

ROTATIONAL DEACONSHIP:
A CASE STUDY OF ZION BAPTIST CHURCH, ILORIN.

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ABSTRACT

This study aims at finding out the reasons for deacons to be rotated. The purpose is not only to advocate for the system of deacon rotation in our churches but also to provide a better understanding as well as exposing the values of the deacon rotation system. This was carried out in a local Baptist church within Agape Baptist Association that is, Zion Baptist Church, Adewole Estate, Ilorin. The Diaconate, the church pastor as well as thirty-five members of the church filled the structured interview conducted at the same time. The report showed that the prospects of the system outweighed the problems and that there is no indication to revert to the permanent system.

To establish this fact many relevant textbooks, periodicals, and other relevant materials were consulted and recommendations and suggestions were made for the adoption and guidelines of practicing this system in the churches of the Nigerian Baptist Convention.

5.2 CONCLUSION

Rotational deaconship system is a decisive ecclesiological option for the church that must pursue growth in order to develop new faces for deacon ministry. This is because its prospects outweigh its problem. Hence, it has been noted that deacon rotation is useful and efficient, it limits deacon tenure to a specific period of time, it stimulates long serving deacons with fresh ideas and points of view from new deacons, it gives room for renewal and rest for the deacons, and it gives the congregation a tactful way to replace ineffective deacons.

Also, churches in the Nigerian Baptist Convention must follow the new trend of deacon rotation by moving from the older pattern so as to achieve an effective deaconship ministry. It is not enough to include this in the constitution but we must be able to stay with whatever we believe in as a denomination. The Convention must be able to see that the churches in our convention follow this recommendation for the purpose of the gospel they claimed to proclaim. This research has made us to know through the literature review that not up to ten percent of our churches are in the process of the system and this is right established through the questionnaire administered in Zion Baptist Church, Ilorin which happens to be the only congregation with long practicing of this system in the whole of Agape Baptist Association, Ilorin. Therefore, the Nigerian Baptist Convention

must be able to move toward a new direction of deacon rotation system. It is a problem solving approach to the permanent system of “once a deacon always a deacon” (Cole, 23).

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

A church determination on whether or not to establish a policy of rotation of deacons should be based on more than just an evaluation of the pros and cons of the system (Paulson, 17). This is because since the birth of the church until the present time, God has manifested His interest in the welfare of His people, and this must be considered when our churches are about to step into the process of selecting leaders, determining the responsibilities and conditions of their service (17). Therefore, in beginning or maintaining the rotation system it is important to know the following based on what the researcher discovered from descriptive survey method.

Any church contemplating to adopt deaconship rotation system should make sure that this system enjoys the support of the majority of church members. There should be a consensus among members before adoption. The decision whether deacons will operate under a rotation plan or service is actually a decision for the church to make, rather than the deacons. Despite the fact that deacon rotation is vital to any church, every effort should be made to begin it by seeking member recommendation for establishing it. No pastor or deacon should force it on the church; it must be church decision coming out of a genuine desire and sincerity of purpose.

Coupled with the church decision is the need for the system. The church must see the need for it rather than trying to copy another church. It must be stressed that this might be dangerous for the system because, every Baptist Church is a local congregation

with its autonomy. What operates in Church “A” may not apply in Church “B” even in the same geographical area. So, the need for the system must spring up from the church members. After all, the underlies factor in the development of deaconship ministry sprang up as a result of the need that arose with the complaint of the Hellenists against the Hebrews- The attempt to meet the needs led to the choosing of seven men referred to as deacons. So, if there is no need for it on the part of a church it should not be an option to be considered.

The scripture says that “my people are destroyed for lack of knowledge” (Hosea 4:6). In an attempt to establish deacon rotation, adequate teaching should be done to enlighten the members. During this teaching, which should be in series, effort should be made to expose the pros and cons of the system. The pastor of the church should encourage discussion from any member of the church that has different views and there should be room for questions which must be adequately attended to by the teacher or pastor handling the teachings. It is necessary that the experience of other people such as pastor, deacons and church members from churches that have operated under a rotation system should not be ignored. No church should rush into the system without adequate understanding of what they want to do, so as not to cause friction within the Church. Therefore, the researcher advocates for an adequate education that is well grounded in the word of God before adopting the system because all scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for correction, and for training in righteousness (II Timothy 3:16).

An adequate education should follow the sincere efforts of the church to seek God’s guidance in prayer. The church should pray because this is a spiritual matter. Beginning a rotation plan for deacons need not be an unpleasant experience. W. Fred

Kendall has discovered in an early pastorate that it can be a spiritual enriching undertaking (Foshee, 100). The beginning and maintenance of the system should be well attended to through prayers. God's guidance in prayer should be sought from the beginning to the end of the training. The decision to start deacon rotation needs prayer, planning and leadership of the Holy Spirit, so as not to jeopardize the harmony of the church (Ekiran, 96). A clear understanding of what are deacon rotation and a prayerful attitude in asking God to lead in the process are basic principles that must undergird any method the church may use.

Retired deacons should continue to minister as servants through other church responsibilities assigned to them. They may also help with some of the ministries assigned to deacons, but they should know that they are not acting as church officers. Hence, for them not to feel discouraged and develop negative attitude to the service of the church, the church should decide on what to do to give them recognition. Some churches confer the title of deacon emeritus in recognition and honor for long standing deacon service. The term emeritus means that the deacon has retired from an active position, usually when no longer physically able to carry out the duties of an active deacon (Henry, 101). Apart from emeritus, Henry Webb suggested other titles such as "life deacon" or deacon for life. In Zion Baptist Church, Ilorin which the researcher used as a case study, the church promotes to honorary life membership any deacon who by reason of age or infirmities shall be, after extended honorable service could no longer able to render active service. Hence, it must be stressed that the church must be guided by the Holy Spirit to know appropriately how to handle the deacons who are no longer in active service. The

