



# Deacon's Handbook

11/2025

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*Elders lead ministry. Deacons facilitate ministry. The congregation does ministry.  
Elder-led, Deacon-served, Congregation-ruled<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Jamie Junlop, "Deacons: Shock Absorbers and Servants" 9Marks Journal, Spring 2010

## **Introduction**

This handbook is dedicated to helping a deacon to serve faithfully and effectively. It is designed to acquaint deacons with the biblical materials related to the Office of Deacon and the particulars of the deacon ministry of OIC (One In Christ) Church.

The church has elected you to the honorable position of a deacon because your life has exhibited the characteristics of faithfulness and loyalty both to the Lord and His church. A deacon must remember, however, that Jesus said, "The greatest among you will be your servant." (Mt 23:11).

Four passages in the New Testament are commonly cited concerning the office of deacon: Acts 6:1-7, Philippians 1:1, Romans 16:1, and I Timothy 3:8-12. The word for deacon in the New Testament originally described a servant (*diakonos*). While the designation sounds generic, it is also a formal church office. Deacons are model servants appointed to a local church office. They are deployed to assist the pastors or elders by protecting church unity, organizing practical service, and meeting tangible needs.<sup>2</sup> Biblically understood, deacons are a cavalry of servants, deputized to execute the elders' vision by coordinating various ministries. When deacons flourish, the whole congregation wins.<sup>3</sup>

The role of deacon is not intended to be sought after for personal honor, but rather it is to be viewed as a call to a greater commitment to service. The desire and willingness to live the life of a servant is a critical qualification for deacon selection.

Paul wrote that the reward for faithfulness in the office of deacon is that they "obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 3:13). The selfless deacon may also feel a close kinship with his Master, who walked the earth as "One who serves" (Luke 22:27). According to Jesus, the true heroes in the kingdom of God are those who assume the role of *diakonos*-- a servant (Matt. 20:26-28).

In this handbook, you will find a brief summary of the deacon's role across various denominations throughout the church's history, which provides a general view of how the deacons have changed through the ages. Biblical qualifications for deacons as well as the duties and responsibilities are also discussed in this handbook. Lastly, the decision-making process is discussed for our current OIC church.

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<sup>2</sup> Matt Smethurst, *Deacons, How They Serve and Strengthen the Church* (Crossway, 2021)

<sup>3</sup> Alexander Strauch, *Paul's Vision for the Deacons* (Lewis & Roth, 2017)

## Deacon Through the Ages

Deacons were held in a place of honor in Christianity's earliest centuries. Based on the teaching from Acts 6:1-7, the deacons in the early church were selected to support the work of pastors by caring for the "outward" or "physical" needs of church life. Historian Rodney Stark notes that the deacons in the early church were of "considerable importance", assisting in liturgical functions and administering the benevolent and charitable activities of the church.<sup>4</sup> The life of risky and self-giving love of early Christians, modeled often by deacons greatly bewildered and shaped the Roman world.

As the church sought to manage geographical expansion and defend against various heresies, a formalized hierarchy was developed to centralize decision-making authority within the office of bishop /elders. The two church offices (bishops and deacons) became three: bishops (overseers), presbyters (elders or priests), and deacons. This "monarchical episcopate" system demands one bishop to oversee a geographic area, gradually shifting the primary role of deacons from agents of charity to essentially secretaries to the bishop. This shift eventually reduced the office of deacon to a mere stepping stone to the priesthood during the Middle Ages.<sup>5</sup>

The Reformation brought biblically fresh attention to the diaconate. Since then, the office of deacons has taken various shapes among Protestants.

- In the *Presbyterian and Reformed traditions*, deacons have always functioned mainly as mercy ministers, caring for the needy and distressed and often helping oversee the finances of the church.<sup>6</sup>
- In the *Anglican Communion*, deacons are either "transitional" moving toward the priesthood, or "vocational", appointed for life; all are theologically trained and formally ordained.<sup>7</sup>
- In many *congregational and Baptist churches*, a model of plural elders and deacons – the elders devoted to spiritual oversight, the deacons to practical service – largely endured until the early twentieth century, when many congregations began favoring a "solo pastor and deacon board" model, often accompanied by an array of committees. In more recent years, there seems to be a drive to replace the executive-board mentality with a more historic vision for deacons. Deacons, in this model, coordinate various ministries in the church as a means of supporting the elders.<sup>8</sup>

At OIC, we adopt the "elder-led, congregational" polity. The office of elders is different from the office of deacons with different aims requiring, in many cases, different gifts (as stated in

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<sup>4</sup> Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries* (Harper one, 1997), 108

<sup>5</sup> Cornelis Van Dam, *The Deacon: Biblical Foundations for Today's Ministry of Mercy* (Reformation Heritage, 2016), 99

<sup>6</sup> *ibid*

<sup>7</sup> Francis Young, *Inferior Office? A History of Deacons in the Church of England* (Cambridge, 2015)

<sup>8</sup> Mark Dever, *Baptist Foundations: Church Government for an Anti-Institutional Age* (B&H Academic, 2015), 238

Sections 2 and 3 in OIC Bylaws). This implies that deacons are not necessarily an “elder-in-training”, nor a counterweight to the elders to “check and balance” pastoral decisions. They are rather model servants who excel in being attentive and responsive to tangible needs in the life of a church, by assisting the elders, guarding the ministry of the word, organizing service, caring for the needy, protecting unity, mobilizing ministry, and more.

## **Qualifications**

OIC Bylaw 3.3a.3 states that “A deacon shall be qualified for the office as specified in the Bible (1 Timothy 3:8-12)”. This paragraph focuses on who deacons must *be*, rather than what they are able to *do*.

The first thing this paragraph mentioned was deacons must be “dignified” (NIV “worthy of respect”), signifying that they must be humble, repentant, and exemplars for the flock. Paul listed six things to show what “to be dignified” practically looks like (Three “negatives” and three “positives”).

The three “negatives” revolve around what a deacon must not be, which are all related to a particular fruit of the Spirit: self-control.

### **1. Not Double- Tongued**

“Double-tongued” is consciously saying one thing to one group, and then saying or insinuating something else to a different group. Deacons will have countless interactions with people when they serve. In all these interactions, a deacon must be compassionate while remaining vigilantly on guard.

- Guard their tongues against disclosing information that the person being served either should not know or simply doesn’t need to know.
- Guard their ears against being party to gossip or slander against church leaders or fellow members.

### **2. Not Addicted to Much Wine**

Deacons are not only to be self-controlled in their speech, but they are also to be self-controlled in their appetites. The principle stated here is that a qualified deacon will not indulge cravings or abuse substances that would hinder their work or their witness.

### **3. Not Greedy for Dishonest Gain**

Deacons should also control their wallets, specifically, what goes into their wallets. The nature of diaconal work will sometimes need deacons to handle church money. A qualified deacon should not be someone who is known for being deceptive, cutting moral corners, or obsessing over money.

Now the three “positives”

### **4. Holds the Mystery of the faith with a Clear Conscience**

“Mystery” refers to divine truth that was once hidden and is now revealed. In this case, Paul is referring to the content of the gospel and Christian doctrine. While it is true that the primary responsibility for teaching and governing falls to the church’s elders, deacons are not exempt from knowing their Bibles because they will often be in situations where they will have the opportunity to speak biblical truth. This qualification thus demands three things of deacons:

- **Know** the faith. One cannot hold what one does not know. A qualified deacon will be eager to grow in a clear understanding of the things of God.
- **Hold** the faith. A deacon should not only grasp the truth with his mind but cling to it with his heart. It is particularly important in current culture which often collides with the biblical truth.
- **Live** the faith. A deacon who lives the faith has a clear conscience, indicated by his or her moral integrity and courage, through genuine, ongoing confession and repentance (cf. 1 John 1:9).<sup>9</sup>

## 5. Tested and Proven

While Paul was not explicit about the length or nature of the testing, what is nonnegotiable is there should be a season of testing. OIC has adopted “one year” of church membership (Bylaw 3.3a.4) as a period of testing when a potential deacon candidate will be observed for their characters, convictions and practices, strengths and weaknesses.

## 6. Faithful Family Life

A deacon’s godliness begins with his/her closest relationships. If a deacon is married, he/she must love and be faithful to their spouse. Serving one’s spouse is the ultimate training ground for serving the saints. If a deacon has children, they must be raised in an atmosphere of gentle firmness and joyful love of God. There is no such thing as a good deacon who is a lousy husband/wife or dad/mom.

The standards in 1 Tim 3:8-12 show that deacons must embody the kind of character expected of all Christians. But they should be exemplary in the ordinary. Deacon are the people in your church of whom you should be able to say, “Brother, do you desire to foster unity? Sister, do you wish to grow as a servant? Watch them”.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> JD Crowley, *Conscience: What It Is, How to Train It, and Loving Those Who Differ* (Crossway, 2016)

<sup>10</sup> Matt Smethurst, *Deacons, How They Serve and Strengthen the Church* (Crossway, 2021)

## **Duties and Responsibilities**

On the broadest level, diaconal work encompasses three things in the life of a church:<sup>11</sup>

### **1. Spotting and Meeting Tangible Needs**

Acts 6 presented a case where seven men were set apart to coordinate a solution to a tangible problem, in order for the elders not be distracted from their primary responsibilities. A deacon should be skilled at spotting practical needs and then taking the initiative to meet them in an efficient manner.

### **2. Protecting and Promoting Church Unity**

The installation of the seven men in Acts 6 was ultimately to salvage the unity of the Jerusalem church. The deacons today are meant to play an essential role as “shock absorbers” in congregational life. A qualified deacon will increasingly resemble the kind of unity-building love the Bible clearly commands.

### **3. Serving and Supporting the Ministry of the Elders**

The purpose of deacons is tied to the priority of elders. By enabling elders to stay focused on their teaching and prayer roles, deacons both guard and advance the ministry of the word. They are like a congregation’s offensive linemen, whose job is to protect the quarterback. Without them, elders will suffer incessant distraction and get sacked by an onrush of practical demands. Deacons are never presented as chaperones of the elders who impose a potential “check” on their decision. In a healthy church, godly deacons execute the vision and oversight of godly elders, not the other way around.

At OIC, the office of deacons has four main departments that have the following responsibilities: **Operations, Finances, Administration, and Communications** (Bylaw 3.3b).

This is a general guide applicable to all departments:

- **Deacons Chairperson:**

- The Office of the Deacon shall elect **a chairperson** (Bylaw 3.3c).
- Besides the duties listed in Bylaw 3.3c, which include organizing monthly deacons meeting and members meetings, and keeping records, the chairperson should consult with elders regularly to assess the church’s needs and oversee the overall duties of all departments with necessary guidance and coordination.

- **Departmental Leaders / Teams:**

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<sup>11</sup> ibid



- o Each department should have **one Director** and **one Associate Director**, serving as leaders and coordinators.
  - o Each department should have **multiple co-workers**, serving as ministry team leaders and coordinators.
  - o The Director and Associate Director may form ministry teams as needed to accommodate short-term and or long-term ministry needs
- **General responsibilities** of the Directors / Co-workers
  - o Identify the needs;
  - o Form ministry teams;
  - o Oversee the progress of accomplishing tasks;
  - o Provide and document policy & procedures and guidelines;
  - o Report at deacons meetings

## **Duties and Responsibilities**

Duties and responsibilities of each department are outlined in OIC Bylaw 3.3b, specifically:

### **Administration**

The Department of Administration is led by the director (aka clerk) and associate director.

#### **1. Book / Record Keeping**

- 1.1. Keeping a register of names and addresses of all church members, with dates of joining the church, dates of baptism, and children, adding new members to the directory promptly.
- 1.2. Preparing certificates of baptism and church membership
- 1.3. Removing members who have not been regularly attending church services for 6 months.
- 1.4. Assisting in the writing of reports and documents for the elders and the deacon departments for meetings and for recording as necessary.
- 1.5. Taking minutes during deacons' meetings as well as congregational meetings
- 1.6. Maintaining and safeguarding repositories of church documents, providing information only to personnel authorized by the elders and/or deacons as appropriate.
- 1.7. Taking record of student services for school credits

#### **2. Meeting Organization**

- 2.1. Call and organize monthly deacons meeting.
- 2.2. Call for congregational meetings and establish quorums at meetings.

#### **3. Correspondence**

- 3.1. Receiving, sending, and filing official correspondence without direction for approval and signature
- 3.2. Drafting business transactions, contracts, deeds and titles
- 3.3. Prepare information for Sunday order of service (???)

#### **4. Human Resources**

- 4.1. Oversee the recruiting, interviewing, and hiring process.
- 4.2. Conduct background checks and employee eligibility verification.
- 4.3. Oversee employee disciplinary meetings, separations, and investigations.
- 4.4. Monitor and ensure compliance with federal, state, and local employment laws, regulations, and best practices.
- 4.5. Oversee all human resource policies, procedures, and implementation for OIC.
- 4.6. Administer the preparation for processing of payroll.
- 4.7. Work cohesively with the Finance department and leadership at OIC with various projects, policies, and procedures.

## **Operations**

The Department of Operations is led by the director and associate director.

### **1. Facility Management:**

- 1.1. Develop and direct a facility management team at the discretion of the church leadership
- 1.2. Manage (coordinate and supervise) all work related to the maintenance and repair of facilities (including but not limited to building inspections, HVAC, plumbing, electrical, custodial, landscape, waste management and security);
- 1.3. Ensure all church facilities and grounds are well maintained and ready for Sunday services and mid-week events;
- 1.4. Manage facility use according to the adopted Facility Use Policy;
- 1.5. Manage (coordinate and supervise) all work related to the janitorial/cleaning of the facilities mid-week, weekends, and as needed;
- 1.6. Responsible for purchasing and maintaining supplies and equipment on an ongoing basis;
- 1.7. Implement, monitor, and follow policies and procedures designed to improve operations, minimize operating costs, and provide efficient use of labor and materials;
- 1.8. Maintain expenditures related to the building, facilities, and grounds repairs and maintenance in accordance with the approved budget;
- 1.9. Work with appropriate government agencies to ensure that buildings are safe and meet current code requirements; Must be familiar with and ensure compliance of OSHA regulations and standards
- 1.10. Work with the church leadership to report problems, solutions and costs associated with projects not approved in the budget, and provide input to development of the annual budget
- 1.11. Schedule and coordinate work with outside contractors, as necessary

### **2. Security**

- 2.1. Develop and direct a security team at the discretion of the church leadership.
- 2.2. Develop, implement, monitor, and follow policies and procedures to ensure the security of the church facilities and the congregations.
- 2.3. Ensure church facilities are properly designed and equipped for the most efficient protection of the congregation in times of natural disasters or hostile attacks.
- 2.4. Coordinate proper training for the congregation to be ready for emergency situations such as fire, tornado, and hostile attacks.

## **Finance**

The Department of Finance is led by the director (aka treasurer) and associate director.

### **1. Payroll**

- 1.1. All finance-related book-keeping including checkbooks.
- 1.2. Cash revenues (income). The task of counting, recording and depositing the money should be done as quickly following services as possible. At least two people must be present when offerings are counted.
- 1.3. Cash disbursements (expenses). Departments may incur unbudgeted expenses up to 0.5% of their approved annual departmental budget, with prior authorization from the Treasurer. Unbudgeted expenses that exceed this limit or are not assigned to a department require Deacons' Board approval if the cumulative total of all unbudgeted expenses remains below 5% of the total annual church budget, and congregational approval if the cumulative total exceeds that threshold. The Finance Team shall maintain a centralized log of all unbudgeted expenses and provide a monthly cumulative report to the Deacons' Board.
- 1.4. Prepare and submit tax reports and payments in compliance with Federal and State Tax regulations.
- 1.5. Maintain updated records of individual giving and provide annual contribution statements

### **2. Budget Management**

- 2.1. Draft the annual budget and coordinate with the elders and deacons to finalize it.
- 2.2. Research, evaluate, and sign service contracts within budgeted guidelines (as stated in 1.2) for operations, such as rental items, internet and phone lines, office equipment maintenance, etc
- 2.3. Assist with the preparation and implementation of financial-related policies and procedures.
- 2.4. Assure monthly financial statements are available to the elders and deacons, and to the congregation.
- 2.5. Serve as an ex-officio member of the meetings that are related to church budget and church financial matters.
- 2.6. Work with the Trustees to ensure that appropriate and adequate insurance coverage is in place, including worker's compensation insurance, and property, casualty and liability insurance.
- 2.7. Establish and oversee accounting records for church-supported missionary staff, building contracts, or other special projects deemed necessary.

### **3. Fund Management**

- 3.1. Manage appropriate funds of all designated gifts, including memorial gifts and deferred giving, and assist in the management of the church's programs such as bequests, endowment or trust funds.
  - 3.1.1. . While the church may distribute funds to help financially needy individuals at the discretion of the church, the IRS prohibits the donor to designate a gift to an individual or family for the purpose of tax evasion. In addition, the church should not serve as a regular channel to pass funds from the donors to any one individual or for-profit organization. The church has the right to refuse donations with a designated purpose which the church deems inappropriate or impractical to fulfill.
- 3.2. Church funds should be deposited in checking or savings account to maximize interest income while not affecting access for designated purposes. Church funds should not be used to purchase high-risk bonds, mutual funds, or stocks or invested in corporations whose mission contradict Biblical values.

## **Communications**

The Department of Finance is led by the director and associate director.

### **1. Communicate within the church**

- 1.1. Work with church leaders to define, develop, and effectively communicate messages to church-wide and specific audiences.
- 1.2. Manage the OIC Church brand to ensure consistency, presence, and quality.
- 1.3. Cultivate, lead, and manage teams of Communications staff and volunteers (writers, photographers, designers, translators, etc)
- 1.4. Participate in the creation of the church calendar in advance.
- 1.5. Consistently monitor and update the church's website and/or social media accounts.
- 1.6. Keep church members informed of official business, including services, meetings, building or staff changes, and outreach initiatives.
- 1.7. Establish communication plans for sensitive issues, such as crisis communications, staff changes, or deaths.
- 1.8. Facilitate the church to see and celebrate the work God is doing.
- 1.9. Educate church leadership and church body on communication or marketing issues.
- 1.10. Spur church members to good works by rallying volunteers for church-led ministry initiatives.
- 1.11. Make it easy for people to get the help and support they need from the elders and pastoral staff or church body as a whole.

### **2. Communicate with outside the church**

- 2.1. Create and implement a system for following up with first-time guests.
- 2.2. Create campaigns to attract more people to services and events.
- 2.3. Inform people in the community about services the church offers.
- 2.4. Study the audiences the church is trying to reach, and use that knowledge to recommend and implement outreach strategies.

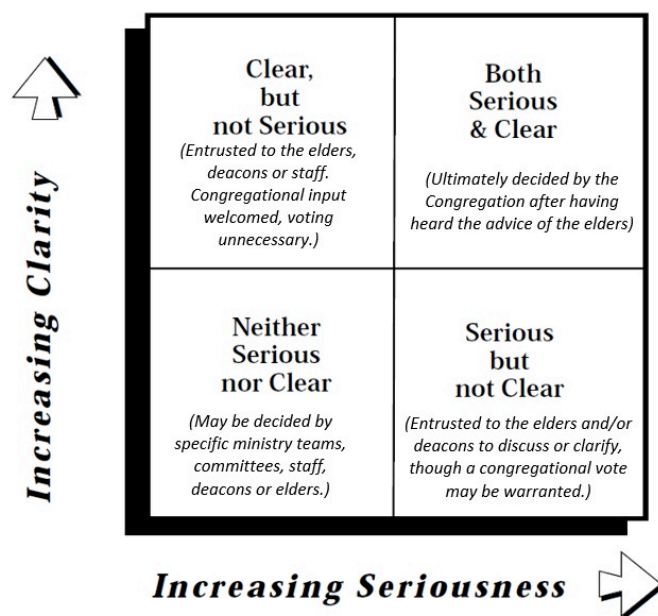


## Decision-Making Process

OIC church is an Elder-led, Congregational church (Article V of Constitution). That is, the congregation is the final earthly authority under Christ's divine authority (Acts 6:1-6, Matthew 18:17, and 2 Corinthians 2:6). Assuming that there is a clear, regenerate church membership, the congregation should have the final say on matters of doctrine, membership, leadership and finances.

There are, however, two unwanted extremes when it comes to congregationalism: 1) absent congregationalism, and 2) hyper-congregationalism. In the "absent" form, the church has no say in making decisions. They are merely told by the leaders what will take place even on the most important issues. In the "hyper" form, almost every decision requires a church-wide vote -even small matters like light bulbs and color of the wall. Both extremes are unhelpful and unbiblical.

Here is a helpful guide for the church to understand when a decision should be made by the whole church and when a decision be entrusted to its leaders:



<sup>12</sup> This chart provides four different categories of decisions that need to be made in the local church. The "x" axis is labeled "Increasing Seriousness", ranging from trivial issues (e.g. color of the carpet) to those which are crucial (e.g. divinity of Christ). The "y" axis is labeled "Increasing Clarity", considering how clear the issue is biblically taught. For example, "non-Christian should not be accepted into church membership" is clearly taught in the scripture, whereas "a pastor should wear a suit and tie on Sunday" is not clearly specified in the Bible.

Let's take a look at each category

### 1. Neither Serious Nor Clear

The Bible does not speak directly to these issues and there are, likely, a variety of preferences represented in the church. Such small matters should not distract the congregation from its main decision-making and are best entrusted to specific ministry teams to decide. This can range from: which internet provider should we use? What snacks do the preschoolers get in Sunday School? Who do we hire to fix the roof? Do we set the sanctuary thermostat at 68 or

<sup>12</sup> Mark Dever, A Display of God's Glory: Basics of Church Structure. (Independently published, 2019)

70? There may be input given from individual church members but such decisions should typically be entrusted to teams or leaders within the church to decide.

## **2. Clear But Not Serious**

It is an issue that may be obvious (either biblically or practically speaking) but the issue is not serious enough to bring before the whole church. For instance, should we paint the building purple? Should we buy more toilet paper when we run out? Should we replace broken windows? Do we need a new computer when the IT team's breaks? The answers to these issues are clear and obvious, thus, they can be easily decided by the leader or leaders who oversees that area of the church – especially deacons and elders.

## **3. Serious But Not Clear**

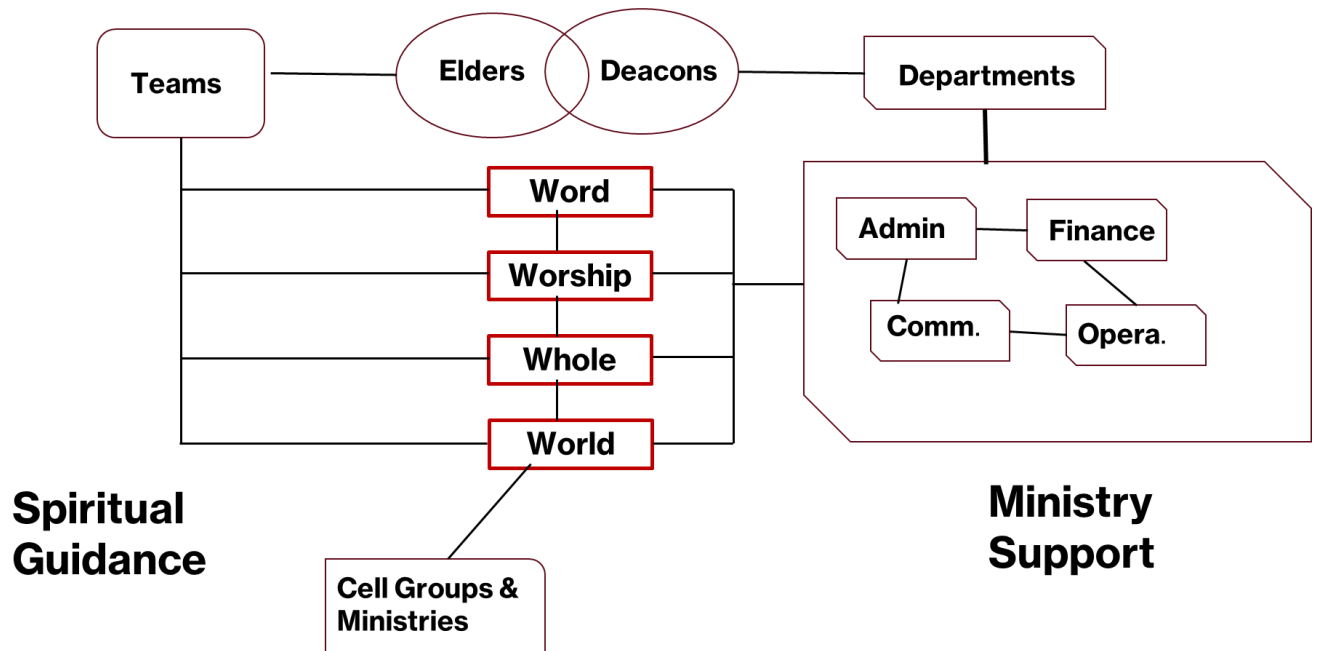
These issues are of a more serious nature, and may even be in the Bible, but may not have a specific teaching or guideline. For instance, at what age should a person be baptized? Obviously, we believe that baptism is a very serious issue, but there is no exact age given. The approved church leaders (for instance, elders) would discuss and come to a consensus. Discernment, trust, discussions and wisdom work together so that prudent decisions are made. Most such issues can be handled by the leadership. Some such issues may be clarified and discussed by the leadership but presented to the congregation for a final decision, depending on how serious it is.

## **4. Both Serious & Clear**

These issues are both serious and clear. These matters are the ones clearly decided by local congregations in the Bible. Such serious and clear issues include: what do we believe (doctrine), who do we trust to lead us and oversee the day-to-day ministry (leadership), who is included or excluded from our midst (membership), and what do we give our overall money to (finances). The Bible's pattern is for the leadership to give sound, prayerful advice about the matter but, ultimately, for the church to decide.



Appendix -1 **OIC Church Structure**



## Appendix -2: **Amendments to the Handbook**

The Deacons Handbook is a functional document subordinate to the OIC Bylaws. While the Bylaws (Article 2, Section 3b) define the scope of responsibilities for Deacons—specifically in the areas of Operations, Finances, Administration, and Communications—this Handbook may be amended by the Deacons Board to clarify or expand on how these responsibilities are carried out, subject to Elder oversight and consistent with the Bylaws.

### **Guidelines for Amendments:**

- All amendments must remain within the responsibilities prescribed in Bylaws Article 2, Section 3b and shall not assign spiritual authority to Deacons.
- The Handbook may organize additional departments or teams as subcategories under the four main responsibilities, provided they remain within that authorized scope and under Elder oversight.

### **Amendment Process:**

- **Proposal** — Any active Deacon may propose an amendment.
- **Deacons Approval** — At least 85% of all active Deacons must approve. Voting may occur during a meeting or via an official, verifiable process outside a meeting (e.g., email vote); any outside-meeting vote must be documented and entered into the minutes at the next Deacons meeting.
- **Elders Approval** — Following Deacons approval, the amendment must also receive unanimous approval of the Elders Board before it takes effect.
- **Recordkeeping** — Approved amendments are incorporated into the official Handbook with the date and both boards' approval records on file.

### **Pursuit of Unity:**

We aim for unity and take all feedback seriously. The 85% Deacons supermajority and unanimous Elders approval protect clarity and grace in ministry. If significant concerns remain, either board may postpone the vote to allow further prayer, discussion, and clarification.