; and *Apostolic Constitutions*, 8:19-20.

seventeenth year (A.D. 384) the prefect of Constantinople, Nebridius; but in twenty months after, was left a widow and remained so in spite of the efforts of the Emperor Theodosius to unite her with one of his own kindred. She became a Deaconess; lived in rigid asceticism; devoted her goods to the poor; and found her greatest pleasure in doing good." When she died, she was "lamented by all the poor and needy in the city and in the country around."³

7. Mediaeval corruption of the office of Deaconess

With the rise and spread of the unbiblical notion of celibacy for the male clergy of the Middle Ages, even the office of Deaconess became corrupted. In 451, a General Church Council reduced the minimum age of widows who become Deaconesses from sixty as stated in Holy Scripture (I Tim, 5:9-10) — to the 'canonical' age of forty. It stated: "No female shall be consecrated Deaconess before she is forty years old; and not then, without careful probation. If, however, after having received consecration, and having been some time in the service, she marry — despising the grace of God — she, with her husband, shall be anathematised."⁴

As Schaff points out: "In the West.,the office of Deaconess was first shorn of its clerical character by a prohibition of ordination passed by the Gallic councils in the fifth and sixth centuries.... At last, it was wholly abolished.

"The second Synod of Orleans in 535 [A.D.] ordained in its eighteenth canon: 'No woman shall henceforth receive the *benedictio diaconalis* (which had been substituted for *ordinatio*) — on account of the [stated] weakness of this sex.' The reason betrays the want of good Deaconesses — and suggests the connection of this abolition of an apostolic institution with the introduction of the celibacy of the priesthood which seemed to be endangered by every sort of female society. The adoption of the care of the poor and sick by the state...also made female assistance less needful."⁵

8. Calvin's restoration of the office of Deaconess

Originally, a usually-married male officer had cared for the poor entrusted to his care. Yet in the Middle Ages, there was a corruption of this office of Deacon into the unbiblical mediaeval 'office' of Archdeacon. There, a celibate male priest was enjoined to perform sacerdotal functions. As a result, even the auxiliary office of Deaconess was phased out.

At the great Protestant Reformation, however, Calvin wisely revived the New Testament auxiliary office of Deaconess — while also divesting even the three male special offices of Preacher-Elder-Deacon of their mediaeval perversions. Thus Calvin commented that the "mercy" offices of Rom. 12:7-13 are referring also to the "widows and other ministers [alias servants] who were appointed to take care of the sick, according to the custom of the Ancient Church."

³ P. Schaff's *History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971, III sect. 52, pp. 259-61.

⁴ Council of Chalcedon: can. 50.

⁵ Schaff: *op. cit.*, III, pp. 261-62.

Elsewhere (*Institutes* IV:3:9), Calvin further declared that this same passage Rom. 12:7-15 includes also references to "those who had devoted themselves to the care of the poor and the sick. Such were the widows of whom he [Paul] makes mention in the *Epistle to Timothy* (I Tim. 5:10). For there was no public office which women could discharge, save that of elevating themselves to the service of the poor."

In his *Commentary on First Timothy* (5:9), Calvin referred to "widows" who "must be sixty" before "being supported at public expense" as working Deaconesses. Indeed, he added that "it was intolerable that they should declare themselves to the service of the Church, if there still remained any likelihood of their being remarried.... They, on their side, should be employed in ministering to the poor — as far as their health allowed."

For these Deaconesses' "communities were not intended for leisure or lazy inactivity, but to help the poor and sick until the women were worn out and could honourably rest in retirement. Thus, to have them prepared to perform such an office, he [Paul] wants them to have had long experience of the duties belonging to it, such as: labour and diligence in bringing up children; hospitality; helping the poor; and other works of charity....

"No woman should be accepted, whose age would ever lead her to desire marriage.... It was not at all necessary that women who were still young should be admitted into the order of widows. Experience had shown that it was a dangerous and harmful practice."

Indeed, in his *Institutes* (IV:13:19), while discussing I Tim. 5:9-15, Calvin stated that "Deaconesses were appointed...to perform the public ministry of the Church towards the poor.... They...vowed celibacy...only so that they might be free from encumbrance in executing their office." See section 10 below.

9. Appointment to special office only where gifted (and where those gifts were developed)

All Christians have some or other Spiritual gifts, and all Christians occupy some or other Spiritual office. Spiritual offices may be either non-ecclesiastical or ecclesiastical. Non-ecclesiastical Spiritual offices include those of Magistrate, Police (wo)man, Husband, Wife, Schoolteacher, Schoolchild, Political Party Secretary, Bowls Club Chairperson, *etc.* Ecclesiastical offices include those of Believer, Deacon, Elder, Preacher, Deaconess, Theological Professor (Doctor or Teacher), *etc.*

The mere possession of the relevant gift of the Spirit (such as that of governing) does not in itself imply that the thus-gifted one thereby automatically functions as an officer — or even that he or she has a right to be installed in that office. Just as not all single persons who desire to marry, ever get married; and just as not all married couples who desire to have children, ever actually become parents — so too not all who desire church office, ever actually fill it.

Thus in Ex. 4:24-50, Zipporah's ability to circumcise, and even her actual administration of that Sacrament — although exercised with the unbiblical approval of her negligent Preacher-Husband Moses — did not and could not constitute her

permanent appointment to the office of Minister of the Word and Sacrament. Cf, F.N. Lee's *Have You Been Neglecting Your Baby?* Similarly, the mere possession of the Spiritual gifts of judgment and of prophecy — no more at all implies appointment to the Eldership or to the Ministry of the Word and Sacraments, than the possession of all the qualifications to be an Apostle implies that Joseph Barsabas Justus had an inalienable right to be appointed to the Apostleship in Acts 1:16-26. Thus, Deborah "the prophesying woman" or *'ishshaah n^ebiy'aah* — was indeed gifted remarkably. She also "administered Israel" or *shoof_taaah eth-Yisraa'eel* in Judg. 4:4 cf. 5:1ff,

Also Philip had "four prophesying virgin daughters" or *thugateres tessares parthenoi prophteuousai*, in Acts 21:9. But such giftednesses in themselves did not constitute their ordination to the Ministry of the Word and Sacraments. Nor were they ever ordainable to such an office.

On the other hand, nobody should ever be appointed to church office until he or she first reveals his or her personal possession and development of the requisite gifts. Husbands who wish they were wives, or male Elders who wish they were female Deaconesses, or female Deaconesses who try to function as if they were male Preachers, not only frustrate the Church in general and themselves in particular. They also inevitably end up neglecting or ignoring the very work they were actually called to execute. I Cor. 7:7-24.

10. Biblical job description of a Deaconess's calling

Together with the great Presbyterian John Calvin, we believe that — quite distinct from the office of male Deacon (cf. Acts 6:1-8 & Phil. 1:1 & I Tim. 3:8-10 & 3:12-13) — there is also the Biblical office of female Deaconess. Rom. 16:1-2 & I Tim. 3:11 & 5:9-10 cf. Acts 9:36-41.

Scripture states that this job of female Deaconess centrally involves:

- (a) general assistance in congregational affairs as *diakonon tees ekkleesias*, cf. Rom. 16:1;
- (b) succouring many in need as *prostatis polloon*, cf. Rom. 16:2;
- (c) providing comprehensive help *en pasin*, I Tim. 3:11;
- (d) collaboration in promoting the gospel *en too; euangelioo; suneethlee*, Phil, 4:5;
- (e) teaching young women to be good homemakers, Tit. 2:3-5 cf. I Tim 5:9-14;
- (f) caring especially for needy widows and orphans, I Tim. 5:4-10;
- (g) performing a ministry of constant prayer, I Tim, 5:5;
- (h) combatting frivolity, gossip, insobriety and unfaithfulness, I Tim. 5:11 cf. 5:4-16; and

- (i) performing good works, I Tim. 5:5,10 cf.. *W.C.F.* 16:1-2 & 19:1-2 (such as washing or dressing ill persons or even dead bodies, or providing shelter for needy believers such as strangers and widows and orphans *etc.*).

Regarding such a Deaconess: "She does not function in the office of Preacher; she plays no role in the Eldership; but she is chosen to the office of Deaconess (I Tim. 5:9)." Thus the famous Dutch Presbyterian theologian, Rev. Prof. Dr. Abraham Kuyper Sr.⁶

His eminent colleague Rev. Prof. Dr. Herman Bavinck Sr.⁷ is even more specific about "what Paul says in I Tim. 5:9-10. While also recommending that first the family members (v. 4) and then the members of the congregation (v. 16) care for the poor widows, in vv. 9-10 he mentions the election of a widow at least sixty* years old who had been the wife of one husband.

"Many demands were made of such a widow. She must have a reputation for good works — if she had children, she must have finished raising them and educating them; she must have been hospitable ('having washed the feet of strangers'); she must also have helped the afflicted; and she must have been diligent in every good work."

Why indeed a minimum of specifically sixty* years old? Perhaps this was also because of one's average life-expectancy. As it were: 'six decades you shall labour and do all your work; but in the seventh decade you shall sabbath from your labours in the twilight of your life expectancy!' Cf. Ex. 20:8-11; Lev. 25:2-10; Ps. 90:3-10. See too sections 5 to 7 above.

"From these verses [I Tim. 5:9-10], continues Bavinck, "it is to be concluded that this widow was called to a special ministry within the congregation — and was probably required to visit the poor and the sick and those in jail as well as to educate orphans and to give advice and direction to younger women. For the contrast made in the following verses (11-16), commends this viewpoint....

"Such female ministry as that referred to here, is also frequently mentioned in later ecclesiastical literature.... It was not just works of mercy like care of the poor and visiting the sick which belonged to the duties of these women. But their services were utilized also in visiting women in their homes and acquainting them with the teaching of the Gospel, and by working in situations where men could only operate with difficulty on account of the ease with which evil rumours could arise."

11. Biblical qualifications to be met before becoming a Deaconess

The candidate for Deaconess obviously needs to be trained and equipped for the above exacting job or jobs. Here are the minimum qualifications she must possess.

First, the candidate for Deaconess must be female, I Tim. 3:11; just as a candidate for Eldership must be male, I Tim. 3:1-2.

⁶ A. Kuyper's *Woman's Honoured Position* (Kampen: Kok, 1914), p. 56.

⁷ H. Bavinck's *op. cit.*, pp. 35-55.

Second, she must not be young and inexperienced, but she must be mature and possess a long-standing reputation for diligence in good works, I Tim. 5:9-14.

Third, she must be grave or serious; not a gossip or a loquacious speaker; she must be sober and temperate; and she must be trustworthy or faithful in all things (I Tim. 3:11).

Fourth, she should not have marriage plans or marriage responsibilities; for her job as Deaconess is so exacting that it is not simultaneously compatible with the proper demands of a marriage career for a woman (I Tim. 5:9-15 cf. I Cor. 7:24-40). If a Deaconess later falls in love and then desires to marry a Christian man, she should do so — but must then relinquish her Deaconesshood.

Fifth, if ever previously married but now widowed the candidate for Deaconess must be of mature age and unlikely to remarry; if she has children, they should be full-grown, so as not to need her attention thereby distracting her from her Deaconess work (I Tim. 5:9-14).

Sixth, she must also have a reputation for sexual morality; so that if a mature widow, she must have been the wife of only one man during the course of that previous marriage (I Tim. 5:9); and if a mature spinster, she must have a reputation for gravity and not for frivolity (I Tim. 5:11 cf. 5:11-15).

Seventh, she must have a reputation for faithfulness in all things — for hospitality, for compassion, and for diligence in every good work (I Tim. 3:11 cf. 5:10).

For the office of Deaconess for which the candidate is being considered is a permanent job, and is to be viewed as a lifelong career. Rom. 16:1-2 & I Tim. 3:11 & 5:9-15.

12. Various jobs done by Deaconesses down throughout church history

For very many centuries, Deaconesses have done great work in helping the afflicted — caring for widows and orphans; running women's organisations; and relieving the poor, *etc.* See too sections 5 & 7 above. Thus, around 225 A.D., Clement of Alexandria wrote that the women who accompanied the apostle Paul on his missionary journeys (cf. Rom. 16:2-3 & Phil. 4:5), collaborated in teaching by bringing the Gospel to Pagan and to Jewish women not in public but in private homes (Tit. 2:3-5 & Acts 16:13-15 & 18:2,26) — while the Apostles themselves preached in public and especially to the men (cf. Acts 6:1-2 & 13:15ff).

Too, the 400 A.D. Chrysostom testified that the women who worked with the Apostles did not preach the Gospel publically in the congregational meetings. Yet they did engage in various private conversations — and helped to spread the Gospel through other services, such as ministering hospitality.⁷

The great Protestant Reformation resurrected the office of Deaconess after its mediaeval decline and disuse. The Reformed Churches in Rhineland as well as the Moravian Brethren were famous for this.⁸ And some good few Deaconesses served in the city hospital of Calvin's Geneva — taking care of the poor and the sick (Cf. Calvin's *Commentary on Romans* 12:4-8 *etc.*).

Too, the Dutch Reformed Synod of Wezel in 1568 re-affirmed — that suitably-qualified Christian women were eligible to serve as Deaconesses.⁹ Other Deaconesses worked at special Christian homes for the aged and for the handicapped.⁸

Yet others worked in the rehabilitation of street women.¹⁰ Always, however, the Deaconesses worked under the direction of the (male) Diaconate — composed only of the male Deacons of a congregation or a group of congregations. Cf. Acts 6:1-8.

13. Modern needs which can ideally be met by Deaconesses

In addition to the above Deaconess jobs mentioned in Scripture and during subsequent church history (cf. sections 9-12 above), there are also modern church jobs which need to be done officially in the Name of Christ — and which can ideally be executed by Deaconesses. Such Christian works in the Name of Christ and His Church, include: ministering to home-care patients; making and/or delivering meals to the needy; housekeeping services for invalids; providing and/or repairing clothes for the indigent; corrective education enabling recipients to learn how to take care of themselves and of others; instructing trainees how to teach others to care for themselves and for others; directing essential home repairs; providing good and Christian companionship for the lonely; commemoration of anniversaries; and operating essential services.

More specialised ministries would or could involve: helping at births and also at funerals; running youth hostels, shelters for runaways, drug rehabilitation centres, pregnancy advice services, homes for unwed mothers-to-be, regular maternity homes, home care and nutrition centres, baby and child care instruction services, corrective homes for girl delinquents, counselling centres, church personnel retirement homes, migrant orientation services, visitation of female prisoners, disaster relief agencies, nursing homes, nurses' hostels, and Christian hospitals. There is also a great need for running Christian day schools, Christian weddings, Christian labour relations advice centres, Christian homemakers' groups, Christian correction centres, schools for the disabled, and shelters for flood and fire victims, *etc.*

Also needed are planners and personnel for Christian relaxation centres, for organising congregational suppers, flowers for bereavements, and the writing and mailing of get-well cards, There is also convalescent care, the organization of various kinds of Christian regional conferences, and Christian vacation resorts and rest homes, *etc.*

⁸ Cf. Bavinck & Zeeman, *op. cita.*, in no 2.

⁹ J.A.H.S. Slotemaker de Bruine's *Woman in the Church* (Utrecht: Ruys, 1923, pp. 18-19).

¹⁰ Burggraaf and DeKoster: *Deacon's Manual*, p. 94; cf. F. N. Lee's *Calvin on the Sciences* (SGU, 1969); H.F. Dankbaar's *Calvin* (Nijkerk: Callenbach), pp. 132-55; and other biographies.

There is too the need of furthering the work of international Christian help to disadvantaged foreigners and especially women overseas; Christian health food depots; Christian subeconomic housing schemes; home financing services; fundraising for Christian endeavours; Christian adoption and mental health agencies; Christian ecology centres, *etc.*, *etc.* Any one of the above could well occupy the lifelong services of at least one Deaconess.

14. Various other church works for non-deaconess Christian ladies

Only a few Christian women qualify to become Deaconesses, just as only a few Christian men qualify for election as Deacons (or, for that matter, as Ministers or Elders). Yet, even for such ladies who have not been called and trained and appointed to be fulltime Deaconesses, much parttime (and even some fulltime) work is or should be readily accessible.

There are many outside jobs and even church jobs for unmarried Christian ladies, whether young or old. Too, there are even parttime (salaried and unsalaried) church jobs for married women — provided, quite naturally, never to the neglect of their primary Christian calling as fulltime Christian homemakers, wives, and mothers.

Fulltime church jobs for non-deaconess ladies — would include those of typistes, church social workers, Church hospital personnel, *etc.* Parttime church jobs (for Christians of either sex) could include those of choir directors; organists; pianists; catechists; Sunday-school teachers; church newspaper editors, reporters and photographers; church treasurers; hymn and tract writers, *etc.* Parttime church jobs (whether salaried or not) specifically for ladies — would include working with women and children in Sunday-schools, day-schools, reform-schools, prisons, Bible studies, women's prayer meetings, and special women's projects in the life of the church, *etc.* For all Christian ladies should follow and serve Jesus with their time and their substance as much as they can. Cf. Mark 14:3-9 & 15:40-41 & Luke 8:1-3 & 10:38-42; John 12:1-7; *etc.*

Specifically, this could involve women ministering: through their preparations, services, and testimonies (John 4:27-50 & Luke 23:56 to 24:10). They could also offer hospitality to church leaders (Rom. 12:13 & I Pet. 4:9 & II John 1,5 cf. III John 5-8), and provide clothing and shelters (Acts 9:36-39 & 16:14-15,40) — in the Name and for the sake of Jesus Christ their Saviour.

Other church jobs for ladies include those of: church doorkeepers (cf. Ex. 38:8); and leading or attending women's prayer groups (I Sam. 1:7,11,21,24-26 & 2:1-11 & Acts 16:13-14) and choir groups (Ex. 15:20-21) and helping in mixed church choirs and orchestras (I Chr. 26:5-6 & Ezra 2:65 & Neh. 7:67 & Ps. 68:24-26 & I Cor. 11:5 cf. Eph. 5:19-22). They serve too in mixed prayer groups (Acts 1:14 & 12:12f); women's home instruction groups (Tit. 2:3-5 cf. Prov. 1:8 & 31:1ff); and may act as patronesses of various church activities (Rom. 16:2-5,12,15 cf. I Cor. 1:11 & 16:19 cf. Jas, 1:26-27 & Acts 9:36-42 & 16:14f,40).

15. Non-church Christian works for ordinary Christian ladies

Non-church works are the most important spheres of Christian influence for almost all Christian ladies (with the exception of Deaconesses). Normally, women should expect and aim to marry (I Tim. 5:14 cf. I Cor. 7:9,21,28) — unless they do not get a suitable opportunity (cf. Acts 21:9); or unless they are aged widows (I Tim. 5:9 cf. I Cor. 7:39-40); or unless they possess or receive the good gift of celibacy (Judg. 11:57-40 & Matt.19:12 & I Cor. 7:7-8).

When young, never-married women should help their parents (Ex. 20:12 & 22:16-17 & Judg. 11:34-40). When older, never-married women should serve God in careers like domestic service (II Kgs. 5:2), or as law-court officials (Joh 18:17 cf. Judg. 4), or as schoolteachers (Eph. 6:4 cf. Tit. 2:3ff) or as knowledgeable businesswomen (Acts 16:14 & 18:3). Yet if married, women should concentrate on helping their husbands at home (Gen. 2:18-25 cf. Prov. 31:10ff) and on rearing their children (I Tim. 2:15 cf. Pss. 127 & 128).

If wives become young widows, they should expect and aim to remarry in the Lord. I Tim. 5:14 cf. I Cor. 7:39b & Rom, 7:3b. Middle-aged widows should aim to be good mothers and/or good mothers-in-law. I Tim, 5:10 cf. Ruth 1 to 4. And if widows are aged 60 or over — they should faithfully serve God in a ministry of continuous prayer and almsgiving. Luke 2:36-38 & Mark 12:41-44 & I Tim. 5:5. Then, their diligence in good works being most undeniable — if elected, they may serve God as full-time Deaconesses I Tim. 5:9-10 cf. 3:11.

However if married — as most women aged 20 to 60 usually are — the first and overriding obligation and fulltime career work of every Christian lady (Prov. 14:1 & 18:22 & 19:14 & 31:10f & Tit. 2:4-5) is to take care of her husband (Gen. 2:18-25 & Prov. 12:4 & 31:10ff & Matt. 19:1-6 & Eph. 5:22-53 & I Pet.3:1-6) and her children (Gen. 1:26-28 & Pss. 127 to 128 & Prov.1:8 & 6:20 & I Tim. 2:11-15 & Tit. 3:4-5) — and, if any, also of her household servants (Gen.16:1f & Prov. 31:15). Too, she must never neglect daily family worship — under the leadership of her husband, and together with her children. Deut. 6:1-9 & II Sam. 6:20 & Jer. 10:25 & Matt. 6:11 & Acts 10:2 & Eph. 6:1-4 & I Pet 3:7 & W.C.F. 21:6.

Yet there is more. To the extent that married women aged 20 to 60, beyond Public Worship on the Lord's Sabbath, still have time for extra commitments without neglecting the husbands and children — they may also engage in attending church-sponsored ladies' Bible studies and prayer meetings or good-housekeepers' meetings *etc.* Acts 16:13 & Tit. 2:3-5.

Not all Christian ladies are as gifted in church abilities as were Miriam and Priscilla and Phebe and Euodia and Syntyche. Ex. 15:20-21 & Mic, 6:4 & Acts 18:2,3,26 & Rom. 16:2,5 & Phil. 4:3. But all Christian wives can and should become "daughters of Sarah" — by faithfully respecting and obeying their husbands (I Pet. 5:6). All Christian mothers can and should learn to raise their children and sometimes even their grandchildren from fetushood through babyhood and childhood to Christian maturity — as Lois and Eunice did with regard to Timothy (II Tim. 1:5 & 3:14-17). And all Christian women everywhere, whether married or not — by studying the godly lives of women like Deborah and Naomi and Ruth and Hannah and Esther and Elisabeth and Anna and Mary and Martha and Dorcas and Lydia — can and should

BIBLICAL MINISTRIES FOR WOMEN

learn to sing and to play and to eat and to drink and to live and to do all things whatsoever to the glory of God. I Cor. 10:51 cf. Judg, 5:1ff & Judg, 11:54 & I Sam. 18:6 & I Cor. 11:5 & Eph. 5:19-22.

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