

***Not Just a Soup Kitchen: How Mercy Ministry in the Local Church Transforms Us All***

by David S. Apple

CLC Publications, 2014. Paperback, 243 pages

**Reviewed by the Deacon Board of Grace Reformed Church (OPC) in Reedsburg, WI**

Put aside all other books you have read about becoming a deacon or doing the work of a deacon. This is a book by a man who has walked the talk. It has the information of a good manual and the readability of a good memoir (which the early pages explicitly are).

Combining his spiritual calling as a deacon with more down-to-earth "street smarts," David Apple serves as a fine guide for deacons in the Reformed tradition, and, more broadly, for anyone actively involved in mercy ministry.

Apple has almost thirty years of experience directing ACTS (Active Compassion Through Service) at Tenth Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Philadelphia. Smack in the middle of that city, he, they, have seen it all. As a result, this book is chock-full of good advice.

Much of the advice comes in the form of general guidelines, and some in very practical (even pointed) terms, such as: "Do not work harder than the person coming to you for help," and "It is not the deacons' task to be 'Lone Rangers' in their ministry."

Some of the most memorable words of advice are found in this set of rules: rule #1: "Do not give money"; rule #2: "Do not give money"; rule #3: "When in doubt, see rule #1."

Lest anyone get the impression that such quips predominate, we would quickly add that the book also includes several substantive appendices, including a list of resources, guidelines for deacons, a sample talent survey, and a bibliography.

Since not every deacon will have the time and the inclination to take up this book and read, we would offer here a few more gleanings from Apple's book. In our opinion, these points should make it onto the agenda for discussion at your next deacons' meeting:

- Present the gospel.
- Ask for references.
- Set limits on what one recipient can receive without others' approval.
- Do not give cash.
- Do not visit an applicant alone.
- Let the recipient earn a contribution, if possible (e.g., help around the church).
- Require some responsibility from the recipient (a budget, perhaps).
- Keep records.
- Do not give assistance without the agreement of at least one other official.
- Encourage church attendance.
- Pray with the applicant.

Becoming a deacon is like going to a foreign country. We think it unwise to do that without a guidebook. We encourage you to make this book your guidebook.

[Posted at OPC.org on 12/27/15]