

Qualifications for Church Leadership

1 TIMOTHY 3:1-13 (23)

1 TIMOTHY: DUTIES AND ORDER IN THE CHURCH, [1 Timothy 2:1-3:13](#) The Deacons of the Church, [1 Timothy 3:8-13](#)

[\(1 Timothy 3:8-13\)](#) **Introduction:** this passage discusses the second officer of the church, the deacon. The office of deacon is so important that the qualifications required are just as high as those demanded of a minister or bishop. In this day and time, when worldliness, immorality, and lawlessness are running so rampant, the qualifications for deacons need to be studied, heeded, and guarded ever so diligently.

The Seven Receive The Apostles' Approval

After selecting the Seven, the congregation presented them to the apostles for official approval. Rather than immediately sending the Seven out to work, the congregation brought them to the apostles, who commissioned them in an official and public way, by the laying on of hands and prayer.

It is only natural that the apostles would be responsible for placing the Seven in charge of the church's money and ministries to the needy. Indeed, the apostles' proposed plan, as outlined in [verse 3](#), states that the apostles would "put in charge of this task" those selected by the congregation:

"But select from among you, brethren, seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task" (italics added).

The subject of the Greek verb that means "put in charge" (first person plural) is the twelve apostles. The subject of the Greek verb that means "select" (second person plural) is the "congregation of the disciples." The Greek verb that means "put in charge," *kathistēmi*, is often used to express appointment to an official position, such as the appointment of a judge or governor ([Acts 7:10](#)). It can also express appointment in an unofficial sense. Either way, the verb indicates a sense of authority, as **R. J. Knowling** in *The Expositor's Greek Testament* states: "The verb implies at all events an exercise of authority."

The apostles could officially place the Seven in charge of helping the church's needy and distributing church finances because they had the authority, as Christ's chosen apostles, to do so ([Ephesians 2:19-20](#)). Therefore, it is best to understand that the congregation chose the seven men and the apostles officially installed them.

The Laying on of Hands

When the apostles installed the Seven, Scripture says, "they laid their hands on them" ([Acts 6:6](#)). This is the first recorded example of the laying on of hands in the Christian community. The imposition of hands is used for various reasons in the Bible, but as James Orr, a well-known Scottish apologist for orthodox Christianity at the turn of

the century, writes, “**The primary idea seems to be that of conveyance or transference** (cf. [Leviticus 16:21](#)) but, conjoined with this, in certain instances are the ideas of identification and of devotion to God.”

Looking first at Old Testament examples, we note that the laying on of hands was used to:

- convey blessing ([Genesis 48:14](#))
- identify with a sacrifice to God ([Leviticus 1:4](#))
- transfer sin ([Leviticus 16:21](#))
- transfer defilement ([Leviticus 24:14](#))
- identify man’s actions with God’s ([2 Kings 13:16](#))
- set people apart, such as in conveying a special commission, responsibility, or authority ([Numbers 8:10, 14](#); [Numbers 27:15–23](#); [Deuteronomy 34:9](#))

In the New Testament, the laying on of hands was used to:

- convey blessing ([Matthew 19:15](#); [Mark 10:16](#))
- convey the Holy Spirit’s healing power ([Mark 6:5](#); [Mark 8:23, 25](#); [Mark 16:18](#); [Luke 4:40](#); [Luke 13:13](#); [Acts 9:12](#); [Acts 19:11](#); [Acts 28:8](#))
- convey the Holy Spirit to certain believers through the apostles’ hands ([Acts 8:17–19](#); [Acts 19:6](#))
- convey healing and the Holy Spirit to Paul through Ananias’ hands ([Acts 9:17](#))
- convey a spiritual gift to Timothy through Paul’s hands ([2 Timothy 1:6](#))
- set apart or place in office ([Acts 6:6](#); [Acts 13:3](#); [1 Timothy 4:14](#); [1 Timothy 5:22](#))

The New Testament contains no normative regulations for the laying on of hands. It is not a prescribed practice such as baptism or the Lord’s Supper, nor is it restricted to a particular person or group in the church ([Acts 9:12](#); [Acts 13:3](#)). So the precise significance of the laying on of hands is difficult to determine at times. We do know that the imposition of hands, like fasting, was practiced by the first Christians because it was useful and a blessing to all. Christians are free, then, to use the laying on of hands if they desire, or to refrain from its practice if it leads to misunderstanding.

Because of confusion or superstition surrounding the laying on of hands, many churches today avoid its use entirely. That is unfortunate because the laying on of hands can be a meaningful public act.

In light of this background, it seems reasonable to assume that the imposition of hands in [Acts 6](#) visually expressed the apostles’ blessing, commissioned the Seven to a special task ([Numbers 27:22-23](#)), and transferred the authority to do the job. Because of the Seven’s responsible task of handling large sums of money ([Acts 4:34–37](#)) and the growing tensions between the Hellenistic Jews and Hebrews, the apostles knew that the situation demanded an official, public act of appointment.

The laying on of hands in [Acts 6](#), however, did not install the Seven to higher ministerial positions (priest or minister), nor did it make the Seven successors to the apostles. It was not ordination that authorized them to preach and administer the sacraments. It did not convey grace or the Holy Spirit, for the Seven were already filled with the Holy Spirit. Rather, *the laying on of hands commissioned the Seven to serve the needy*. How different this is from customary traditions of laying hands only on the highest clergy!