THE QUESTION

Did the early church set a minimum age for deacons?

Asked by a THF member on August 14, 2026 · published November 9, 2026 · 10 numbered quotations · the 18 early Christian passages and 98 Bible verses we kept are listed at the back, each with a link.

Read it online: thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/did-the-early-church-set-a-minimum-age-for-deacons

The short answer *Interpretation: our reading of the passages, not their words*

These passages give no minimum age for deacons, either from the New Testament or from the early writers. Instead they required men who were tested first, blameless, truthful, not greedy, married only once and able to run a household. The only age named is sixty, and that rule is for enrolled widows, not deacons.

LIBRARY ONLY	This study was written only from The Historic Faith's library of early-Christian writings and the Bible, never from the web. Every passage we kept from what the library gave is listed at the back, with a link to read it.
HOW IT WAS MADE	Compiled by machine learning from The Historic Faith's library of early-Christian writings and the Bible only. Every quotation was matched word for word against our stored text. Not yet reviewed by The Historic Faith.
SHARING WITH AN AI?	Every quotation here comes from The Historic Faith's library. If you paste this study into an AI, anything it adds beyond these pages comes from that AI, not from us.

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POINT 1 OF 6

Apostles appointed deacons to serve the church

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Cyprian says the apostles appointed deacons after the Lord's ascension to serve the bishops and the church. The Apostolic Constitutions describe a bishop ordaining a deacon by laying on hands before the clergy. Neither passage mentions an age.

1 "But deacons ought to remember that the Lord chose apostles, that is, bishops and overseers, while the apostles, after the Lord's ascension into heaven, appointed deacons for themselves as servants of their episcopacy and of the Church."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Cyprian,** *Epistles* (c. 248–258 AD) **Source 12, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

2 "Concerning the ordination of deacons, I, Philip, make this constitution: O bishop, you shall ordain a deacon by laying your hands on him in the presence of the whole presbytery and the deacons, and you shall pray and say"

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Apostolic Constitutions** (c. 250–380 AD) **Source 16, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

POINT 2 OF 6

Deacons had to be proven first

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Clement of Rome says the apostles first tested their converts by the Spirit before making them bishops and deacons. The Didache asks for deacons who are worthy and proven. The test was a known, tried life, not a set age.

3 "Thus, preaching through countries and cities, they appointed the first-fruits of their labors, having first proved them by the Spirit, to be bishops and deacons of those who would later believe."

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Clement of Rome,** *First Epistle to the Corinthians* **Source 17, page 6** **Read it in the library ›**
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4 “Therefore, appoint for yourselves bishops and deacons who are worthy of the Lord: men who are gentle, not lovers of money, truthful, and proven.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Didache,** *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* 15 (c. 50–120 AD) **Source 1, page 5** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 3 OF 6

Character was the main requirement

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

Polycarp lists what a deacon must be: blameless, honest in speech, free from love of money, self-controlled and caring. He presents deacons as servants of God following Christ, who served all.

5 “Similarly, the deacons should be blameless before His righteousness, as they are the servants of God and Christ, not of men. They must not be slanderers, double-tongued, or lovers of money, but must be temperate in all things, compassionate, industrious, and live according to the truth of the Lord, who was the servant of all.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Polycarp,** *Epistle to the Philippians* (c. 100–155 AD) **Source 6, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 4 OF 6

Married once and ruling his household well

Our note · compiled by machine learning · Interpretation: our reading of the passages, not their words

Origen repeats Paul's rule that deacons be husbands of one wife who manage their children and homes well. The Apostolic Constitutions add that a deacon must have married only once. These rules suggest grown men with settled lives, though no age is named.

6 “And about deacons he says, "Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well,"”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Origen,** *Commentary on Matthew* 14 (c. 215–254 AD) **Source 11, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

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7 “We have already said that when a bishop, a presbyter, or a deacon is appointed, he must have been married only once, whether his wife is still living or has died.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Source 14, page 6** Read it in the library ›
Apostolic Constitutions (c. 250–380 AD)
THF's updated English

POINT 5 OF 6

The only age given is for widows

Our note · compiled by machine learning · From the text: says what the passages say

In the same passage, Origen quotes Paul's rule that a widow be enrolled only at sixty or older. This is the only number in these sources, and it applies to widows, not to deacons.

8 “Let no one be enrolled as a widow under sixty years old, having been the wife of one man,"”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Origen,** *Commentary on Matthew* 14 (c. 215–254 AD) **Source 11, page 6** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

POINT 6 OF 6

Youth alone did not bar church service

Our note · compiled by machine learning · Interpretation: our reading of the passages, not their words

A letter in the Ignatius collection, written to one who serves the bishops as Stephen did, tells him not to let anyone despise his youth. Ignatius also says youth devoted to God should not be despised. This suggests young men could hold church office, though no age is fixed.

9 “They baptize, offer sacrifice, ordain, and lay on hands, but you minister to them, as the holy Stephen did at Jerusalem to James and the elders.”

later in the same passage

“Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers, both in word and behavior."”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Ignatius of Antioch,** *Epistles of Ignatius* (c. 98–117 AD) **Source 3, page 5** Read it in the library ›
THF's updated English

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10 “Therefore, youth is not to be despised when it is devoted to God.”

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITER **Ignatius of Antioch,** *Epistle to the Magnesians* (c. 98–117 AD) **Source 5, page 5** **Read it in the library ›**
THF's updated English

THE LIMITS

What these passages don’t tell us

- None of these passages names a minimum age for deacons.
- These sources do not show when, or whether, churches later added a set age for ordaining deacons.
- A word-for-word match shows that a quotation really is in our text. It does not show that our reading of it is right, or who wrote each work.

WHERE EVERY QUOTE CAME FROM

The Sources

The 18 early Christian passages and 98 Bible verses we kept for this question (repeats and weak or off-topic search hits were left out): early Christian passages first (sources 1–18, grouped by writer, earliest first), then Bible verses in The Faith Once Delivered Bible (sources 19–33, in Bible order), then 83 more verses THF links to these passages, by reference. **Quote 1, page 2** beside a source shows where the study quotes it. Passages are in THF’s updated English unless marked “1885 English” (the Roberts–Donaldson translation, public domain). “… [continues online]” marks a passage the library gave only in part. **On paper?** At **thehistoricfaith.com**, Bible verses are in the **Audio Bible** and early Christian writings in the **Library** (search for the title).

EARLY CHRISTIAN WRITERS *18 passages from 10 writers*

Didache, *c. 50–120 AD · source 1*

1 *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* 15 (1885 English) **Quote 4, page 3** “appoint for yourselves bishops and deacons worthy of the Lord, men meek, and not lovers of money, 1 Timothy 3:4 and truthful and proven… [continues online] **read ›**

Ignatius of Antioch, *c. 98–117 AD · sources 2–5*

2 *Epistle to the Smyrnaeans* “the laity be subject to the deacons… [continues online] **read ›**

3 *Epistles of Ignatius* **Quote 9, page 4** "Honor widows who are truly widows." Be a friend to orphans, for God is "the Father of the fatherless, and the Judge of the widows." Do nothing without the bishops, … [continues online] **read ›**

4 *Epistle to the Smyrnaeans* (1885 English; on point 1) “reverence the deacons, as being the institution of God… [continues online] **read ›**

5 *Epistle to the Magnesians* (1885 English) **Quote 10, page 5** “it is a fearful thing to contradict any such person… [continues online] **read ›**

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Polycarp, *c. 100–155 AD · source 6*

6 *Epistle to the Philippians* **Quote 5, page 3** "that "God is not mocked," we ought to live worthy of His commandment and glory. Similarly, the deacons should be blameless before His righteousness, as they are the servants of… [continues online] **read ›**

Clement of Alexandria, *c. 190–215 AD · sources 7–8*

7 *Stromata* 3 (on point 4) in marriage," Luke 20:35. But if anyone considers that question and those who asked it, he will find that the Lord is not rejecting marriage, but bringing a remedy… [continues online] **read ›**

8 *Stromata* 6.13 (1885 English; on point 3) an one is in reality a presbyter of the Church, and a true minister (deacon) of the will of God, if he do and teach what is the Lord's… [continues online] **read ›**

Tertullian, *c. 196–220 AD · source 9*

9 *Against All Heresies* 1 (1885 English; on point 1) "brother heretic emerged in Nicolaus. He was one of the seven deacons who were appointed in the Acts of the Apostles… [continues online] **read ›**

Hippolytus, *c. 200–236 AD · source 10*

10 *Refutation of All Heresies* 24 (1885 English; on point 1) "as one of the seven (that were chosen) for the diaconate, was appointed by the Apostles… [continues online] **read ›**

Origen, *c. 215–254 AD · source 11*

11 *Commentary on Matthew* 14 (1885 English) **Quotes 6, 8, pages 3, 4** "in regard to deacons, Let the deacons, he says, be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well, 1 Timothy 3:12 etc… [continues online] **read ›**

Cyprian, *c. 248–258 AD · sources 12–13*

12 *Epistles* **Quote 1, page 2** "But deacons ought to remember that the Lord chose apostles, that is, bishops and overseers… [continues online] **read ›**

13 *Epistles* seriously troubled, dearest brother, when we read your letter. In it, you complained about your deacon. Forgetting your priestly position, and not mindful of his own office and ministry, he… [continues online] **read ›**

Apostolic Constitutions, *c. 250–380 AD · sources 14–16*

14 *Apostolic Constitutions* (1885 English) **Quote 7, page 4** the deaconess be a pure virgin; or, at the least, a widow who has been but once married, faithful, and well esteemed… [continues online] **read ›**

15 *Apostolic Constitutions* (1885 English; on point 5) your widows not under sixty years of age… [continues online] **read ›**

16 *Apostolic Constitutions* (1885 English) **Quote 2, page 2** "Concerning the ordination of deacons, I Philip make this constitution: You shall ordain a deacon, O bishop, by laying your hands upon him in the presence of the whole presbytery… [continues online] **read ›**

Clement of Rome · *sources 17–18*

17 *First Epistle to the Corinthians* **Quote 3, page 2** "Thus, preaching through countries and cities, they appointed the first-fruits of… [continues online] **read ›**

18 *First Epistle to the Corinthians* Our apostles also knew, through our Lord Jesus Christ, that there would be conflict regarding the office of the episcopate. For this reason, considering that they had obtained perfect foreknowledge… [continues online] **read ›**

THE BIBLE *15 verses, The Faith Once Delivered Bible (Old Testament from the Septuagint), in Bible order*

19 **Mark 3:14** He appointed twelve, that they might be with him, and that he might send them out to preach **read ›**

20 **Acts 6:2** The twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not appropriate for us to forsake the word of God and serve tables. **read ›**

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21 **Acts 6:3** Therefore, brothers, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this work. **read ›**

22 **Acts 6:5** The proposal pleased the whole multitude, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faithfulness and the Holy Spirit, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a convert from Antioch, **read ›**

23 **Acts 14:23** They appointed elders for them in every church and, after prayer with fasting, commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed. **read ›**

24 **1 Timothy 3:1** The saying is trustworthy: if anyone aspires to the office of bishop, he desires a good work. **read ›**

25 **1 Timothy 3:8** Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for shameful gain, **read ›**

26 **1 Timothy 3:10** Let them also first be tested; then let them serve if they are blameless. **read ›**

27 **1 Timothy 3:12** Let deacons be husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. **read ›**

28 **1 Timothy 3:13** For those who have served well gain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in faithfulness in Christ Jesus. **read ›**

29 **1 Timothy 4:12** Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the faithful in speech, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faithfulness, in purity. **read ›**

30 **1 Timothy 5:1** Do not rebuke an older man, but exhort him as a father; the younger men as brothers; **read ›**

31 **1 Timothy 5:9** Let no one be enrolled as a widow under sixty years old, having been the wife of one man, **read ›**

32 **Titus 1:6** provided a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, with faithful children who are not accused of reckless living and are not insubordinate. **read ›**

33 **Titus 2:2** that older men be temperate, dignified, sober-minded, sound in faithfulness, love, and perseverance; **read ›**

ALSO LINKED BY THF TO THESE PASSAGES *83 verses, by reference*

Partly machine-linked: related to the passages, not always quoted in them. Each reference links to the verse in our audio Bible.

Genesis 4:25

Leviticus 15:18

Deuteronomy 8:18 · 20:5 · 20:19

Proverbs 9:17

Isaiah 50:9 · 60:17 · 63:3

Jeremiah 23:24

Matthew 5:6 · 6:19 · 6:24 · 7:21 · 10:5 · 18:20 · 19:6 · 20:28 · 23:9

Mark 7:9 · 10:43 · 12:39

Luke 2:36 · 6:46 · 10:16 · 11:23 · 12:47 · 12:50 · 20:25 · 20:27 · 20:34 · 20:46

John 3:6 · 6:27 · 20:22

Acts 1:8 · 6:1

Romans 7:4 · 7:12 · 14:19 · 14:21 · 15:16

1 Corinthians 6:9 · 6:10 · 6:12 · 6:18 · 7:5 · 7:8 · 7:9 · 7:14 · 7:32 · 7:39 · 9:25

2 Corinthians 11:3

Galatians 3:27 · 5:13 · 5:16 · 5:17 · 6:1 · 6:7

Ephesians 4:2

Philippians 1:18 · 1:27 · 4:3 · 4:8

Colossians 2:20

1 Timothy 3:2 · 3:4 · 4:1 · 4:3 · 5:3 · 5:11 · 5:14

2 Timothy 2:12

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Titus 1:5
Hebrews 5:1 · 13:4 · 13:5
1 Peter 2:11
1 John 2:27
Revelation 2:6 · 4:4 · 11:16

Searched: Ante-Nicene Fathers volumes 1–9 and the Bible, including the Septuagint.

ABOUT THIS STUDY

A THF member asked “Did the early church set a minimum age for deacons?” on August 14, 2026. The Historic Faith answered it as a public study on November 9, 2026.

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How to cite this study. The Historic Faith, “Did the early church set a minimum age for deacons?” Early Church Questions, published November 9, 2026, https://thehistoricfaith.com/early-church-questions/did-the-early-church-set-a-minimum-age-for-deacons. To cite one quotation, add its number and source, for example “quote 1, source 12.”

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THE END OF THIS STUDY