

Celebrating God's Gift of Servanthood



9

**Officer Orientation Retreat
Part Two—Deacon Edition**

**First Presbyterian Church
West Chester, Pennsylvania**

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Morning Worship

Deacon Orientation Retreat

Opening Sentences

In the beginning, when it was very dark God said, "Let there be light."

And there was light.

In the beginning, when it was very quiet, The Word was with God.

And the Word was God.

When the time was right God sent the Son.

Christ came among us, Christ was one of us.

In the beginning, we were created in the image of God. But the image of God is a deep and broad thing, the totality of which constantly eludes us. And so as we draw near to God, we offer the pieces of the image which we each hold, praying that together we may more fully reflect and proclaim the height, depth, and breadth of the One who calls us from death to life. Let us join together in the prayer of Catherine of Sienna,

"You, O Eternal Trinity, are a deep sea into which, the more I enter, the more I find, and the more I find, the more I seek. O abyss, O eternal Godhead, O sea profound, what more could you give me than yourself? Amen."

Scripture Reading: Romans 12

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

We rejoice in your generous goodness, O God. As you have made this day, O God, you also made us. Give light for our comfort. Come upon us with quietness and still our souls, that we may listen for the whisper of your Spirit and be attentive to your nearness in our deliberations. Empower us to rise above our differences in new life to proclaim your praise, and plan new ways to show Christ to the world, for he reigns forever and ever.

Let us pray the prayer Jesus taught us.

Our Father who art in Heaven....

Benediction

Let us begin our retreat in the presence and guidance of the God revealed in Jesus the Christ and in each of us.
Amen

How Our Deacons Work: An Introduction

Deacon Orientation Retreat

The Deacons: Presbyterian Polity in Action

1. Representative Democracy - similar to civil structure; separation of powers; one of three
2. “Theology of the Group” – a group of people is more likely to make good decision than an individual person

Purpose of the Deacons

1. Care for our Members
2. Organization varies by size of congregation - division of responsibility and labor
3. Set the vision - “big picture” of how we tend to the needs and cares of our members and why
4. Work with committees and members to fulfill our shared mission

Purpose of the Deacon Committees

1. Do the Work of the Deacons—enact the deacon’s plan in their area of service
2. Primary place of deliberation and action

Role of Moderator

1. Moderate—keep us on topic and on track
2. Call meetings to order; identify speakers; calls for motions/discussions/votes
3. Moderator can be overruled by deacons—group is still ultimate authority
4. Does not make motions—may suggest a direction or approach for consensus
5. Call special meetings as needed—usually at request of a committee or two members
6. “Enforce the Process”—enforce our agreements; keep order in meetings; shared responsibility among members
7. Make a monthly report to Session highlighting information on deacon activities
8. “Deacon to the Deacons” – provides support and care for the members of the Board
9. Coordinate attendance at Session meetings (this should be a shared responsibility between deacon captains and the Moderator)

Role of Secretary

1. Records actions of deacons and preserves information
2. Notifies members of meetings and compiles information for meetings
3. Does not make motions—records them

Role of the Treasurer

1. Works with the staff Business Administrator to keep track of the deacon budget
2. Receives and signs off on receipts for reimbursement
3. Reports on the deacon budget at meetings of the Board
4. Submits the deacon budget request to the Session Finance Committee for the following year

Role of the Deacon Captains

1. Check in monthly with the deacons on your team to see whether there are any changes to their parish members
2. Coordinate the areas under your supervision (e.g. Home Communion, flower delivery, Nursing Home Worship)
3. Communicate deacon and church programming emphases with the deacons in your parish groups
4. Engage lay members of the congregation in the work of your ministry area

Working Together as a Covenant People

1. Authorize Committees to fulfill their jobs and spend their money
 - a. No authorization needed for “regular” responsibilities or expenditures
 - b. Something “new” that impacts multiple areas needs to come to board
2. Honor our Covenant
 - a. Read and review Deacon Covenant—see draft within this orientation packet
 - b. Hold us all accountable to the same level
3. Honor our Process—Present a “United Front” to Congregation
 - a. We discuss, discern, decide and declare
 - b. We vote our convictions, and accept the majority decision
 - c. We do not share our process outside of the Board
4. Consider the question “What is best for the whole church?”
 - a. Not just your committee—the overall vision and direction of the congregation
 - b. Doing what is best for the whole body at the “expense” of your area may be necessary—and noble

Ways to Enhance our Productivity

1. Deacon Captain records minutes from group meetings and sends them to the Secretary
2. The Deacon prepares a report to the Board in three agreed areas: Action, Discussion and Information (rather than sending minutes)
 - a. Action—requires action from the board
 - b. Discussion—would appreciate insight of deacons to explore implications; no vote
 - c. Information—keeps deacons informed of committee activities; no vote; no discussion unless want to highlight or ask questions
3. Reports are due to the Secretary before noon on the Tuesday before next meeting
4. All deacons agree to read all information prior to meeting—absolutely necessary to make informed decisions
5. Action Items come from committees
 - a. If a deacon brings a motion, moderator usually refers to a committee
 - b. Exceptions can—and probably will—be made depending on circumstances
6. In most cases, major items will be presented for discussion at least one month prior to action
7. Electronic votes
 - a. Only when response necessary in short period of time
 - b. Nothing controversial (usually)
 - c. Any opposition indicates a face-to-face meeting will be called
8. Email is to be used for sharing information—not emotion—if confronted with complicated or difficult issue, it’s better to connect personally

Enjoy Serving on Our Deacons

1. Taking some time to agree on these items now should enhance our time together—and make our meetings more enjoyable
2. Thank you for your service to our church and to our God

Questions, Clarifications and/or Comments?

Remember Basic Principles of Deacon Work in Ministry

#1—Divide the Work!

#2—Multiply the Ministry!

#3—Grow the People, Grow the Church!

1. The goal of good committees is to involve as many people as possible doing the ministry, to encourage them in the life and ministry of our church...
 - a. by matching people's gifts to needs and opportunities around us
 - b. by trusting people to do their best without micro-management
 - c. by dividing the ministry into smaller pieces so more can become a part
2. As servant leaders, we are called to **Invite, Engage, Integrate, and Disciple** our church family for ministry.
3. We must trust our members—and help them to trust themselves.

“Every difference of opinion is not necessarily a difference of principle.”

--Thomas Jefferson

Caring for Our Congregation

Deacon Orientation Retreat

The Deacons have a long and meaningful history here at First Presbyterian Church. Many members have been ordained and served over decades of the church's existence.

Over the past months, the deacon and staff decided that given the dual realities of the coronavirus pandemic and a large, diverse congregation, we need a new strategy for caring for our members, and placed it as one of the primary objectives that we would accomplish during the interim period. Due to the pandemic, many of the activities that deacons have engaged in through committee work are not currently possible, though others have become even more important. We recognize that a congregation as large as First Pres requires a full complement of ordained people with warm spirits and big hearts to keep us connected and engaged; this is even more vital for those who are elderly, ill, and lonely.

The Deacons already are a vital part of what we call the “continuum of care,” caring for our members as the family of Christ. Our part of the continuum is to proactively connect throughout the year with all our members, which will be divided into “Parishes” of about twenty families each. By reaching out to each family, we have a better chance of helping people feel they are a part of the church, as well as learning of any situations or needs they may have.

The easiest way to describe our ministry is with four “C’s”: Connection, Communication, Compassion and Care.

Connection. We try to contact every member of the church on a regular basis so that we can create bonds of closeness and connection with them. Some members of the church no longer live in the area and can lose touch with us. Other members are not able to get to church as often as they would like. Regardless of their situation, the Deacons are doing our best to reach out to each and every member.

Communication. Part of our design in connecting with members is to keep them informed of what is happening at the church and how they can be engaged, so we share information about upcoming events or activities. Communication goes both ways, so we also invite members to share their questions, concerns—even their frustrations—in the hopes of opening the communication channels between our leaders and members.

Compassion. Everyone experiences tragedies in life, so the Deacons want to be “first on the scene” when difficulties arise. By connecting and communicating, our hope is that members will feel comfortable contacting us when they have questions or problems. While we are not the only form of compassion, we are here to help in any way we can.

Care. There are several options for ongoing care at the church—which no one will utilize if they don't know about them. Using the first three “C’s,” our goal is to help connect people with the care ministries within our church. And, of course, we may make a visit or two along the way ourselves!

The pastors hope you all are excited about this enhanced role of ministry. We look forward to working together to serve our church and its members. There are still a lot of details to address and plans to make. Thank you for your willingness to serve together. We will love to “C” where this goes!

Evolution of Deacon Structure

Deacon Orientation Retreat

Parish Zone Period

- For most of First Pres's history, deacons were organized around "parish zones", a geographical grouping of households for which they were responsible for care and communication

Committee Period (Late-2000's – 2019)

- The parish model was disbanded, and deacons were organized into committees based on primary activity. The committees included:
 - Worship:
 - Coordinated home communion for elderly and ill members on Pentecost, the first Sunday in Lent, and World Communion Sunday
 - Facilitated quarterly Nursing Home Worship
 - Fellowship
 - Organized the church's weekly coffee hour and chancel flower programs
 - Hosted the biannual luncheon for 50+ year members
 - Outreach
 - Sent cards on important days to members who had lost loved ones
 - Coordinated the delivery of poinsettias at Christmas
 - Mentoring
 - Contacted new members for the first year after joining First Pres, helping them to plug into different church programs
 - Provided presents to the newly baptized and couples getting married in the church
 - Coordinating care packages for first year college students

Slightly Adapted Committee Period (2017 – 2020)

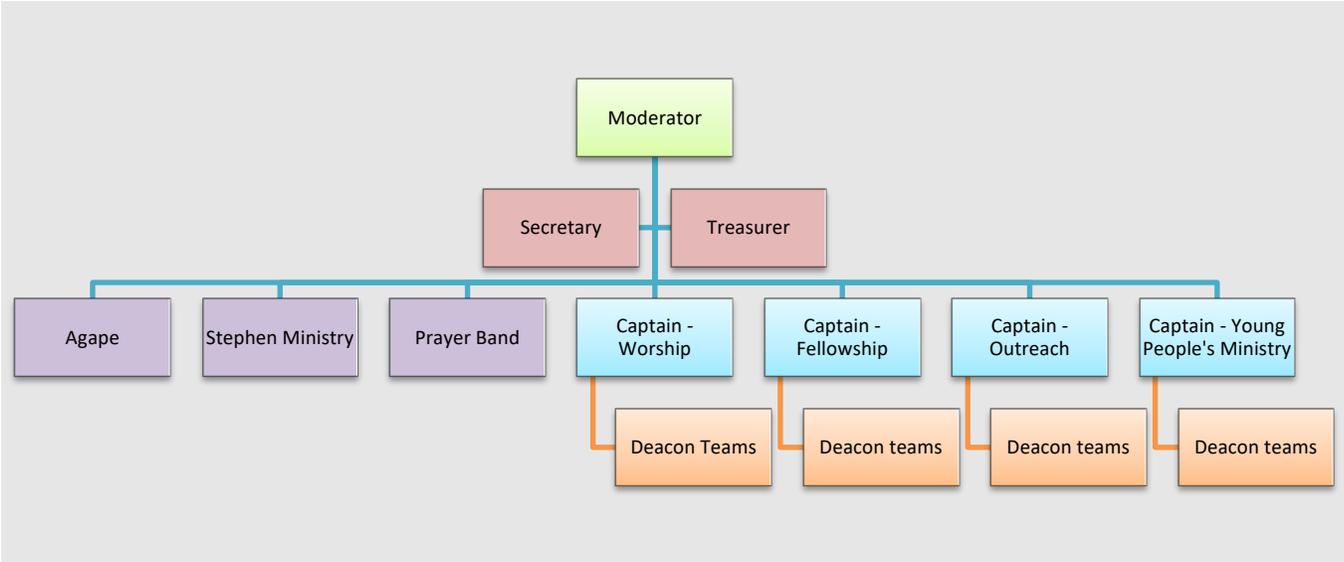
- The committee structure remained the same as above, but adapted parishes were added for two retirement communities where First Pres has a number of members living (Tel Hai and White Horse Village). In 2019 a choir deacon was added to provide support and care for members of music ministry.
- The Caregiving committee of session was disbanded, which served as a liaison between the Deacon Board and Session. In its place, a Deacon report was submitted to Session each month and a member of the Deacons invited to attend the Session meeting.
- All caregiving committees of the church were administratively tied to deacons. These included:
 - Agape Team (hospital visitation ministry)
 - Stephen Ministry (trained one-on-one pastoral support for those in crisis or transition)
 - Prayer Band (prayer ministry for members and community)
 - Health Cabinet and Parish Nursing (currently inactive)

A New Parish Model (2021 and moving forward)

- Recognizing the strengths of the parish model for connection and also the challenges of staying connected in a large congregation during a period of separation calls for new strategies (or rather, new, old strategies – getting back to the bread and butter of caregiving!).

- At the same time, we are looking to the future and recognizing that there are ministries that the deacons coordinated under the committee structure that we want to keep vital once it is safe to gather again.
- Within any large congregation there are smaller congregations made of people in shared stages of life, interests, and concerns. The success of the modified parish models (retirement communities and choir) shows that parishes can be successfully organized around natural groups of individuals, and communications can be tailored for their needs.
- Because this is a new model and one developed in response to the unique needs of a pandemic, it is assumed that this model will be adapted as the deacons try it and see what works, what is missing, and what could be improved. Communication with deacon captains, the moderator, and staff will be essential throughout the year as the structure is refined and improved.

Deacon Board Structure



Responsibilities of Deacon Captains

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A. Purpose of Deacons

1. To initiate regular communication with the households in your parish through emails, calls, and cards
2. To contact parish members who have experienced significant losses or life events
3. To communicate church programs and information to parish members as appropriate
4. To receive information from parish members about life changes or their relationship with the church and to communicate that information to the deacon captain and/or pastor
5. Reach out to parish members who may be interested in home communion and flower deliveries and to confirm their availability to receive communion. The parish deacon would typically serve communion and deliver flowers to those in their parish or would recruit other ordained church members to do so, in concert with the Worship Deacon Captain. Lists of those served would be communicated to the deacon captain for your area
6. Once nursing home worship resumes, to choose two visits per year to participate in
7. To participate in larger programs coordinated by the Deacon Board, such as the biannual Homecoming celebration for 50+ year members

B. Purpose of Deacon Captains

1. To act as the “deacon to the deacons” for the deacons in your team, contacting them in times of life transition, sorrow, or particular need
2. To assist the Moderator in attending Session meeting
3. To communicate regularly (at least 1x per month) with the deacons on your team to discuss programs, strategies, and updates and to provide support and care for one another. This may take the form of a face-to-face meeting or an email communication; it may be helpful to think about alternating these communications until you find out what works best for your team
4. To assist one another in the completion of your tasks: for example, collect the names of those served communion and send to the worship captain
5. To coordinate the ministry in your area:

Worship:

- Once home communion resumes, reach out to all deacons one month prior to ask them to provide a list of those in their parishes wishing to receive home communion and, confirm that they are able to serve
- Reach out to other ordained church members to serve communion to those who are unable to be served by their parish deacons
- Assemble and disassemble communion kits for distribution (recruiting help from other deacons on your team).
- Receive reports from the other deacon captains about the names and numbers of those served.

Outreach:

- In October and at Mother’s Day, reach out to all deacons to determine which households should receive flowers, and order plants for distribution. Confirm that parish deacons are able to distribute the flowers or assist them in finding additional volunteers.
- When nursing home visits resume, work with pastoral staff to develop an order of worship and establish a schedule for deacons to participate in the worship.

Fellowship:

- Once coffee hour resumes, establish a schedule with the expectation that deacons will ordinarily sign up for 4 coffee services a year. Invite other church members to participate in this hospitality ministry, with the goal of having it led by non-active deacons at least 50% of the time.
- Coordinate the fall Homecoming celebration honoring 50+ year members.

Young People's Ministry:

- Coordinate care packages for first-year college students
- Reach out to families where a young person is being baptized to offer a gift
- Reach out to families on the anniversary of a baptism to offer a word of support
- Notes of congratulations sent to high school and college graduates
- Notes of congratulations and welcome to new members
- A book and note presented to couples married at First Pres
- In partnership with the Youth Director and Christian Ed director, offer support to young people in the congregation who might be going through a health challenge or life transition (for example, a significant surgery or the loss of a loved one)

Financial Policies, Procedures and Practices

Deacon Orientation Retreat

How Do We Make a Deacon Budget?

1. Each May, the Executive Committee (EC), made up of the moderator, secretary and staff, invites each deacon captain to estimate how much it will cost to fund their ministry for the coming year
2. Each captain examines their present expenses and projects their future needs
3. The EC examines each ministry team's projected needs, estimates next year's income and establishes a draft budget
4. Draft budget provides an estimate of funding needed to fund next year's ministry
5. EC presents budget to Deacons for discussion in November and approval in December
6. Deacons approve the budget for next year—no session or congregational approval necessary
7. Everybody has money to do ministry!

How Do We Get Approval to Raise Funds?

1. All requests to raise funds must be coordinated with Finance/Stewardship Committee (FSC) of Session prior to fundraising—FSC will coordinate requests and mediate overlapping requests
2. "Regular" events can be submitted to FSC by September of each year and approved by Session at January meeting
3. Unforeseen requests can be submitted to FSC for coordination with other requests already scheduled

How Do We Spend the Money?

1. Each committee is authorized by the board to spend their allotted amounts, both budgeted and designated
2. Please classify expenses to the appropriate budgeted line item – even if this action overspends the particular line item – this will help in creating next year's budget
3. Committees are responsible for the "bottom line" of your ministry area—funds are fungible within ministry budget
4. Do your best to stay within budget—but deacons can approve more funds if needed
5. If a Committee's needs to exceed its total budget by \$500 or more, it must seek deacon approval
6. Contact Executive Committee as soon as possible to explain the need for additional funds

How Do We Get Reimbursed?

1. Complete Request for Payment form – found in rack outside church office and soon to be online
2. Attach/scan original receipts
3. Attain authorization signature from Staff Resource or Committee Moderator
4. Submit authorized Request for Payment form to Jeff Somers by email or placing in his box
5. A check will be mailed to you!

DEACON COVENANT

First Presbyterian Church
Adapted from Session Covenant December 15, 2020

“I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.” (Ephesians 4:1-6)

As members of this Board of Deacons, we have been called by God through the voice of this congregation to serve the people of God with energy, intelligence, imagination and love. Therefore, we bind ourselves together with bonds of honesty, support and encouragement.

As leaders called to model the Body of Christ, we will:

1. Maintain a community and climate of worship so that the central question is not “What is the group consensus?” but “What is the leading of Christ in our midst?”
2. Be intentional in developing relationships with one another and engaging in conversation and ongoing study together in order to build and maintain Christian community and foster trust.
3. Gather good data and basic factual information, identifying alternatives and possibilities. Keep all possible options open in order that creativity may contribute to the process.
4. Lay aside all biases and blocks to the Holy Spirit, leaving the outcome to God’s direction, being willing to consider new ideas, and being obedient to the results.
5. Spend time in reflection and prayer, listening for God’s intimations of the future and hints of God’s direction, relying on scripture, listening, and deep engagement with Christ and each other.
6. Share with the community what one has seen, heard, or felt in the reflection time and speak from our personal experiences related to the subject.
7. Act in a spirit of love and humility, honoring the truth that God works through each member of the body. Be aware God may be speaking through another person and remember that no one possesses all of God’s truth.
8. Listen attentively and with respect and openness to our sisters and brothers, believing that all desire to be faithful to Jesus Christ. Focus on ideas instead of questioning motives, intelligence or integrity.
9. Wait for God’s timing. Continue to ask God for direction during the waiting. Speaking with a united voice depends on waiting long enough to receive a common sense of leading.
10. Lead by example, by sharing our faith and resources to further the church’s ministry through:
 - a. Regular attendance and participation in Worship
 - b. Intentional involvement in a Christian Education program
 - c. Consistent Stewardship through pledges and contributions
 - d. Joyful engagement in the Fellowship Activities with our members
 - e. Ongoing participation in the Mission Outreach of our church
11. Use our leadership roles to empower and encourage others, so that our members may experience the joy of serving and that God’s ministry will be done. We recognize that it is our responsibility to work with our committees and groups to provide clarity of roles, resources for their work, and directions in selecting priorities.
12. Maintain confidentiality within the group, sharing only “public” information in ways that build up the Body of Christ.

Furthermore we agree:

1. Committees are authorized and responsible for their particular areas of ministry as described in their job descriptions. They do not need additional permission to fulfill their duties.
2. Committees are authorized to spend their line items—budgeted, designated and restricted—and do not need additional permission from the deacons while performing the “normal” duties of their ministry. If a committee requires funding beyond its budget, it may submit a request to the deacons, detailing its rationale and design. Because budget allotments are made based on each committee’s plan, a request will be examined for its consistency with the deacon’s long-range plans.
3. Meetings generally will last no more than 60 minutes.
4. We will allot time in each meeting for ongoing training/reflection/dreaming—this provides the opportunity for the deacons to set both their vision and the direction, while committees may labor together to “make it happen.”
5. Written reports from each committee will be submitted to the Moderator by noon on the Tuesday before the next meeting, so that an agenda can be made and all materials distributed electronically the Thursday prior to meeting and will be read by all deacons prior to meeting.
6. Written reports are not ministry minutes or summaries, but will follow the templet divided into:
 - a. Action Items—issues requiring deacon approval by formal vote
 - b. Discussion Items—occasions that a committee requests feedback from the deacons, which the deacons will provide without a formal decision or vote. In most cases, “major items” will be presented for discussion at least one month prior to action.
 - c. Information Items—actions the committee has taken as authorized by the deacons; these items will be noted, but not mentioned unless (1) a deacon has a question or (2) the reporting deacon would like to highlight something.
7. We will speak as one body. While we may disagree during our discussion, our voted decision will be considered the official position/decision of the board of deacons, and we will not undermine this decision by conversations within the congregation. We work and stand together.
8. We will speak the truth in love to each other, knowing that sometimes this may hurt another’s feeling; we agree that it is better to be honest than agreeable.
9. We will support one another in our shared ministry, encouraging and assisting whenever possible. Because the church has called us to lead them, we consider our responsibilities to be a sacred trust, and will thank God regularly for the opportunity to serve our community and our God.
10. At this time in our lives, we each agree to fulfill these responsibilities. If a member of our board should have a change in personal circumstance which no longer allows him/her to fulfill these responsibilities in a timely manner, the member may resign from the board with absolute appreciation for ministry provided.
11. We are a team that trusts each member, holds each other accountable, and works together for the shared ministry of our church. Thanks be to God for this opportunity to serve!

Here we hold ourselves and each other accountable to this covenant, and the policies and/or agreements we make together. We commit ourselves to one another, this congregation and the God we serve together.

DEACON AGENDA (SAMPLE)

Monday, January 4, 2021 7:00pm

- 6:30pm Opening Devotion Prayer
- 6:35 Time for Training and Improvement
- 7:00 Approval of Minutes of Deacons Meetings
- 7:05 Treasurer's Report 8
- 7:10 **ITEMS FOR ACTION**
- 7:15 **ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION**
- 7:20 **ITEMS FOR INFORMATION (Committee Reports)**
- 7:25 Other Matters for Discussion
- 7:30 Adjourning Prayer

Deacon Communication Schedule (Sample)

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Ongoing Communications

- Contact elderly members on birthdays
- Offer periodic calls, emails, or visits to those who welcome them (it is helpful to establish your own schedule for this; some households might want a monthly check-in, while others would be happy with a few times a year).
- Reach out to members who have experienced a loss (the church office will notify you)
- Offer solace or celebration on special dates (it may be helpful to start a calendar for your households).

Monthly Communication Themes

January

- A letter will be sent from the pastors to all members with an introduction to the new parish model.

February

- Send an introductory communication (letter or email) to each household sharing your information and asking about the best way to connect.
- In the introductory letter or a follow up, share information about Lenten programming.

March

- Happy Easter! Send a message to your households with an Easter greeting.

April

- Check in with elderly members about Home Communion for Pentecost (or share wishes for home communion in the future)

May

- Check in with families to see if there are any graduates in their households, and wish congratulations

June

- Communicate about summer programming (VBS, adult studies)

July

August

- Check in with households to see if anyone has someone starting school who would enjoy a care package
- Invite families to Kick Off Sunday in September, share Fall programming

September

- Check with elderly members about their availability for communion on World Communion Sunday
- Reach out to 50+ Year members on homecoming years to invite them to lunch

October

November

- Contact all families about Advent and Christmas programming

December

- Reach out to households for Christmas

Sample Communications

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Introductory Letter

Could be an email or typed letter; include a picture if possible.

Dear XXX,

My name is XXX, and I am writing to introduce myself as [your/your family's] deacon, a position I am excited to serve in for the next few years.

While deacons have served in a variety of ways at First Pres over the years, this year our ministry is trying something new (and to those of you have been in the church for a while, something that might sound familiar). Each household within the congregation will have a deacon assigned to it, similar to our parish zones in the past. This deacon is especially charged with providing a connection to the congregation, and to hold you and your family in prayer. As a deacon, I can provide a listening ear, connect you with home communion, and be another resource for you within First Pres. Mostly, I'm looking forward to getting to know you and connecting in ways that fit with your preferences and schedule.

You'll hear from me about once a month through a card, email, or call, or more often if you're going through something where the support of a deacon could be a help. If you'd prefer to receive emails rather than cards, or vice versa, please let me know. I also realize that at this point in your life you might prefer not to have regular communications from a deacon, and that is perfectly fine as well. In that case, please just reply to this message asking to be taken off my list and the pastors only contact you once more, next year, to see whether you'd like to change your preferences.

You are also very welcome to reach out to me, whether it's to update me on something going on in your life, to share a way that the church could be supportive, or to ask for prayer. My contact information is below:

I am looking forward to getting to know you more over the coming years and hope that this new year brings you health and peace.

In Christ,

[XXX]

Sample Check-In

Card or email

Dear XXX,

I just wanted to reach out and see how you have been lately; without the ability to attend church in person, I find I'm missing the weekly interactions that help our church feel connected. Is there anything going on in your life that I can hold up in prayer?

Be well,

[XXX]

Sample Grief Communication

Card or email

Dear XXX,

I am so sorry about the death of your father. To grieve a parent is a heartbreaking experience, and I pray that as you mourn you feel his presence and love with you, and the comfort of God in the days and weeks to come.

With deep sympathy,

[XXX]

Closing Worship

"Seeking After God"

An Offering of Ourselves (based on "Body Prayer" by Richard Foster)

I pray today with my head, Lord, lifting it heavenward in adoration.

I pray today with my eyes, Lord, looking for the things that are not seen.

I pray today with my hands, Lord, raising them in jubilant praise.

I pray today with my knees, Lord, bowing in submission and contrition.

I pray today with my feet, Lord, working with all my might.

May you be pleased with my prayer. Amen.

Scripture Lesson

Psalm 46

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

Therefore, we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;

though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult.

There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High.

God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved; God will help it when the morning dawns.

The nations are in an uproar, the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice, the earth melts.

The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.

Come, behold the works of the Lord; see what desolations he has brought on the earth.

He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow, and shatters the spear; he burns the shields with fire.

“Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations; I am exalted in the earth.”

The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.

God, in you I trust.

Eternal God, we thank you for being with us today, and for every sign of your truth and love in Jesus Christ. Especially we thank you for the gift of peace in Christ...

for reconciliation in our relationships...

for each new insight into your love...

for energy and courage to share your love...

Gracious God, we remember in our own hearts the needs of others, that we may reach up to claim your love for them, and reach out to give your love in the name of Christ. Especially we prayer for our families...

for harmony and justice...

for friends who are hurting or bereaved...

for the Spirit's power in this church...

O Lord my God, thank you for bringing this day to a close; Thank you for giving me rest in body and soul. Your hand has been over me and has guarded and preserved me. Forgive my lack of faith and any wrong that I have done today, and help me to forgive all who have wronged me. Let me rest in peace under your protection, and keep me from the temptations of darkness. Into your hands I commend my loved ones and all who dwell in this place; I commend to you my body and soul. O God, your holy name be praised. Amen. (The unison prayer is by Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

Departure Blessing

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with us all. **Amen!**

Bless the Lord! **The Lord's name be praised!**