

Rev. Eric Watkins



“Mercy Ministry in a
Social-Justice World”

Eric Watkins is the pastor of Harvest Orthodox Presbyterian Church in San Marcos, CA, and was recently appointed the part-time Director for the Center for Missions and Evangelism at Mid-America Reformed Seminary. He has been a minister in the OPC since 2001 and has planted two churches. His degrees include an A.A., B.S., M.Div. and ThM. In 2016 he completed his PhD from the Theological University in Kampen, the Netherlands. His dissertation was on Preaching Christ from the Old Testament in a Postmodern Context and was published as *The Drama of Preaching: Participating with God in the History of Redemption* by Wipf and Stock. He has written extensively for *Tabletalk*, *New Horizons*, *Christian Renewal* and other publications on subjects related to social justice and the church, evangelism, and outreach. Pastor Eric has taught at Reformation Bible College in Sanford, FL, Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, FL, Gordon Conwell Seminary in Jacksonville, FL, Mid-America Reformed Seminary in Dyer, IN, Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, PA, and Westminster Seminary California.

He is happily married to Heather; the two of them have four beautiful, adopted children. Eric’s pastimes include surfing, beach volleyball and playing guitar. He can be emailed at Watkins.1@opc.org.

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*Please read beforehand if possible: <https://opc.org/GA/race.html>

**Note that the OPC, PCA, URCNA chapters on deacons are appended below.

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Section 1: Reflections on the 1974 report

1. What were the issues that led to OPC study report on Race Relationships in 1971 (when the study committee was first established)?
2. How do those issues reflect in our current day?
3. As a church, to what extent were those recommendations acted upon, particularly as they relate to mercy ministry?
4. How has the social justice movement effected the mercy ministries of the church?
5. How has the social justice movement affected young people in the church?

Section 2: Reflections on BOCO XI (Deacons)

1. What does Psalm 68:1-5 have to do with Acts 6:1-7?
2. Who are the potential “strangers” envisioned in BOCO XI.1?
3. What is s the difference between “need” and “distress”
4. What might be some of the “other forms of service” envisioned in BOCO XI.4?
5. How does our BOCO on the function of deacons compare with other NAPARC churches?

Section 3: Suggestions for what local churches (and their deacons) might consider

1. Is it fitting/proper/biblical to use diaconal funds to help people outside the church?
2. Where are those boundaries drawn?
3. How can our practice of mercy to “widows, orphans and strangers” be enhanced?
4. How might the work of deacons do “outreach” and not simply “inreach?”
5. How can deacons equip and encourage the church to share in this ministry?

Additional Thoughts/Questions:

Appendix A
OPC BOCO on Deacons

Chapter XI
Deacons

1. The Scriptures designate the office of deacon as distinct and perpetual in the church. Deacons are called to show forth the compassion of Christ in a manifold ministry of mercy toward the saints and strangers on behalf of the church. To this end they exercise, in the fellowship of the church, a recognized stewardship of care and of gifts for those in need or distress. This service is distinct from that of rule in the church.
2. Those chosen to this office should be of great faith, exemplary lives, honest repute, brotherly love, warm sympathies, and sound judgment.
3. In order to facilitate the performance of the duties of their office the deacons of each particular church shall be constituted a board of deacons. The board shall choose its own officers from its membership.
4. The board shall oversee the ministry of mercy in the church and shall collect and disburse funds for the relief of the needy. Other forms of service for the church may also be committed to the deacons.
5. In the discharge of their duties the deacons shall be under the supervision and authority of the session. Accordingly, the board shall keep a record of its proceedings and of all funds and their distribution, and shall submit its records to the session once every three months, and at other times upon request of the session. If it seems to be for the best interest of the church, the session may require the board of deacons to reconsider any action, or may, if necessary, overrule it.
6. It is desirable that the session and the board of deacons meet together at regular intervals to confer on matters of common responsibility.
7. In a church in which there are no deacons, the duties of the office shall devolve upon the session.

Appendix B
PCA BOCO on Deacons

CHAPTER 9

9-1. The office of deacon is set forth in the Scriptures as ordinary and perpetual in the Church. The office is one of sympathy and service, after the example of the Lord Jesus; it expresses also the communion of saints, especially in their helping one another in time of need.

9-2. It is the duty of the deacons to minister to those who are in need, to the sick, to the friendless, and to any who may be in distress. It is their duty to develop the grace of liberality in the members of the church, to devise effective methods of collecting the gifts of the people, and to distribute these gifts among the objects to which they are contributed. They shall have the care of the property of the congregation, both real and personal, and shall keep in proper repair the church edifice and other buildings belonging to the congregation. In matters of special importance affecting the property of the church, they cannot take final action without the approval of the Session and consent of the congregation. In the discharge of their duties the deacons are under the supervision and authority of the Session. In a church in which it is impossible for any reason to secure deacons, the duties of the office shall devolve upon the ruling elders.

9-3. To the office of deacon, which is spiritual in nature, shall be chosen men of spiritual character, honest repute, exemplary lives, brotherly spirit, warm sympathies, and sound judgment.

9-4. The deacons of a particular church shall be organized as a Board, of which the pastor shall be an advisory member. The Board shall elect a chairman and a secretary from their number and a treasurer to whom shall be entrusted the funds for the current expenses of the church. It shall meet separately at least once a quarter, and whenever requested by the Session. The Board of each church shall determine the number necessary for a quorum. The Board shall keep a record of its proceedings, and of all funds and their distribution, and shall submit its minutes to the Session regularly, and at other times upon request of the Session. It is desirable that the Session and the Board of Deacons meet in joint session once a quarter to confer on matters of common interest.

9-5. Deacons may properly be appointed by the higher courts to serve on committees, especially as treasurers. It is suitable also that they be appointed trustees of any fund held by any of the Church courts. It may also be helpful for the Church courts, when devising plans of church finance, to invite wise and consecrated deacons to their councils.

9-6. The deacons may, with much advantage, hold conference from time to time for the discussion of the interests committed to them. Such conferences may include representatives

of churches covering areas of smaller or larger extent. Any actions taken by these conferences shall have only an advisory character.

9-7. It is often expedient that the Session of a church should select and appoint godly men and women of the congregation to assist the deacons in caring for the sick, the widows, the orphans, the prisoners, and others who may be in any distress or need. These assistants to the deacons are not officers of the church (BCO 7-2) and, as such, are not subjects for ordination (BCO 17).

Appendix C

URCNA Church Order on Duties of Deacons

Article 15 – The Duties of Deacons

The duties belonging to the office of deacon consist of continuing in prayer and supervising the works of Christian mercy among the congregation; acquainting themselves with congregational needs; exhorting members of the congregation to show mercy; gathering and managing the offerings of God's people in Christ's name, and distributing these offerings according to need; and encouraging and comforting with the Word of God those who receive the gifts of Christ's mercy. Needs of those outside the congregation, especially of other believers, should also be considered as resources permit. The deacons shall ordinarily meet every month to transact the business pertaining to their office, and they shall render an account of their work to the Consistory.