

**The Board of Deacons**  
**By**  
**His Grace Bishop Youssef**

Since nominations for the board of deacons take place in many churches in the month of September, I would like to address a few points relating to this subject.

**Concerning the Nominations:**

**First:** Serving on the board of deacons is not different from any other church service; it is a feet-washing service. I mean that serving on the board of deacons is mainly working on the comfort of each church member in humility and self-denial. In the first apostolic age, the Greek murmured against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations. The apostles arranged a deacon service to fulfill this need (Acts 6).

**Second:** Fighting over seats in the board of deacons is one type of self-glorification which contradicts Christ's teachings, "Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave-- just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many"(Mathew 20:26-28). Similarly, turning down service on the board of deacons requires self-examination lest the reason be self-pity for fear of exertion and tribulations, which are issues that one must confront in the service of God as Joshua son of Sirach says, "My son, if thou come to serve the Lord, prepare thy soul for temptation"(Sirach 2:1).

**Third:** Although the board of deacons' responsibility is administrative and financial, it must be performed in a spiritual way. That's why in the apostolic age, the apostles insisted that the chosen deacons be known for piety and filled with the Holy Spirit although the service was merely a table service (Acts 6:2). Therefore, those chosen for the service must be known for their deep spiritual life, away from the observance of ritual and the love of show, so that their service may be according to the heart of God.

**Fourth:** The congregation's responsibility in choosing is a serious one that must be done in a spiritual way by raising our hearts to God, asking the guidance of the Holy Spirit, avoiding social compliments, conglomeration, and partiality. Similarly, apathy is rejected because it opens the doors for opportunists and those who are self-serving to achieve their ends leading to problems and stumbling in the service.

**Fifth:** The board of deacons is chosen by nomination. The Bishop will choose the board from among those who received the highest number of votes in the nominations. We, therefore, are guaranteed that those chosen have received the approval of the people (because they received the majority of votes), and the blessing of the church (represented in the choice of the Bishop).

**Sixth:** The spiritual father puts the nominations in front of God in the prayers and liturgies seeking God's rather than his personal choice. He should teach the congregation this spirit by example. His love for his children should be without distinction. He shouldn't favor one person over another or refuse to nominate a particular individual except if there is a strong spiritual reason. As for personal issues and objectives, these have no place whatsoever in a priest's service and spiritual life.

**Seventh:** It is important to represent all sectors of the congregation in the board of deacons like church education, women, social service, youth, deacons, etc. The board should also include the elderly that we may benefit from their experience and the youth that we may benefit from their strength and activity.

**Eighth:** Neither those who quit the board, nor those who didn't receive a majority of votes, nor those who weren't chosen for the board, nor their supporters should assume a negative or a hostile attitude towards the church because the fields of church service are many and are by no means limited to serving on the deacons' board. Each individual has his/her talent. God may have willed to devote this individual to another service better suited to his/her talents and abilities.

**Ninth:** Any disturbance during the nominations is a clear indication of the lack of awareness and the absence of a spiritual sense which requires spiritual treatment and many tears, bent knees and hands continually raised in front of God that we may realize that our relationship with the church is primarily for the salvation of our souls and that all fields of church service is to deliver the message of salvation to the believers away from the love of first seats and leadership.

**Tenth:** Those who have been chosen for serving on the board should understand that the work is that of God; therefore, it must be accomplished with honesty and sacrifice without self-pity and without taunting others with how much time or effort are spent, but giving of themselves in love and humility up till the end, noting that we are primarily responsible towards God not man. If we are honest, we will be blessed according to His promise, "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'" (Mt 25:21). As for those who are dishonest, they will be terrified according to His divine words, "A curse on him who is lax in doing the Lord's work!" (Jeremiah 48:10).

To be continued...

## **The Relationship of the Board of Deacons with Each Other and with the Members of the Congregation**

**First:** Many times it is easier for us to work alone rather than in a group. This is because of an ego that is not humble. We must realize that one string can't produce a beautiful symphony but if all strings play in harmony they can produce a wonderful hymn, a hymn of love as we say in the morning praises, "Those whom the Holy Spirit has attuned together as a stringed instrument blessing God united in the true evangelic love like the apostles." Therefore true love must reign over the members of the board so that they may cooperate with each other in the service of the church. This love is manifested in mutual respect and in keeping away from the hateful spirit of conglomerating inside the board.

**Second:** Many problems happen because of belittling the opposing opinion and not giving it due importance. That's why respecting the other opinion-whatever it may be- is important and necessary in dealing inside the board. Also humility and stirring away from the love of praise and honor and the love of the bigger share and the first seat are necessary in the service, always remembering the words of St. Paul, "in honor preferring one another" (Romans 12:10).

**Third:** Service on the board of deacons is commitment towards God. It mustn't be affected by personal grudges or problems if any. Some are quick to resign from the service after any disagreement even if it is in opinion, which is against one's responsibility towards God. Therefore, there must be a positive attitude towards solving problems and differences through prayers, communication, and constructive discussions. As for requesting to be relieved from the service, it requires self-examination lest the reason be self-pity and refusing to endure trouble for the sake of the service.

**Fourth:** Personal issues shouldn't affect the service of the board or agreement on decisions. Many times, rejecting a particular opinion stems from disliking the holder of this opinion which disagrees with the spirit of honesty that the members of the board

should have. Similarly disagreeing on an opinion shouldn't affect my relationship with that person. Many times the results of voting on a particular decision are taken in a personal way which affects the relationship of the members with each other.

**Fifth:** Many times the burden of the execution of decisions falls on the shoulders of one or two members while the rest limit themselves to giving instructions and suggestions which is in disagreement with the spirit of giving, service and sacrifice which should be in each member.

**Sixth:** Board decisions are based on the majority of votes therefore no one should get upset or take a certain position or act negatively if most members are against his/her personal opinion. If the board takes a certain decision, all members must work on its execution even those who were in disagreement. It is also inappropriate for those who are in disagreement to speak negatively of the decision in front of the congregation because such behavior contradicts the spirit of love and commitment to the majority's decision. On the contrary, he/she must support the decision and defend it.

**Seventh:** Members of the board represent the congregation; therefore, the opinion of the majority of the congregation must be taken into consideration and not personal desires. That's why knowing the opinion of the people on some issues is necessary.

**Eighth:** None of the members of the board should independently take hold of the church affairs- This happens sometimes when the church doesn't have a permanent priest- No one should enforce his/her personal opinion on the group. This is in disagreement with the spirit of sharing and group work that must be in each member of the board.

**Ninth:** There is no reason whatsoever not to show the congregation the board's decisions as well as the budget. However, it is better to keep the discussions and the details of the discussions that preceded the decisions, like who agreed and who disagreed a secret. These details are of no use and may negatively affect the unity of the church. The congregation should not feel that there is division or conglomeration in the board. That's

why we must care not to speak about anyone in a way that condemns him/her whether directly or indirectly but we should cover the weaknesses of others, knowing that in many things we all trip.

**Tenth:** The congregation's confidence in the board members as well as supporting them is very important and can push the service forward. Therefore, we must not always blame them for every oversight but encourage them and cooperate with them. It is also inappropriate for the congregation to put many responsibilities on the shoulders of the board without shouldering any themselves or to ask them to do what is not within the scope of their service which are administrative and financial, or within their powers like asking them to interfere in spiritual matters or with their priest. It is better that the congregation speaks directly to their father the priest.

To be continued.

## **The Relationship between the Board of Deacons and the Church Priest**

**First:** The relationship between the priest and the board must be a relation of spiritual love where the members of the board feel the spiritual fatherhood of their priest while dealing with him in the true spirit of sonship. Priest and members should have their eyes set on the success of the service and its growth to the glory of our God Jesus away from personal objectives and self-glorification. I say this so that the relationship between them is neither reduced to an administrative one where the members feel that they are dealing with a president of board of directors rather than a father priest nor does the priest feel that he is dealing with a group of employees rather than his spiritual children.

**Second:** The fatherhood of the priest becomes apparent in his spiritual guidance to the work of the board so that the service doesn't swerve from its spiritual direction. It is also manifested in a big heart capable of withstanding the weaknesses of his children while seeking to correct them by education and guidance as the Discalnia says, "removing guilt with education." If he had to warn let that be in tears as Paul the apostle did (Acts 20:31) and if he had to discipline let that be in humbleness (2 Timothy 2:25) and if he had to rebuke let that be in patience (2 Timothy 4:2).

**Third:** The members show that they are the priest's sons and daughters by their submission and obedience to him and their cooperation with him in building the church. Even when they disagree with him in opinion, they do so in love and objectivity that they may safeguard the reverence and respect due to the holy mystery of priesthood.

**Fourth:** Different opinions inside the board are perfectly acceptable as long as this diversity doesn't violate the spiritual framework of the Orthodox Church. The reason behind having more than one member on the board is to benefit from their diverse experiences for the good of the church and to serve its interests. I say this because some think that diversity in opinion is a form of rebellion especially if there is disagreement with the father priest. That's why I say that there is nothing wrong with the priest taking

the opinion of the board and actually making the final decision based upon the board's suggestions as long as it is in the interest of the church and within the general spiritual framework (This can be applied to many administrative and organizational issues especially if there are experts in these fields).

**Fifth:** The father priest must always confirm the spiritual framework, and he has the right to stop any decision that may have adverse spiritual effects or that violates the Orthodox Christian teachings but this must be done in a spirit of love, advice and guidance.

**Sixth:** The job of the board of deacons is to help the priest not to take account with him. I say this because some think that their service on the board gives them the right to question, investigate and judge the priest in violation of the biblical teachings which gives this right only to the Pope or the Bishop (1 Ti 5: 19-21). But if there were some clarifications or explanations concerning administrative or financial issues (which fall within the duties of the board), these have to be made in the spirit of sonship and in humility.

**Seventh:** The board of deacons is also responsible for facilitating the work of the father priest rather than obstructing it. I say this because the service comes to a halt due to routine issues or because the execution of the decisions of the board and their follow up falls on the shoulders of the father priest as if the duty of the board is to suggest and decide only, but the execution is the father priest's duty.

**Eighth:** It is extremely inappropriate for the board to take a decision without the knowledge of the father priest. It is equally inappropriate if the priest handles financial or administrative matters (the responsibilities of the board) without the knowledge of the board. This will not happen of course if Christian love and a spirit of truth and clarity exist.

**Ninth:** Questioning the father priest on spiritual issues is not at all a part of the duties of the board but it is the right of the Pope or the Bishop. Sometimes the board asks the



father priest for a report on visitation, Sunday school services, pastoral services, etc which is inappropriate. However, if there is a comment on the service- for example, a certain family needs visitation or spiritual follow up- one can inform the father priest away from the board meetings in humility and in a spirit of sonship, being his spiritual son/daughter and regardless of board membership. This spiritual approach will not bother the father priest because he knows well that God allows his sons (who are his creation and his slaves) to speak to Him in service issues as Abraham interceded on behalf of Sodom & Gomorrah and as Moses interceded on behalf of his people the Israelites.

**Tenth:** What happens inside the board of discussions or disagreements of opinion shouldn't affect the spiritual relationship between the father priest and the members of the board. These differences shouldn't turn into attacks in the board meetings or outside them against the priest or vice versa. Should this happen, it evidences lack of true love that is not angry, but bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things and endures all things (1Co 13:5,7). If there is no love then there is no God because God is love.