

## The Officers Of The Church And Their Functions

A lectureship presentation by Asaolu, O. S. ([asaolu@yahoo.com](mailto:asaolu@yahoo.com))

**Organizers: Brethren Interactive Forum    Venue: Church of Christ, Ikeja    Date: November 20, 2010**

### Preamble

Let us take a quiz. *Which institution has God created...*

1. As the body of true worshippers who worship in the spirit by Christ Jesus?\_ John 4:24; Phil 3:1-3; Eph 3:21
2. As the pillar and ground of the truth to declare His manifold wisdom?\_ 1 Tim 3:15; Eph 3:10; 1 Thess 1:7-8
3. As the forum of members and supplier of officers for His work?\_ Roman 12:4-13; 1 Cor 12:27-31; Heb 10:25

Unfortunately, when we think the **church** is not what it ought to be and feel that we can do better than the pattern in the scriptures, we create our own religious bodies, formulate our own plans and appoint our own officers, effectively sabotaging or diminishing the church of God! In the religious world, rarely do people come out bare-faced to start a denominational church. Rather, they would initially claim to establish 'an interdenominational ministry' and later metamorphose into a church once they attain a critical mass or number.

We are witnessing the emergence of modern "sects" from the Lord's church; such as Preachers Forum, Elders Forum, Brethren Interactive Forum, etc. *Why do these bodies competitively think that they are the ones to provide coordination or fellowship at unified level for the churches?* God ordained self-governing local churches with individual officers. An 'association of churches' must have its own rules and officers... We can and should cooperate without forming unscriptural bodies. If the desire is to disseminate information; e-mail/website, SMS, letters, magazines, books, etc. suffice. If the motivation is direct interaction; congregational programs and invitations suffice. Could it be that some desire to organize-and-guide the brotherhood hence the formation of these superstructure forums "**over and across**" the local congregations? The Lord's church at Ikeja could have organized today's lectureship without it being "**under the auspices**" of the Brethren Interactive Forum. I hope other segments of the church will not be misled into assuming that they too may create regional bodies with appointed officers, purse, secretariat, letter heading, etc. organizing their own programs according to their own policies. Every unscriptural religious body stimulates the establishment of a rival one. You cannot be neutral and should be prepared to either welcome or challenge new ones such as Lagos Youth Forum, Ushers Forum, Sisters Forum, Secretaries Forum, Deacons Forum, etc. and various levels e.g. National Elders Forum, African Overseers Forum and World Bishops Forum. Every forum will seek to protect members' interest and regulate their activities. Each will first seek acceptance, then relevance and eventually dominance; by trying to monitor, outclass and direct the affairs of churches of Christ. As George Santayana wrote; "*Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.*" To avert apostasy, let forums self-dissolve.

### **Definitions:**

Of-fi-cer [dictionary.com]: -a person who holds a position of rank or authority in the army, navy, air force, or any similar organization, esp. one who holds a commission

-a person appointed or elected to some position of responsibility or authority in the government, a corporation, a society, etc.

**An officer** is both authorized and recognized to discharge the duties/responsibilities of an office. Heb 5:4-6 [E.g. purported Speaker of Ogun Assembly and the Governor's chairmanship of NGF had legitimacy problems.]

Authorized & recognized implies valid proclamation by competent authority or acknowledgement based on meeting of specified qualifying criteria. An officer is normally appointed to hold office for some term, with job specifications.

**The church** is the called out people of Christ; those called by the gospel from the darkness (sin) into His kingdom of light who acknowledge Jesus as the sovereign Lord and Savior -Mt 16:18; 1 Pet 2:5,9; Col 1:13-14.

Func-tion [dictionary.com]: -the kind of action or activity proper to a person, thing, or institution; the purpose for which something is designed or exists; role.

**Function** refers to duties; implicit and explicit, responsibilities, scope of authority and activities.

### Introduction

The Church though universal in time and space (Heb.12:28) is physically seen on earth or manifested in local congregations (Acts 9:26, Rm.16:16). Like any group, it must be led by a few, not by all. Hence God has created various offices in the church to make for a smooth administration; namely **the Head, the Apostles, the Prophets, the Evangelists, the Teachers, the Bishops (governments), and the Deacons (helps)**. We have adequate information and instructions in the scriptures about church officers and every other topic relating to godliness, we are totally equipped on how to walk and to please God in everything -2 Tim 3:16-17; 1 Thess 4:1.

**1 Corinthians 12:27-28** Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.

**Eph 4:7-12** But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith, when he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men... And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.

**Romans 12:4** For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office.

**1 Thessalonians 5:12-13** And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves.

The passages clearly show that **church officers:**

1. evolved in a certain order, and are part of a divinely ordained hierarchy.
2. are drawn from members in the one body who have graciously been individual endowed.
3. exist in various cadres but have a common purpose –ministration (evangelism & benevolence) and edification (building-up God's people unto perfection in Christ).
4. labour among us, the brethren or saints.
5. caution or rebuke us in the course of their work.
6. are over other members in the Lord.
7. deserve recognition and appreciation.

The true 'church leaders' are those scripturally serving in an official capacity. They give guidance and care to others as God's entrusted stewards. Church officers are comparable to the more noticeable or prominent human body parts such as the eyes, ears, nose, mouth, arms and legs which do not obviate or render inessential the eyebrow, fingernail, throat, lungs, heart, spine, stomach, buttocks or anus. Officers are designated members in the fore-front and need the cooperation of others led for Christ. "*From whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love*" -Eph 4:16 (ASV). We all need one another in the Lord's body -1 Cor 12:14-22. You're either trying to be a different part, which makes us deformed; not doing anything at all, leading to partial paralysis, or working together with all the other parts, which makes us healthy. Let us therefore acknowledge true officers. The following are not scriptural officers: Pope, Primate, General Overseer, Archbishop, Senior Pastor, Leaders Committee, Leaders Wives, Acting Preacher, WBS Evangelist, Forum Coordinator, Board of Trustees, CAN President, etc. **For any office, we should ask... (see the Appendix)**

1. Is this church work or office rooted (mentioned/implied) in the Bible?
2. What is the biblical job description or duties expected of the office holder?
3. Is such a person an officer of the universal church or an officer of a local church?
4. Are there deducible qualifications for the post?
5. Are there vacancies today for the position? If Yes, Is any form of training required for the position? If Yes, who is supposed to train the prospective officer and where?
6. Are there instructions and/or examples on appointment/acquirement of such officer in the early churches?
7. Are there rewards associated with the office?

### **On the Evolution of Local Congregations and Church Officers**

Aside expedient separation or unfortunate division, a congregation starts from evangelistic outreach or a coming together of sojourning Christians. When one or more Christians preach and baptize new believers into Christ in a new land, they constitute a new assembly who worship in spirit and in truth, e.g. Acts 8:5,12; 19:1-ff. The individual who preached to convert others, if a male AND if he is always seeking opportunity to do such, is doing the work of an Evangelist and may be recognized thus. Such a person is the main teacher who is setting things in order –Acts 8:5-12 & Acts 19:1-10. If feasible, such should alert others who may be able to come and assist –Acts 8:14,25. In Acts 11:19-26, we see that Christians fleeing from Jerusalem persecution preached to and baptized converts in Antioch. When the Jerusalem church got the information, Barnabas was sent, who after some time brought in Paul from Tarsus as an additional teacher. By Acts 13:1 & 15:35 many others were teaching there also, with Elders already ordained in Acts 14:23. Alternatively, sojourning Christians could identify people of like precious faith in a locality and come together to constitute the Lord's church in such community, e.g. transferred workers, traveling traders, Youth Corpers, etc. see Acts 21:4. Men who tutor such group may be recognized as Teachers and aspire to other vacant positions. Women are prohibited from leading the church in teaching or prayer (1 Tim 2:8-12), and are precluded by both examples and commanded criteria as

church office holders. That Paul mentioned desirable attributes for a Deacon's wife (1 Tim 3:11) does not officially make her a Deaconess just as the attributes for a Bishop's child (Tit 1:6) does not imply we should ordain child-elders. A brother may occupy several offices simultaneously if he so qualifies and is duly appointed. For example, Paul was a Prophet, Teacher, Preacher and Apostle (Acts 13:1, 1 Tim 2:7) while Peter was an Apostle, Elder, Preacher and Prophet (1 Pet 1:1; 5:1, Lk 1:2, Eph 3:5). While a Teacher at Ephesus, Timothy was encouraged to also continue his work of an Evangelist by preaching the word -2 Tim 4:2-5. That we all teach or preach to others do not make everyone a Teacher or a Preacher, some are more gifted and trained. Being an officer in God's house is no joke so only the spiritual that have honest reputation, wisdom and dedication should volunteer and be considered -Acts 6:3. Only those found doing a work well should be formally appointed or given official recognition when they meet up with all the biblical criteria -1 Tim 3:5,10.

- **Preachers** essentially preach and spread the good news or gospel of Christ to the lost -Rm 10:14-15.
- **Teachers** instruct the saint on doctrine gradually; that is the totality of the truth including both fundamentals and mature or deep things of Christ -Heb 5:12 - 6:3.
- **Elders** rule [in matters of opinion] and direct church affairs based on their experience and knowledge of the word of God -1 Tim 3:1-7; 5:17, Heb 13:17. This involves prayerful counseling, decision-making and supervision, to ensure that the saints are doers and not mere hearers of the word.
- **Deacons** serve in the church in whatever duties assigned to assist the Elders. They are spiritual men who help the church to fulfill secular functions such as delivering messages, maintaining property, serving tables, keeping records (secretary) or money (treasurer), etc. -1 Tim 3:8-13. Their precursor is found in Acts 6:1-7.

**For example**, when Evangelists preach and baptize people, the Teachers will later explain fully the one body into which they were baptized. The Elders decide whether baptisms should be held at a particular natural body of water or a constructed baptistery and visit the newly baptized to encourage such while the Deacons will arrange the transportation to the river or the construction and maintenance of the church baptistery. ***From the beginning, Christ never intended His Church to be run as a one-man show (1 Cor 14:26-31) hence He gave gifts to men, and endowed some (a plurality) to occupy each office in the church*** -Eph 4:11. A Preacher need not be a lone ranger as others could exist to assist or be sent out -Col 1:7; 4:7-12,17. With time a congregation should ordain a plurality of Elders and Deacons -Acts 14:23, Phil 1:1. If a sole Minister exists indefinitely without efforts to fill church offices then such a person is apparently *Diotrephesic* for not obeying 2 Tim 2:2. While Matthew and Peter foretold of false prophets among the populace, Paul warns about Christians developing itching ears and heaping teachers upon themselves. Consequently, the way some congregations now recruit a preacher of their taste as a hireling 'shepherd' should give us cause for concern. The prevalent lack of elderships is also worrisome. We must study, pray and work individually and congregationally to change the situation as God would have it.

\*# Emphasize the functions of Evangelists, Teachers, Elders and Deacons as enumerated in the APPENDIX \*#

## Conclusions

1. We are all members of one body, the universal church built upon Christ, the apostles and the prophets.
2. Each local church is to have her own officers who function as servant-leaders.
3. Evangelists and Teachers should be raised in every church in order to fulfill the great commission.
4. Elders and Deacons should be raised in every church. These men have local jurisdiction and their functions are limited to the congregation within which they are appointed.
5. In a scripturally organized church, Elders care for and rule the flock, a Preacher inclusive! -1 Tim 3:5
6. Nevertheless, a Preacher should keep an eye on the Elders and have them in check -1 Tim 5:17-22.
7. Elders and Preachers are co-labourers in the Lord's vineyard, doing different aspects of the assigned work. There should be no rivalry and vain-glory as to who is greater -Mt 18:1-5 & Mk 9:33-35. All officers and members should communicate, collaborate and forbear one another in love -Col 3:12-15.

***We started with a quiz; let us end with another...***

1. For how many years has your congregation existed? \_
2. How many Teachers have been trained in your congregation? \_
3. How many Evangelists have been raised in-house, sent out and supported by your congregation? \_
4. Do some Teachers temporarily relocate from your assembly to help nurture a young congregation? \_
5. How many prospective Elders and Deacons have been identified and ordained in your congregation? \_
6. How long did it take (or is it likely to take) before you groom and appoint men into **all** these offices? \_
7. Could our lackluster effort in the above areas be a major factor for the limited success of the Church? \_

## APPENDIX

### The Head

1. Christ is the Head of the Church, the Ruler of God's kingdom –Eph 1:22-23, Col 1:12-18. He is equally known as Governor (Mt 2:6), Counselor (Isa 9:6), High Priest (Heb 8:1), Chief Shepherd (1 Pet 5:4), etc. His position is evident in the scriptures, foretold and fulfilled.
2. His duty includes establishment of the church, to give its law, reign over it, nourish and preserve it, and present it unto the Father at the end of this age –Dan 2:44-45, Isa 61:1-4, Heb 10:5-16, 1 Cor 15:24-28
3. Christ headship role is universal –Mt 28:18-20, Heb 12:22-23
4. Jesus of Nazareth qualified and was approved of God for the Messiahship by the prophecies he fulfilled (Mt 1:18-23), by the miracles he performed (Jn 12:24-38, Acts 2:22) by his resurrection (Rm 1:4), etc.
5. There is no vacancy for this position today because Christ rose to die no more –Acts 2:31-36, Heb 7:22-25, Eph 3:21.
6. The early church(es) accepted the authority and lordship of Christ through the apostles doctrine and obedience to the Holy Spirit –Lk 10:16, 1 Jn 4:6, 1 Thess 2:13-14. By giving heed to the gospel, people submitted to the rulership of Jesus. He demonstrated this in Rev 1-3.
7. Yes. While on earth, Christ was ministered unto materially by some wealthy believers (Luke 8:1-3, Mark 15:40-41, Matthew 27:57-60). He was worshipped also (Mt 14:33), more so today, after His glorification for that is the Father's pleasure –Heb 1:6, Phil 2:9-11.

### The Apostles

1. The office is biblical –Mt 10:2-4, Rm 11:13.
2. To receive the divine revelation of all truth, proclaim and commit same unto the church -Jn 14:26, 1 Cor 4:1, 2 Pet 3:2. They were master-builders of the church at the foundational stage – Mt 18:18. They laid hands on Christians to impart spiritual gifts –Acts 8:18
3. They are universal officers appointed by Christ himself –Eph 2:20 - 3:5. Their work cuts across multiple congregations –Gal 2:8
4. Apostles were messengers chosen by Jesus to testify of his life and resurrection. They were 'sent' as eyewitnesses of the risen Christ –Acts 1:1-8, 21-24; 26:14-18, 1 Cor 9:1, Gal 1:11-12 and were to wrought the 'signs of an apostle' –Rm 15:19, 2 Cor 12:12
5. The apostles reign with Christ –Mt 19:28, Lk 22:28-30. There are no vacancies today since the early apostles are still in office through their inspired writings. We can not have new apostles.
6. Christ appointed such directly (Mt 8, Acts 1) or by the Spirit verbally (Acts 13:2-4 & 14:14) and the church acknowledged them once proved –Acts 9:1-2, Rev 2:2. Churches do not appoint their own apostles.
7. Yes. The labourer is worthy of his hire is a phrase associated with ALL ministers who labour in word persistently -1 Cor 9:6-14, Lk 10:7, 1 Thess 5:13

### The Prophets

1. The office is biblical – Acts 13:1, Eph 3:5
2. These are God's spokesmen (Jer 1:9, Num 12:6, Heb 1:1-2) who deliver his message unto all. They speak to exhortation (1 Cor 14:3, Acts 15:32) and at times, fore-tell –Amos 3:7. Generally, they testify of Christ and point to his saving power –Acts 10:43, Rev 19:10
3. The office is universal since divine truth proclaimed is for all –Eph 2:20 – 3:5, 2 Pet 1:19-21
4. The post in the NT is for those inspired by God after equipping such with the spiritual gift of prophecy -1 Cor 12:10, 2 Pet 1:20-21.
5. No vacancies exist today for prophecies have ceased in accordance with 1 Cor 13:8. However, the prophets of the NT still minister through their writings.
6. Churches do not appoint their own prophets, rather those with the gift were recognized –Acts 13:1 & 15:32
7. Yes, Mt 10:41, Lk 10:7, 1 Thess 5:13

## The Evangelists

1. The office is biblical –2 Tim 4:16. Also called Minister or Preacher or Man of God
2. The **duties** expected of an evangelist are to:
  - a) Preach the word at all times –Rm 10:15; 2 Tim 4:2
  - b) take heed to himself and the doctrine -1 Tim 4:16
  - c) Be an example to believers in speech and conduct -1 Tim 4:14
  - d) Exhort, correct and rebuke people with patience and sound teaching - 2 Tim 4:2
  - e) Be watchful in everything, endure sufferings and discharge fully his commission –vs 5
  - f) Set in order the things that are wanting and ordain elders in a congregation –Titus 1:5  
Wanting things may include sound doctrine, faithful teachers, widows welfare, corrective discipline, prayer life, etc.
3. An evangelist is a local officer whose office is ‘transferable’ in that he may be recognized in that capacity whenever he relocates -Acts 8:40 & 21:8; Titus 1:5. Since churches are autonomous, an Evangelist is not a universal officer with jurisdiction over **all** churches.
4. Yes. A Preacher must be
  - a) sent or acknowledged by others and not self-proclaimed –Rm 10:15a, 2 Cor 8:23; 1 Thess 3:2
  - b) a harbinger of glad tidings of good things, the gospel of peace –Rm 10:15b
  - c) a bible student who rightly divides the word of truth -2 Tim 2:15. This implies literacy and ability to communicate with target audience is intrinsic, the Lord however has not specified a minimum or maximum level of secular education and neither should we!
  - d) apt to teach -2 Tim 2:24
  - e) gentle to all, patient, meek and not quarrelsome –2 Tim 2:25
  - f) a pursuer of righteousness, godliness, and love -1 Tim 6:11
  - g) one who fights the good fight of faith or advances and defends of the truth -vs 12
5. Yes, vacancies exist for Preachers because there are lost sinners yet to be reached –Rm 10:14. Prospective preachers should be trained in the church by other officers, especially Evangelists – Acts 13:1; 1 Tim 3:2; 5:10 & 2 Tim 2:2 and be practically mentored by one –Acts 16:1-3
6. Yes, a Preacher may
  - a) stay for as long as deemed necessary in the congregation he establishes e.g. Philip, Paul
  - b) be raised in-house by a congregation e.g. Stephen (Acts 2:42a & 2 Tim 2:2)
  - c) be temporarily assigned by his trainer or congregation to a church in order to accomplish some specific tasks, e.g. Timothy, Barnabas.
  - d) voluntarily visit or be invited to work with a receptive congregation e.g. Apollos, Paul
7. Yes, Dan 12:3, Lk 10:7, 1 Thess 5:13

## The Teachers

1. The office is biblical –Acts 13:1, Jn 6:45
2. Teachers are those who instruct saints in detailed manner on already revealed truth, originally communicated by the inspired apostles and prophets. These are Christians who educate fellow believers in sound doctrine –Rm 2:20, 2 Tim 4:3. By default, preachers and elders are expected to also serve as teachers.
3. The office is local. Since congregations are autonomous, a Teacher is not a universal officer with jurisdiction over **all** churches. That one functions as a Teacher in congregation A does not necessarily mean he is matured enough to handle congregation B. A brother should be proved as to his doctrine before being accepted as one of the official Teachers in a congregation else false Teachers will easily enter in and destabilize churches –Acts 15, 2 Pet 2:1
4. The qualifications are that one be mature in faith (relatively compared to the students) and be sober, not puffed up, due to the enormous responsibility –Heb 5:12-14, Jms 3:1 & Lk 12:47
5. There are vacancies today for people need to be taught both the fundamentals and the deep things of Christ –Heb 6:1-3, Mt 28:20. Teachers should be trained in the church by other officers, especially Evangelists & Teachers - Acts 13:1 & 11:26; 1 Tim 3:2; 5:10 & 2 Tim 2:2.

6. Teachers & Preachers are sent to assist a newly established congregation by the home base of those who evangelize –Acts 11:19-23. Apostles & Prophets were sent too in those days –Acts 8:14; 15:32-34
7. Yes, 1 Thess 5:13

### **The Bishops**

1. The office is biblical -1 Tim 3:1. Also called Elder, Pastor, Shepherd, Presbyter and Overseer.
2. The **duties** include:
  - a) being an example to the brethren in character –vs 2,3,7, 1 Pet 5:3
  - b) watching over and caring for the welfare of the flock –vs2, Acts 20:28, 1 Pet 5:2, Heb 13:17
  - c) being able to teach sound doctrine and refute gainsayers –vs 2, Tit 1:9
  - d) being able to rule well in matters of human judgment –vs 3-4
  - e) being a considerate not an obstinate leader –Tit 1:7
  - f) being hospitable to all –vs 2, Tit 1:8
  - g) being a good steward not obsessed with pecuniary gains –vs 2, Tit 1:7, 1 Pet 5:2,
  - h) counseling and prayer –Jms 5:14, Tit 1:8-9
3. A Bishop is a local officer whose jurisdiction is limited to his immediate congregation where he was appointed. A church must know and study a man and his family over some reasonable time before he can be said to have qualified for this position. Besides, one can not oversee what he does NOT see. Elders are to be ordained in EACH and every church –Acts 14:23, Tit 1:5 and these Shepherds are not charged with the oversight of a distant flock to which they are strangers, technically -1 Pet 5:1-2. They take heed to themselves and the flock among them.
4. This position must be very dear to God for it is the most detailed with respect to qualifications – Tit 1:5-9, 1 Tim 3:1-8.
5. Yes, there are vacancies today to be filled for congregations must be governed as divinely specified. Prospective elders should be trained in the church by other officers, especially Evangelists - Acts 13:1; 1 Tim 3:2; 5:10 & 2 Tim 2:2. That was the way Paul, Barnabas, Apollos, Timothy, Titus, etc. taught the early churches –Acts 14:20-23, 1 Tim 1:3, Tit 1:5. Disciples are to be taught in the church -1 Tim 3:15 whatever cadre whether men, women, youths, etc.
6. There are examples of such appointments in Acts 14, 1 Tim 3, etc.
7. Yes. Elders who are devoted to preaching and teaching should be remunerated -1 Tim 5:17-18, Lk 10:7, 1 Thess 5:13

### **The Deacons**

1. The office is biblical –1 Tim 3:10
2. The job of Deacons in the church is inferred from the meaning of the root word which means ‘Servant’ and from the fact it is always written with lesser attributes after Bishop. We note that
  - a) they must be able to live and present the gospel -1 Tim 3:9
  - b) they will be involved in some management and decision issues for the church -vs 12. We conclude that this would be in temporal matters for Bishops are the ones entrusted with leadership and feeding the flock with spiritual food. The Deacons therefore see to the details of incidentals as the chosen seven assisted the Apostles in Acts 6.
3. Deacons are local officers whose functions are limited to the congregation where they were ordained -1 Tim 3:10
4. Yes, the qualifications are spelt out in 1 Tim 3:8-12 –serious and sober fellow, non-hypocritical, non-carousal, non-divorcee monogamist with a faithful Christian wife, etc.
5. Deacons should be trained in the church by other officers, especially Evangelists - Acts 13:1; 1 Tim 3:2; 5:10 & 2 Tim 2:2
6. Yes, we have instructions in 1 Tim 3, an instance in Phil 1:1 and a pattern in Acts 6:1-7
7. Yes, 1 Tim 3:13, 1 Thess 5:13

---

**Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord -1 Corinthians 15:58.**