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PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES OF DEACON ROTATION

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ABSTRACT

There are basically two types of tenure into which a deacon could be elected: "life-long and "limited". The former is more traditional than the later, however, this is not to say that it is outdated or irrelevant. Each of these plans has its sincere apologists, likewise antagonists.

This work has given attention to the critical evaluation of "limited" tenure - Deacon rotation to determine the rationale behind its introduction and its effects on a church. Thus, the essay is titled, "Prospects and Challenges of Deacon Rotation".

This study has been carried out by reviewing the literature which examines the Biblical basis of deacon ministry, origin of the deacon rotation plan, advantages and disadvantages of the system, and variations of the plan. Also, oral interviews were conducted to ascertain the actual practice and effects of deacon rotation in a church. Some people believe that deacon rotation plan is more result-oriented than life-long tenure. But, the plan may not work in every church.

Thus, it is recommended that, each church should consider the pros and cons of each of these limited-service plans and choose the system that promises a dynamic and vibrant deacon ministry in their own setting.

B. Recommendations

Comparing the literature and the findings of this research, the researcher thus, makes the following suggestions:

Education

Ignorance, they say, is a disease and can be deadly,

⁷Foshee, The Ministry of the Deacon, p.98.

therefore, the entire church needs to be adequately educated on the issue of "Deacon rotation plan". Those who oppose the idea probably do not have enough education about the subject. From the literature reviewed, the pastor is encouraged to have adequate time to educate his congregation on the desirability, advantages and disadvantages of the system. He can as well invite speakers from churches that are already practising deacon rotation to reinforce his effort.⁸ It has been observed that rotational deaconship is based on democratic principles, therefore, successful implementation of it requires adequate enlightenment on the part of the operators. Again, those that the church would ordain or elect as deacons must be adequately informed about the duration of the tenure before they are ordained to prevent a "sit-tight syndrome".

Most churches of the Nigerian Baptist Convention that claim to have adopted a deacon rotation plan may need more education on the practice. Findings of this research show that what some of them call "rotation" plan is not but rather a step towards it - "limited period of service" plan.

Acceptability

The fact is that not every Baptist church will operate a deacon rotation plan. For instance, churches that are numerically small and those situated in a rapidly

⁸ Michael A. Ekiran, A Handbook on the Diaconate, Ordained to serve, Lagos: Moztaaz, 1997, pp.96-97; Foshee, The Ministry of the Deacon, 1968, p.99.

changing urban community (especially a university setting) may not find it beneficial to them.⁹

However, whenever a church wants to embark on deacon rotation plan, the whole idea must be accepted by all the members of the church. A simple minority is not enough for the adoption of this plan in any local church. Even a two-third majority is not enough. The interest of the pastor to adopt it is not adequate alone. If there are a significant number of members with a differing opinion(s), I suggest the plan should wait until the ones with the differing opinion(s) are convinced by the Holy Spirit.

Experiences have shown that it is better for a church to agree on an issue before it is embarked upon. Several of the problems in the churches of the Nigerian Baptist Convention have emanated largely from decisions made through the simple majority without considering the rights of the minority. The issue of deaconship is a volatile one, especially in "African societies" where position are sought with all eagerness, the church included.

On the part of those to be ordained, as deacons, they must be acceptable to the church. If selection and ordination is done in a poor way, it can result in unpalatable repercussions.

⁹Paulson, "Should all churches have deacon rotation?" 1994, pp.15-17.