



Deacon and Yokefellows: Teammates in Ministry

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Why Yokefellows

The first consideration in deciding to use the yokefellows' approach in deacon ministry involves determining the reasons for doing so. A long-standing reason references training people for ministry. In this approach you use yokefellows to train potential deacons or to notice deacon qualified individuals. This approach possesses several strengths. If used to train potential deacons, it provides a way for a person to decide if they really want to serve in the Deacon Council Ministry of your church. This would be particularly important if the major ministry of the deacons involves the Deacon Family Ministry Plan or Team Ministry approach.

Another strength exists in that you can pair a novice deacon with a more experienced, mature deacon as a mentor in ministry. This gets the novice deacon off to a good start and helps to diminish the chances of the beginner becoming discouraged.

This particular approach tends to limit those who can serve as yokefellows. You will only be able to use those individuals who will or already serve as deacons. As we shall see later, this negates one of the potential strengths involved in using yokefellows.

How to Utilize Yokefellows

Use yokefellows as visiting partners in the Deacon Family Ministry Plan or Team Ministry. In this plan, you and your fellow deacons would each have a yokefellow who would minister to your families or team assignments with you. There are several strengths in this plan.

Your yokefellow can give support and encouragement to you in ministry. This would particularly be true on days when your motivation might not be all that it should be. The yokefellow can also share unique insights in certain ministering situations you may not experience. None of the above reasons, however, will help your Deacon Council cope with the ratio of deacons to families or team assignments.

Use yokefellows to minister to a particular group of families or team ministry assignments. You will want to consider using this approach if you have a deacon-family ratio much above one deacon for every ten families. In this design each deacon has a yokefellow. Then you assign the yokefellow a certain number of families or a team ministry assignment.

As the assigned deacon you would have general oversight over all the families but would only minister to a portion of the group. Here is an illustration: Your family assignment consists of 20 families. Your yokefellow ministers to 10 of the families and you minister to 10. You would have overall responsibility for all 20. In addition to your 10 families, you encourage and facilitate the yokefellow in ministering.

As you can see, this method reduces the number of families per deacon and so makes the Deacon Family Ministry Plan or Team Ministry more effective. Using this approach also enables you to include as yokefellows individuals who might not otherwise be deacons. This greatly increases the number of people available for ministry. You will, however, need to be sure that those who serve as yokefellows understand that they do not now (and may never) serve as deacons.

Once you have decided the approach you want to use, begin the process of setting up the yokefellow plan. It is wise to begin by getting the church to approve the concept. Since yokefellows will minister to the entire congregation, they will be received better if the congregation understands the plan. Some congregation members are not sure they want deacons, much less yokefellows, ministering to them. A detailed explanation of the yokefellow ministry and being allowed to vote on its adoption help these members.

Once the congregation has approved the plan, you and your fellow deacons can choose a yokefellow to work with you. It would be helpful to have the details of how you will use yokefellows in written form as you seek to enlist individuals to serve with you. This selection process needs to begin with a time of prayer for God's guidance. Both you and the person you choose need to feel a definite sense of our Lord's leadership.

What Kind of Person Can Serve As a Yokefellow?

A yokefellow does not necessarily have to be one who will one day serve as a deacon. This means someone who would not meet some of the qualifications for a deacon in your church could serve as a yokefellow. In no case, however, should you choose a person who possesses characteristics detrimental to the church's missional ministry. It probably would be best for you to choose a person other than a reserve deacon to serve with you. Reserve deacons may minister to families but they do so as deacons.

Qualities of Yokefellows

Keeping the aforementioned in mind, what qualifications need consideration?

1. The person considered needs to have an observable ministering spirit. If you do not know one, you identify them by observing those who minister in small group classes, disciple making classes, and other places.
2. You need to be able to relate well to the person. It would not be wise to choose someone with whom you have relationship problems. This does not mean, however, that the person chosen needs to be an established friend. One of the joys of yokefellows lies in getting to know more people in the congregation.
3. It would be good to choose a person who has a motivation for voluntary commitment to service. You do not need to force or manipulate a person to serve with you. Like a person considering deacon service, the yokefellow should feel the Lord's leadership to this service.

Once each of your Deacon Council members chooses a yokefellow, share with one another the names selected. *This needs to be done before contact with the potential yokefellow.* Because of this, it probably would be good for each deacon to make a primary and secondary choice. The high probability exists that several of your deacons will choose the same yokefellow. You need a clear understanding in the beginning that there will be a need for give and take in the final selections. Some of your Deacon Council probably will not be able to enlist their first choice. In order for this process to go as smoothly as possible, prayer needs to precede each step.

After finalizing the selections with your fellow deacons, invite the person chosen to serve with you. You would do well to do this in the informal setting of the home of the one you invite. Your spouse and the yokefellow's spouse need to be in this meeting since they serve as ministering partners. Your spouse can help answer questions from the yokefellow's spouse.

If the yokefellow agrees to serve, then you assign a group of families or team ministry assignment to him. It would probably be good in the beginning of the assignment period for you to go with the yokefellow and introduce him to the families or team ministry participants. There may be other times when your circumstances will call for you to minister with your yokefellow. Normally, however, the yokefellow ministers separately from you. The yokefellow's spouse would be the one to visit with the yokefellow.

After making the assignments, you will want to publish a list of all the deacons, yokefellows, and their family assignments. This list needs to include their addresses and telephone numbers. This allows church members to call if they know of a need in the lives of one of the assigned families. Many churches have found it helpful to distribute this list to every church family. If you do not distribute the list to all the church, you will want to post the list in a place in the church where it can be easily seen. You and your fellow deacons and yokefellows need to have the complete list of who is assigned to whom.

You can receive the reports on the ministry activities of the yokefellows in several different ways. Your yokefellow can give the report to you, and you can give it to the Deacon Family Ministry Plan Coordinator or Team Leader. Some churches have the yokefellows attend the beginning of the meeting of deacons and give the report at that time. These same churches plan a time of training for the yokefellows at this meeting time. Some churches include a meal for deacons and yokefellows as a part of this period. However you decide to do it, regular reporting helps the Deacon Family Ministry Plan or Team Ministry to be more successful.

Training Yokefellows

The same can be said for training. If your yokefellows do not come to the regular meeting of deacons, consider scheduling other times of training. In fact, other times of training probably need to be conducted anyway. These training experiences can include a retreat for your church, attending associational training conference, being a part of a national conference at Ridgecrest, or having a conference at your local church. You may also want to seek the help of the person in your state convention office who relates to the work of deacons. This person has a list of certified workers who can come to your church and help you with a conference or retreat.

I hope these comments and suggestions regarding yokefellows help you in your use of this approach. If you have specific questions concerning yokefellows or any other concerns regarding deacons, please contact the Deacon Specialist, Roy Lee Saint, in the Leadership and Life Development Department.

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