

ROTATIONAL DEACONSHIP IN A LOCAL BAPTIST CHURCH:
A CASE STUDY OF GLAD TIDINGS BAPTIST CHURCH,
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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 Ogbomoso North-West Baptist Association, that is, The Glad Tidings Baptist Church, Ogbomoso. The Diaconate, the church pastor as well as twenty members of the church filled the structured interview conducted and at the same time responded positively to the oral 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 finally recommendations and suggestions were made for the adoption and practice of the system in all the churches of the Nigerian Baptist Convention who are yet to adopt the system.

denomination. The Convention must be able to see that the churches in our convention follow this recommendation for the purpose of the gospel that we claim 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 rightly established through the field study of the Glad Tidings Baptist Church, Ogbomoso which happens to be the only congregation with this system in the whole of Ogbomoso North-West Baptist Association. 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."⁴

B. Recommendations for Adoption and Practice

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.⁵ This is because since the birth of the Church until the present time, God has manifested His interest in the welfare of His Church, and this concerns how our Churches go about the process of selecting our leaders and determining the responsibilities and conditions of their service.⁶ Therefore, in beginning or maintaining the rotation system it is important to know the following based on what the researcher discovered from the field study:

⁴ George, p. 23.

⁵ Donald Paulson "Should All Churches Have Deacon Rotation?" *The Deacon* Vol. 24, No. 2, Jan-March 1994 p. 17.

⁶ Ibid.

Church Decision

Any Church contemplating adopting deacon rotation should make sure that it enjoy 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 members 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.

The Need for the System

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 underlying 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 the Church it should not be forced on them.

Adequate Education

The scripture informs us that “my people are destroyed for lack of knowledge”.⁷ 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. 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 reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness”.⁸

Seek God’s Guidance In Prayer

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

⁷ Hosea 4:6 (NIV).

⁸ II Timothy 3:16 (NIV).

that it can be a spiritually enriching undertaking.⁹ 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."¹⁰ A clear understanding of what is 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.

Recognition for the Retired Deacons

Retired deacons who have rotated off the active body can continue to minister as servants through other church responsibilities. 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.¹¹ Apart from emeritus, Henry Webb suggested other titles such as "life deacon" or deacon for life.¹² In Glad Tidings Baptist Church which the

⁹ Foshee, *The Ministry of the Deacon*, p. 100.

¹⁰ Ekiran, Michael A.A. *Handbook of the Diaconate: Ordained To Serve* (Lagos: Moztas Investment, 1997), p. 96.

¹¹ Webb, Henry, *Deacons: Servants Models in the Church* (Nashville, Tennessee Convention Press, 1980), p. 101

¹² *Ibid.*

