

A Church Judicial Analysis of the Office of the Deacon In the Reformed Church in Zimbabwe

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DECLARATION

By submitting this thesis electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the authorship owner thereof (unless to the extent explicitly otherwise stated) and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

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ABSTRACT

This research study analyses the office of the deacon in the Reformed Church in Zimbabwe (RCZ). This is done by taking the Scriptural and Reformed church polity understanding of the office of a deacon into account.

Chapter 1 deals with the research background of the study. This chapter serves as the general introduction to the main thrust and objectives of the research. The main aim of this study is to analyze the function of the office of the deacon in the RCZ in the light of Scriptural and Reformed church polity understanding of the office of a deacon.

Chapter 2 deals with the office of deacon in the RCZ. Firstly, this chapter describes the social, economic, cultural and political setting of Zimbabwe. Secondly, it attends to the historical background of the RCZ and lastly, attention is given to the development of the offices in the church, predominantly the office of the deacon.

Chapter 3 deals with the Scriptural basis for the office of the deacon.

Chapter 4 provides a church judicial reflection of the office of deacon. Different views of Church polity experts will be dealt with. Attention will be given to articles regarding the office of the deacon in the church orders of the Reformed Churches in America, Christian Reformed Church in Canada, Protestant Church in the Netherlands, the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America and the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa.

Chapter 5 deals with the recommendations proposed to the RCZ regarding the office of the deacon in order to ensure that the RCZ will adhere to a Scriptural and Reformed church polity understanding of the office of the deacon.

OPSOMMING

Hierdie navorsingsstudie analiseer die amp van die diaken in die Gereformeerde Kerk in Zimbabwe (GKZ). Dit word aangepak deur die Skriftelike en Gereformeerde kerkregtelike verstaan van die amp van diaken in ag te neem.

Hoofstuk 1 hanteer die agtergrond van die navorsingsstudie. Die hoofstuk dien as 'n algemene inleiding met betrekking tot die hoofokus van die navorsing. Die hoofdoel van hierdie navorsing is om om die amp van die diaken in die lig van die Skrif en Gereformeerde kerkregtelike beginsels te analiseer.

Hoofstuk 2 fokus op die amp van die diaken in die GKZ. In die eerste plek beskryf die hoofstuk die sosiale, ekonomiese, kulturele en politieke konteks van Zimbabwe. Tweedens, word aandag geskenk aan die historiese agtergrond van die GKZ. Laastens word daar ook aandag gegee aan die ontwikkeling van die ampte in die GKZ, met spesiale fokus op die amp van die diaken.

Hoofstuk 3 konsentreer op die Skriftelike basis vir die amp van diaken.

In Hoofstuk 4 word 'n kerkregtelike analise gegee van die amp van diaken. Die verskillende standpunte van kerkregkundiges sal in hierdie hoofstuk onder bespreking gebring word. Aandag word in die hoofstuk verleen aan artikels wat betrekking het op die amp van die diaken in die kerkordes van die Gereformeerde Kerk in Amerika, Christelike Gereformeerde Kerk in Kanada, Protestantse Kerk in die Nederland, Presbiteriaanse Kerk van die Verenigde State van Amerika en die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk in Suid-Afrika.

In Hoofstuk 5 word beskrywingspunte voorgestel, gebaseer op die Skriftelike basis en Gereformeerde kerkregtelike beginsels, om die Kerkorde van die GKZ te wysig.

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DEDICATION

To both my beloved late parents, Elia Malajiko and Rosemary Chauke Baloyi, I dedicate this work.

ABBREVIATIONS

Cor - Corinthians

DRCM - Dutch Reformed Church Mission

Eph - Ephesians

Ex - Exodus

Lev - Leviticus

Matt - Matthew

MTh - Master of Theology

Num - Numbers

RCZ - Reformed Church in Zimbabwe

Rom - Romans

SA - South Africa

Tim - Timothy

UK - United Kingdom

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

1.1 Introduction

The main thrust of this study is *a church judicial analysis of the office of deacon in the Reformed Church in Zimbabwe*. The Reformed Church in Zimbabwe (RCZ) has existed more than 123 years. The Church was constituted by the Dutch Reformed missionaries. The RCZ has followed the Reformed church governance system. One of the Reformed church polity principles is that Christ is the head of the church. The local congregation is, in itself, a complete manifestation of the body of Christ. Within this local congregation is the office of believers, as well as the special offices of ministers, elders, and deacons (Vorster 1999:32-45). These offices are called by Christ to govern His Church. These offices stand in unique relation to the office of believers.

1.2 Research Focus

The ecclesiastical offices of the RCZ include the office of the minister of the Word, elders and deacons. The three offices work together in the Church Council. According to Vorster (1999:32; 43; 45), the minister of the Word is responsible for discharging the preaching ministry, as well as for overseeing the well-being of the entire congregation. The ministers of the Word and the elder's tasks include supervision of church affairs, home visitation and evangelism. The deacons are primarily responsible for internal fund raising, carrying out the works of charity such as caring for the poor, visiting and comforting the destitute. The deacons are responsible to collect the alms and other contributions of charity *inter alia* caring for the poor, visiting and comforting the destitute, as well as to faithfully and diligently distribute the resources to the poor as their needs may require it and to exercise care that the alms are not misused (Hanko 1963:50). In most of the RCZ congregations the deacons are seemingly unaware of their duties or are neglecting it. The RCZ is experiencing challenges because the deacons are not appropriately attending to their task. The researcher is of the opinion that a better understanding of the duties of the deacon will help to amend the Church

Order of the RCZ appropriately and will enhance the functioning of the deacons so that they will execute their task in accordance with Scriptural and Reformed church polity principles.

In view of the above background this study, A *Church Judicial analysis of the office of Deacon in Reformed Church in Zimbabwe* shall focus on the qualifications, tasks, and responsibilities of the deacons in the RCZ congregations. A brief historical background of the Reformed Church will be discussed to shed more light on how the RCZ started and developed since its inception in the North of the Limpopo, hereafter referred to as the country of Zimbabwe. Furthermore, this research will analyze the office of the deacon in the RCZ in order to see if the current RCZ Church Order regulations with regard to the tasks of the deacons are based on Scriptural and/or Reformed Church Polity principles. This will help to determine the need for changes in the church order regulations.

1.3 Problem Statement

In RCZ congregations the office of the deacons seems to be the driving force of the congregation when it comes to issues concerning financial matters. They are in charge of the congregation resources. They are in a position to drive the congregation, to motivate the congregants to donate for the welfare of the ministers, church projects and support those in need. If the deacons neglect or do not properly understand their duties, it may have a devastating effect on the growth of the church. At present, the deacons of the RCZ are executing their tasks without sound Scriptural or Reformed church polity foundation. The RCZ 2010 *Rules and Regulations (RCZ Bhuku Yomurairo)*, clearly states that anyone who aspires to be a deacon has to be a RCZ church member and should have attained the age of twenty five. These articles make no references to Scriptural and/or Reformed church polity foundation of the office of the deacon.

1.4 Research Question

The questions that this research wishes to address are as follows:

- i. *What influence did the missionaries have on the office of the deacon in the RCZ?*
- ii. *What can be deduced from the Bible regarding the office of the deacon?*

- iii. *What is understood by the concept office of the deacon in Reformed/Presbyterian church polity?*
- iv. *In what ways does the RCZ diverge from or keep to the Scriptural and Reformed church polity understanding of the office of a deacon?*

1.5 Research Hypothesis

The research question formulated above can be rephrased as a hypothesis or a statement, which is to be proved, says Zeze (2012:16).

The hypothesis of this research is as follows: **The deacons of the RCZ should execute their tasks/duties according to the Scriptures or Reformed church polity foundation.**

In the last chapter, the researcher will attend to how the Scriptures or Reformed church polity foundation of the office of the deacon should be addressed in the Church Order of the RCZ.

1.6 Motivation of the study

This research aims to highlight the Scriptural and Reformed church polity understanding of the office of deacons. Cowen said:

“The origin of the office is still being debated: however, the traditional view is that it had its beginning in the appointment of the seven (Acts 6), although they are not specifically called deacons. This view is widely held because the seven were elected to serve *diakoneo* tables (6:3), and were instructed to serve as deacons (1 Tim 3:10, *diakoneo*)” (Cowen 2003:111).

A comprehensive work assessing the office of deacons is lacking in the church polity of RCZ. Therefore, amendments in the church order on the office of deacons are necessary, but it should not dismantle the existing structures.

1.7 Prior Study

Amongst others, before embarking on this study and whilst doing his Post Graduate Diploma at the University of Stellenbosch, the researcher read the following books: *From Synagogue to Church: Public service and offices in the earliest Christian communities*; *Who rules the church? Examining congregational leadership and church government*; *managing the*

church? Order and organization in a secular age; Notes of the Church Order; Let my people grow: Ministry and leadership in the Church; The Church: Its polity and ordinances; Paul and Power: The structure of authority in the primitive as reflected in the Pauline Epistles; Diakonia in the Classical Reformed Tradition and Today; The Faith Moves the South: A History of the Church; Mission and Church in Malawi: The History of the Nkhoma Synod of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian; The polity of the Churches, new ecclesiology and polity: The United Church of Christ; The church order being a brief explanation of the Christian Reformed Church; With common consent: A practical guide to the use of the church order of the Canadian Reformed Churches; The historical development of the offices according to the Presbyterian tradition of Scotland; An Introduction to Reformed Church Polity, Living Churches: A Reconsideration of their Basis of Life and Leadership; "Christ, the Head of the Church?" Authority, Leadership and Organizational structure within the Nkhoma Synod of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian.

The above reading led the researcher to realize that the RCZ does not take cognizance of the Scriptural and Reformed church polity foundations regarding the office of deacons and decided to embark on this research project.

1.8 Research Methodology

In order to conduct this study, the researcher will conduct a literature study of existing resources on the subject matter. In the thesis attention will be given to New Testament Studies on deacons, confessional and church polity documents of selected Reformed churches in Europe and North America. These are then inductively presented as a premise for arguing that the office of deacons is incorrectly understood in the RCZ.

1.8.1 Primary sources

Primary sources that will be used include documents and minutes of different committees, such as Finance Committees, Synodical Committees, and Church minutes of the RCZ. These documents will be consulted.

1.8.2 Secondary sources

In order for the researcher to conduct this study, literature studies of existing resources on the subject matter will be consulted. The researcher will spend much of the time consulting

different literature in the Faculty of Theology Library at Stellenbosch University in South Africa and Murray Theological Library in Zimbabwe. The researcher will also use the Church Magazine called *Munyai WaShe*, which is found in the church archive at Morgenster Printing Press.

From the biblical point of view, the researcher will visit some of the Scriptural references from the Bible. Bible commentaries and Bible dictionaries in the library at Stellenbosch University will be used in order for the researcher to obtain information about the office of the deacons. In the New Testament, passages which describe the duties of deacons such as Acts 6:1-7 and 1 Timothy 3:7-13 will be analyzed. This will help to make concrete conclusion about the judicial analysis the office of the deacon in the RCZ.

1.9 Definition of concepts

It is important to define some of the terms that need clarification for the easy flow of thought in this study. Concepts or terms such as ‘Church’, ‘judicial’, ‘analysis’, ‘office’, and ‘deacon’ are defined below:

1.9.1 Church

Harvey (1982:27) defines a Church as a local congregation/assembly of Christians, organized of the maintenance of the worship, doctrines, the ordinances and discipline of the Gospel and united, under special covenant, with Christ and one another. Vorster (1999:10) says the Church is the people together who faithfully obey God’s Word. A particular group of Christians is called a Church. However, the definition of ‘church’ goes beyond a mere building where people gather for worship. It can also be viewed as the body of Christ. Furthermore, Vorster (1999:10) acknowledges that Christ is the Head of the Church, which he governs through the Holy Spirit, with the Word which is preached to members of the church. The latter are to live according to this Word. The church as the people of God is the fruit of faithful obedience to God as He reveals Himself in His Word (Vorster 1999:10).

Percy (2000:99) argued that the Church is an embodiment of the presence of God in this world. As the body of Christ there is fellowship and communion amongst the members. The RCZ as a denomination is a church because she is the body of Christ.

The Church belongs to the Triune God (Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit) and through the Holy Spirit, Christ gathers his Church, asserts Zeze (2012:7). The church does not refer to the buildings where people contact their worship service, but rather to the people who are gathered themselves.

1.9.2 Judicial

Judicial refers to the Church Order, which determines the way things must be administered in a particular Church (Vorster 1999:9). It has to do with the process or system within a Church. In the last chapter of this research an evaluation and recommendation on the office of the deacon in the RCZ is being done. In doing so the researcher made ample use of the wider tradition inter alia reformed church understanding of the office of the deacon (c.f. chapter 4).

1.9.3 Office

In the Church Order of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa, it is stated that the offices in the Church are instruments in the hands of Jesus Christ, through which He governs and builds the Church (Vorster 1999:15).

In the RCZ there are three offices that form the church council, namely the office of the minister, the deacon, and the elder; these three offices constitute the Church Council. In this study, when the researcher refers to the office of the deacon, he will be referring to the position of the deacon.

The Church Rules and Regulations of RCZ stipulates that anyone who desires to be elected to the office of the deacon in RCZ and have attained the age of 25 years is eligible to be elected to serve in this office (*RCZ Bhuku yoMurairo* 2010:19).

According to Vorster (1999:15), there are four types of offices; ministers of the Word, professors at the Theological School, elders and deacons. The offices in the church are instruments in the hands of Christ, through which He institutes, conserves and builds the Church. The office-bearers are servants who primarily receive their mandate to serve from Christ. Therefore, the office of the deacon is not an inferior office, as others may think of it.

Jansen¹ (2006:125) lists five points, which were written by Van Ruler in 1957 whilst he was a lecturer at the faculty of theology at Amsterdam. He defined 'office' in the work of God as follows:

- i. Office is a representation of God and this is a mystical thing.
- ii. Office is not only in the church, but in a manifold way is also in the world, centrally in the state.
- iii. Ecclesiastical office is a moment in the work of the indwelling Spirit that mediates between the Mediator and the human.
- iv. Office function in no other than in communion with and on behalf of human and the congregation and, like the Mediator, is to be understood as an emergence measure.
- v. Office and the congregation are both serviceable to God's kingdom intentions with the world.
- vi. It is not the essence of a believer that he become an office bearer.
- vii. Office and the congregation together are the church (Jansen 2006:125-126).

What is being explained here is that the offices in the church stand as indicator of how God uses men and women as officers of the church

Jansen (2006:131) asserts with Van Ruler's claim that the offices is used by God to do God's work, and it is through the work of the Spirit to elect those to work in different offices in the Church. His (Van Ruler) main point was based on the draft of Calvin at Geneva, which states that the doctrine of the office is that it is God the Holy Spirit who uses the offices in fulfilling His mission work of mediation of salvation.

Office is a representation of Christ in the Church. Because of this, one cannot say the office originates from the congregation, but they originate from above and are represented in the congregation (Jansen 2006:143).

¹ Van Ruler, referred to here by Jansen, was a lecturer at the Faculty of Theology at Amsterdam University in 1957. There was a dispute concerning the understanding of the meaning of office and he was requested to write a thesis on the meaning of office in the Church. Jansen is the holder of Ph.D. from Amsterdam University and is a pastor of Community Church of Glen Rock, New Jersey. He wrote many books, such as *Notes on the Church Order of the Reformed Church in America: A history of a Classis*.

1.9.4 Deacon

McKee, in his definition said:

“A deacon is a servant leader who serves and inspire others in both outward and inward ways such as to practically express Christ’s healing presence as mediated through the Church” (McKee 1989:123).

According to Cowen (2003:101), the Greek word for “deacon” is “*diakonos*”, meaning servant waiter. Apparently, deacons were initially the assistants to bishops and overseers. They are not ordained by the laying on of hands as ministers, but are initiated or confirmed by the minister of the congregation. It means that the office of the deacon was instituted to lead the ministry of charity. Van Wyk (1997:91) points out that the spiritual qualification and special responsibilities receive attention in Acts (6:1-7). Zeze (2012:113) indicates that the task of deacons is to look after the Church and the needy.

In his book, *Meeting each other in Doctrine, Liturgy, and Government*, Meeter (1993:70) states that the office of the deacon is there to collect the alms and other monies appropriated to the use of the poor and with the advice of the consistory, cheerfully, and faithfully to distribute the same to the strangers, as well as to those of their own household, according to the measure of their respective necessities. They should also visit and comfort the distressed, and be careful that the alms be not misused. They shall render account in the Consistory of the distribution of alms at such time as the said Consistory shall determine, and in the presence of so many of the congregation as may choose to attend. The office of the deacon is not a permanent office, according to Meeter (1993:71); they serve for two years.

The same sentiments were supported by Vorster (1999:45), who points out that the office of the deacon is conscientiously to collect the money and the goods given to the poor as gifts of love and to distribute these gifts diligently, after discussing the needs of both the needy and other church members. It is the duty of the deacons to visit and comfort those in need and to ensure that the gifts are not wrongly applied. Deacons must give reports to the Church Council about their activities, and if requested, they must give the same report of their activities to the congregation with the approval of the Church Council (Vorster 1999:45).

The deacons share the leadership responsibilities of the church with the minister and elders, and (deacons) are there to receive and collect church offerings; in other words, deacons are the collectors and administrators of church finances. They should be in a position to

formulate ways of fundraising money for different projects that may arise in the church. The church should not be poor whilst deacons are there. Deacons' service is a service of love, such as when a person offers hospitality to a guest. The services of the deacons is not limited to the physical or material needs of the person, but also include the spiritual needs; this is why Vorster (1999:45) opines that they should visit and comfort the needy, meaning that they must share the Word of God and encourage, and pray with such a person.

Van Wyk (1997:93) states that the institution of the office of the deacon does not mean a multiplication of office, but rather a differentiation within the office as it is one diakonia in which all have parts. Its aim is to administer resources in each congregation and to care for the poor and not to work as subordinate service to the minister and elders. The service of charity is more and more cut off from the office of the deacon as it is now in the hands of different groups in the church, such as women's league, evangelism team and youth fellowship.

One of the researchers in Church Polity, Hanko (1962:41-42) explains that deacons have at least five tasks to perform as their responsibilities and these are: Deacons must collect the alms and other contributions of charity; deacons must faithfully and diligently distribute the gifts to those in need; deacons must visit and comfort those who are sick and distressed; deacons must take good care against the misuse of the alms; and lastly, deacons are required to account for their activities to the consistory and the congregation as it may requested by the later. Like the elders, deacons share the same responsibilities of the church with the minister for they also should visit the poor and the needy. Deacons are collectors and administrators of church finances although they are considered the second officers to the presbyters in rank (McKee 1989:64).

Similarly, Vorster (1999:149) argues that the offices are instituted to serve and promote the well-being and up-building of the church, which means that there is no office that is superior to another office in the Reformed polity. This means that the office of the deacon is equally important to the office of the minister and the office of the elder. Deacons in the RCZ must be capable of organizing themselves toward fulfilling their responsibilities in the church.

The offices in the church have a ministerial character; therefore, office-bearers in the church have to bear special qualities. The following evidence can be found in the Bible (1 Tim. 3:8-12) for the office of deacon (Vorster 1999:139):

Van Oene (1990:109) states that the deacons were a special group of people in the church, called to service the social needs of the people; their origin was attributed by some to the appointment of the seven in Acts 6:1-7. According to Church Rules and Regulations of the RCZ (2010:34), deacons are there to receive offerings, they supervise alms offering, and they visit the poor, needy, ill and are members of the Church Council with a right to vote.

The office of the deacon was first established in the Jerusalem church in response to the growing need of the congregation (Acts 6:1-6). Cowen lists three meanings for the word *diakonos*:

- i. It refers to one such a servant, attendant, or minister who executes the commands of another, such as a master.
- ii. In the church, it refers to one who cares for the poor and has charge of and distributes the money allotted to them.
- iii. It can refer to a waiter, one who serves food and drink (Cowen 2003:101).

Furthermore, Cowen (2003:104) mentions that three qualifications are given here: (1) good reputation; (2) full of the Holy Spirit; and (3) full of wisdom (Acts 6:1-7, 1 Tim.3:8-12). Scripture teaches the requirements or qualifications for the office of the deacon. From this, it is clear that we are not dealing with an inferior office. The deacon must be someone rich in caring for people in need, and for whom it is a privilege to take upon him/her the ministry of caring of the church. In addition, much administrative talents, knowledge of finances and business is required, but above all he/she must be a faithful Christian of good reproach.

The office of the deacon is purely based on both the spiritual and human well-being; therefore, they should execute their duties with the aim of providing the opportunity for people to realize that God love them regardless of their status in society.

According to Williams (1972:133-134), deacons operate in the spheres of finances; that is, taking care of financial matters of the assembly and trusteeship, which deals with matters of building and church maintenance. In his argument, he did not spare the deacons on the issue of house visitation in order for them to comfort the bereaved and the sick.

Furthermore, in his notes on Article 25, one of the famous Church Polity experts, Hanks (1962:41), points out that the work of mercy is the work of the whole congregation, which is carried out through the office of deacons. Humanly speaking, this office needs people full of

integrity to the congregation and even to the community that they are operating within. Hanko (1962:41) mentions five duties of the deacon in the Christian Reformed Church in North America. Deacons must collect the gifts of mercy and contributions of charity. Contributions of charity refer to gifts in addition to the usual funds collected during the worship service. Secondly, deacons must faithfully and diligently distribute the contributions because it is the Lord's work.

The deacons must visit and comfort those in distress; by doing this they will represent Christ. The fourth duty of the deacons is to exercise care against misuse of the gifts of mercy. Mismanagement of funds on both sides must be guarded against. The last point mentioned by Hanko (1962:41) is that deacons are required to render account of their activities to the consistory. The reason is the deacons are under the consistory, and this will help to see whether the deacon is faithfully doing their work as expected.

The deacons must render or give account to the congregation; this will help the congregation to evaluate themselves on the work of mercy they are doing to see whether it is pleasing in the eyes of God. The main task of the deacons is to care for the poor and to collect offering.

Prominent editors, Van Dellen and Monsma (1954:178), observe that those in the office of deacons have the duty to intercede for the poor and the afflicted through prayers in their meetings and during visitation, rather than meeting their physical needs only. Prayer is a vital weapon for the deacons to execute their duties. The office of the deacons find its root age in the early church, where it was clearly defined, especially in the book of Acts 2:42 and 4:32-37. These passages show that the tasks of deacons were not limited to the material things only, but it was stretched to include the spiritual aspect of life (Vorster 1999:45).

1.10. Limitations of the Study

This study is conducted by a serving minister of the Word in the RCZ; therefore, it must be understood in the context of the country of Zimbabwe. It is obvious with my experience in the RCZ that there is a need for a well-researched study of the duties of deacons in the RCZ and/or a manual on the correct understanding of deaconship. However, the major limitation of this study is that most of the RCZ documents, minutes and reports were written in the native language of *Shona*, hence, more time will be spent on trying to translate all these sources from *Shona* to English. Likewise, before the RCZ attained its autonomy from the

Dutch Reformed Church (Cape Synod), all the minutes of various committees were written in Afrikaans. This will be major a limitation to what the research wants to achieve by using the history of the church's materials.

1.11 Outline of chapters

Chapter 1 deals with the research background of the study. This chapter serves as the general introduction to the main thrust and objectives of the research. The main aim of this study is to analyses the function of the office of the deacon in the RCZ in the light of Scriptural and Reformed church polity understanding of the office of a deacon.

Chapter 2 deals with *the office of the deacon in the RCZ*. Firstly, this chapter describes the social, economic, cultural and political setting of Zimbabwe. Secondly, it attends the historical background of the RCZ and lastly, attention is given to the development of offices in the church, predominantly the office of the deacon.

Chapter 3 deals with the Scriptural basis for the office of the deacon.

Chapter 4 gives a church judicial reflection of the office of deacons. Different views of Church polity experts will be dealt with. Articles regarding the office of the deacon in the church orders of the Reformed Churches in America, Christian Reformed Church in Canada, Protestant Church in the Netherlands, the Presbyterian Church of United States of America and the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa will be analyzed.

Chapter 5 deals with the recommendations proposed to the RCZ regarding the office of the deacon in order to ensure that the RCZ will adhere to Scriptural and Reformed church polity understanding of the office of the deacon. In this chapter analysis is being done of the church order provision in the RCZ regarding the office of the Deacon

1.12 Conclusion

The main aim of this study is to analyze the office of the deacon in the RCZ in the light of Scriptural and Reformed church polity understanding of the office of the deacon.

CHAPTER TWO

The Office of Deacons in the Reformed Church in Zimbabwe

2.1 Introduction

Chapter two of this study is divided into two sections, namely a brief history of Zimbabwe and the missionary activities within the context of RCZ. The first section describes the social, economic, cultural and political setting, whilst the historical background the RCZ reveals the religious activities of the country. This is to provide a platform within which the development of offices in the church, predominantly the office of the deacon, will be analyzed.

2.2 A Description of the Study's Context

2.2.1 A Brief History of Zimbabwe

Thorpe (1951:14) reveals that Zimbabwe is a landlocked country without an outlet to the sea. It was formally known as Rhodesia. Mutumburanzou² (1999:1) adds that Zimbabwe is strategically located in the Southern part of Africa. In other words, Zimbabwe is located between the Zambezi and the Limpopo rivers. Botswana is to the Southwest and Zambia to the Northwest, and it borders with South Africa to the South, and Mozambique to the East.

Internet material³ states that Zimbabwe derives her name from the *Shona* word (*dzimba dzamabwe*), which is literally translated into 'the house of stones'. This name came after the country attained its independence in 1980. During the colonial era, it was known as the republic of Rhodesia or Southern Rhodesia. Zimbabwe is divided into 10 provinces, namely Harare Metropolitan, Bulawayo metropolitan, Manicaland, Masvingo, Midlands, Matebeleland South, Matebeleland North, Mashonaland Central, Mashonaland East and Mashonaland West. These provinces are currently divided into 59 districts and 1200 municipalities.

Inyangani Mountain is the biggest mountain in Zimbabwe with the highest peak of 2,592 meters high and it is found in the Eastern side of the country. Two rivers, namely the Runde

² Rev. A.R. Mutumburanzou is a former Moderator of the RCZ and Principal of the Murray Theological College. He studied at Stellenbosch University and was the first RCZ minister to obtain a masters and doctorate degree in 1999.

³ The historical background downloaded from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zimbabwe> [Accessed 22/01/2015].

and the Save are the longest rivers in the country and the confluent where they meet at the lowest point is about 162 meters deep. Victoria Falls (Thorpe 1951:21) is one of the popular tourist destinations that are earning the country's much needed foreign currency. In terms of National Parks, Gonarezou, found in the Southeastern part of the country is regarded as one of the biggest National Parks in the continent of Africa.

The census, which was conducted in 2005, revealed that the population was pegged at 13, 5 million. The country covers an area of 390,757 square kilometers and 150,871 square meters.

2.2.2 People of Zimbabwe

According to Bhebhe (1984:13), the people of Zimbabwe had their origin from the Bantu-speaking people who were found in Central and Southern Africa. He argues that the people of Zimbabwe have been strongly associated with pastoral farming and agriculture in their daily life. Bhebhe (1984:13) again noted that the agricultural industry is confirmed by the grindstones and hoe heads, which have been discovered by archaeologists. Thorpe (1951:29) has the same opinion as Bhebhe in that he indicated that the people of Zimbabwe are made up of various clans, which is an indication that they belong to the Bantu races.

Like many other African countries, Zimbabweans also follow the belief that from the beginning of human life, God commanded people to get married and bear children. In this process, dowry (*lobola*) has to be paid by the husband to the family of the wife is a symbol of marriage bond or a covenant (Mutumburanzou 1999:6).

2.2.3 Official Languages

The people of Zimbabwe are not of one culture or language, which means that even their lifestyle is also different from one region to another. In all the languages found in Zimbabwe, one can find idioms, idiophones, figurative, proverbs and other expressions used in communications to express a point (Mutumburanzou 1999:5).

Although English is the official language of Zimbabwe, the majority of the people speak *Shona*, which is the native language of the *Shona* people. *Shona* is one of the native languages in Zimbabwe alongside *Ndebele (IsiNdebele)*, which is spoken by the Matebele people found in Matebeleland South, Matebeleland North and part of Midlands's province. All in all there are about nineteen languages spoken in different parts of Zimbabwe. The

tribes and languages of Zimbabwe⁴ include English, Shona, Ndebele, Chilapalapa, Dombe, Tsoa, Kalanga, Kunda/Chikunda, Lozi, Manyika, Nambya, Ndau, Nsenga, Nyanja/Chewa, Tonga, Tsonga/Shangaan, Tswa, Tswana, and Venda. All of these languages are used amongst the ethnic groups found in different provinces found in Zimbabwe

2.2.4 Economy

Thorpe (1951:20) highlighted that Zimbabwe is good for ranching, mining and with a better rainfall it was regarded as the farmers' paradise. The country earns foreign currency from its mineral exports, agriculture, and tourism. Zimbabwe is one of the biggest trading partners of South Africa in the continent. Many decades ago, when you talked of economy resources, Zimbabwe was considered as one of the richest country in Africa, even though it has recently been affected by the political situation. Zimbabwe was regarded as the bread basket of Africa. In fact, Mutumburanzou (1999:2) argues that other economic activities of the country during and after the colonial era have been affected by the climatic conditions and persistent droughts that have been experienced in the region. The great impact of these persistence droughts forced some people in the country, especially those in the Southern and Eastern parts of the country to continue growing drought resistant crops such as sorghum (*mapfunde*), millet (*mhunga*), rapoko (*rukweza*), pumpkins (*manhanga*) and many others (Mdenge 1988:185; Mutumburanzou 1999:1).

Therefore, one can argue that the availability of economic and human resources was a potential tool for the spread of the Gospel. Even when the missionaries came, it was easier for them to use agriculture as a means of getting to the grass roots. Therefore, the next section will describe the activities of the missionaries in Zimbabwe, particularly in the RCZ church.

2.3 The Arrival the Dutch Reformed Church Mission in Zimbabwe

Cronje (1984:114) states that the Dutch Reformed Church Mission in Zimbabwe (DRCM) came to Zimbabwe after the initiation of the DRC Christians in Zoutpansberg Congregation under the guidance of Rev. Stephanus Hofmeyr. Hofmeyr was a minister in Zoutpansberg

⁴ The list of languages were downloaded from the Constitution of Zimbabwe: <http://www.ethnologue.com/product/18-Report-ZW> [Accessed 23/01/2015].

Congregation in Transvaal, South Africa. Van der Merwe⁵ (1981:1) states that the missionary work of the DRC in Zimbabwe was started by Andrew Louw with the blessing of the DRC (Cape Synod) in 1891. He labored through the training of evangelists and holding of special revivals as a way of stimulating the zeal in his members to participate in this noble cause of witnessing amongst the non-Christians, as pointed out by Cronje (1984:115).

According to Houser⁶ (2000:100), the mission work in Southern Rhodesia by the DRC started long back in 1865 when Stephanus Hofmeyr came to Soutpansberg in Northern Transvaal. His great missionary heart was not only concerned with the spiritual well-being of the natives of that province, but also with the perishing souls across the Limpopo River. For Hofmeyr there was no time to waste, so he wrote a letter to his home board in the Cape, requesting that missionaries be sent to the Banyai⁷ people in the then Southern Rhodesia (Houser 2000:100).

The time when the missionaries arrived in Zimbabwe, then known as Rhodesia, in 1891-1974, was referred to as *Muneri Era*, the era of missionaries (Mutumburanzou 1999:31). During this time, missionaries established mission stations, which are still referred to as “Kwa Muneri”, the places of missionaries. These mission stations are Morgenster, Pamushana, Jichidza, Gutu, Chibi, Zimuto, Chimombe, Makumbe and Nyashanu (Mutumburanzou 1999:36).

Mutumburanzou (1999:32) is convinced that it was under such inspiring vision that Hofmeyr sent Rev. S.P. Helm, his colleague, and a group of evangelists to Zimbabwe. This mission was to find out whether there could be a possibility of establishing a permanent settlement in the area for effective mission work amongst the *Shona* people of Zimbabwe. Through this

⁵ W.J. van der Merwe is the author of *From Mission Field to Autonomous Church in Zimbabwe*. This book contains the history of the RCZ. Van der Merwe was a missionary who laboured in the RCZ. He was a pastor in numerous congregations and was also once a lecturer at Murray Theological College. Much of the factual information gathered for the writings of his book has come from the original sources kept in the DRC Archives in Cape Town, the National Archives in Zimbabwe, and the DRCM Office in Cape Town, the Archives of the DRCM at Morgenster and from the files of Rev. G. Murray, who was formerly stationed at Morgenster. In Masvingo as the Liaison Officer and the General Secretary of the African Reformed Church from 1956 to 1975, Van der Merwe laboured as a missionary for 24 years in the African RCZ.

⁶ Houser Tillman was born in 1922 in the United States and completed his MA in 1978 at the School of World Mission at the Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California. He was a pastor for seven years in the United States. He spent thirty-five years as a missionary in Zimbabwe, including fifteen in Natal, South Africa. His missionary services include the managing of primary schools and planting Churches. He edited and published translations of the Free Methodist Church standard of faith and practise in the languages *Shangaan* and *Shona*. The Free Methodist Church in Zimbabwe, which was founded by Houser, is a missionary Church that shares the same hymn book as the RCZ.

⁷ Banyai was a reference to the Shona-speaking people in the then Southern Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe. This is a group of people where the RCZ has established mission stations and congregations. Today in Zimbabwe, 75% of the population are Shona-speaking people.

fact finding mission, Helm visited more than eighteen congregations in South Africa, explaining the spiritual need of the people in Zimbabwe. According to Cronje (1984:115), this touched the heart of Andrew Louw, who was the son of the DRC minister in the town of Paarl in South Africa. He declared that he was convinced of having been called by God to minister amongst the people of Zimbabwe.

In his book, titled *Born to Witness*, Cronje (1984:117) explains that this young man was a student at Stellenbosch Theological Seminary, but had to withdraw in the third year of his studies because of ill health. Andrew Louw, with a team of seven evangelists, left Kransport in South Africa by an ox-wagon on 18 June 1891 and crossed the Limpopo River and entered Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). According to Van der Merwe (1981:49), Andrew Louw and his team of evangelists were supported materially and spiritually by a congregation at Stellenbosch from the day they started their journey to Zimbabwe. As they were travelling, some of the evangelists were posted to different villages to commence the missionary work in Zimbabwe. It took them two and half months to reach the mountain where Chief Mugabe was residing and they were given permission to start missionary work amongst his people.

Andrew Louw heard that God was calling him for this missionary task and although he was a sick man, he offered himself as a missionary for the Banyai people. His father was a minister of the DRC and a devout man; he was also convinced when he read the Bible in 1 Corinthians 1:27, namely: “God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things of the mighty”. A.A. Louw started off by ox wagon for Banyailand and they passed through Goedgedacht Mission in Soutpansberg, where he and his team received all the encouragement and other provisions. It was noted that they set out in faith and crossed the Limpopo with great difficulty and after weeks of travel in their ox wagon over the *mopane/mupani* trees of the Lowveld, they arrived on Mugabe’s mountain on 9 September 1891 (Houser 2000:101).

Mutumburanzou (1999:35) states that soon after their arrival at the top of the mountain where they were living, Andrew Louw became ill with malaria. However, God heard the prayers of the young man and he recovered from the illness.

2.3 Arrival of Missionaries in 1891

The first mission station was founded on 9 September 1891. This was the day when Andrew Louw and the seven evangelists pitched their tents on Chief Mugabe's mountain. The seven evangelists who accompanied Andrew Louw were Micha Maghato, Joshua Masoha, Lukas Mokele, Jeremia and Petros Morudu (two brothers), David Molea and Izak Khumalo (Van der Merwe 1981:64). Similarly, Paas (2006:221) mentions that Andrew Louw cooperated with the seven evangelists to start missionary work in Rhodesia, now called Zimbabwe, on the South of the Limpopo. The preaching of the Gospel as the mandate of the Church has been noted by Van der Merwe (1982:5), who said that the Church has received a clear command to witness by the risen Lord himself (Matthew 28:18). The missionaries who arrived at Morgenster were doing so as a way of obeying their marching orders until the end of time, as is mentioned in Matthew 24:14.

A historian in Zimbabwe by the name Christopher Zvobgo, in his book: *The Wesleyan Methodist Missions in Zimbabwe*, noted that the missionary group of the Dutch Reformed mission of the Cape Synod, led by Rev. A.A. Louw, founded its first mission station at Morgenster on 9 September 1891 (1991:4). Paas (2006:221) concurs with Zvobgo and noted that from the beginning of his missionary work, Louw cooperated with his seven evangelists as mentioned earlier on. Louw and his wife Cinie Malan translated the Bible into Karanga, which is the indigenous language.

2.3.1 First Mission Station: Morgenster

Cronje (1984:116) reveals that the first mission station to be established by the missionaries in the now RCZ was named Morgenster, which means the 'morning star' or 'day star'. At the same time, it was a prayer that this mission station was to be "*like the morning star heralding the coming of the Son of Righteousness in the hearts of the people of Zimbabwe*" (2 Peter 1:19; Revelation 22:16). Cronje (1984:116) further indicates that Andrew Louw served as the head of mission work at Morgenster for forty-six years. He was the founder of Morgenster mission, and also the founder of the RCZ. Andrew Louw retired in 1937, but remained at Morgenster mission until he passed on in 1956 (Cronje 1984:118). This is also supported by Van der Merwe (1981:49), who noted that the congregation of Rev. J.H. Neethling supported Louw until he retired in 1937.

2.3.2 First Converts

The inclusion of Black evangelists by Andrew Louw was a noble idea because it contributed to the issue of reception of a White person amongst the Black people. This played a major role amongst the people of Zimbabwe to accept Christianity, says Paas (2006:221).

Cronje (1984:122) notes that the first converts were Mutizigwa and Muzeza, who were baptised on 6 September 1896 and were given new biblical names, Joseph and Matthew. Similarly Mutumburanzou said:

“Five years later in 1900 the first two indigenous women convert were also baptized on 1st September 1900 Chabad Beta was baptized as Maria (Mary) whilst Mudemba Beta was baptized as Martha Beta” (Mutumburanzou 1999:37).

Morgenster remained the only mission station of the DRCM for ten years since the arrival of Andrew Louw and his team in 1891. However, since 1901, more mission stations and congregations were established by the missionaries in rural areas and mines, says Cronje (1981:118).

2.3.3 Other Mission Stations

The following mission stations were established by the missionaries from 1901 to 1954. The second mission station after Morgenster was Pamushana mission, which was started in 1901 by Rev. P.F. Foriche and Rev. L. du Plessis in Bikita district, East of Masvingo province (Cronje 1984:119).

According to Cronje (1984:119), Chibi, Gutu and Zimuto mission stations were established by the Berlin Missionary Society and were handed over to the DRCM in 1907. The Berlin Missionary society were also doing mission work in Zimbabwe but had to withdraw as a result of financial constraints. In 1908 Rev. J. F. Roux established the sixth mission station called Jichidza in Zaka district, Masvingo province. The seventh mission station, known as Chingombe, was established by Rev H. H. Olandini in 1909. However, the name Chingombe, which was named after the chief of the area, was later changed to Alheit in honor of Rev. W. Alheit, who was the minister of Ceres, the congregation that was supporting Orlandini financially, as well as by intercession from the time he arrived in the area of Chief Chingombe (Van der Merwe 1981:75).

All these mission stations were established in one province, which was then known as Fort Victoria and are known as Masvingo province at present. On the other hand, in Manicaland province two mission stations, namely Makumbe mission in 1915, founded by Rev. PA Badenhorst and Nyashanu mission in 1954, were established. These two mission stations were established in Buhera district in the West of Manicaland province (Cronje 1984:120).

2.3.4 Town, Mines, and Rural Congregations

The DRCM in Zimbabwe also established congregations in towns, mines and rural areas, which are not mission stations. Van der Merwe (1981:73) argues that outposts' stations were established in rural areas and they were manned by Black evangelists who were referred to as Black missionaries who yielded a rich harvest for the Kingdom of God. In the beginning, these outposts were attached and supervised by the mission stations because missionaries who were ministers were only found in mission stations, whilst evangelists were living in rural areas (Van der Merwe 1981:74). These outposts later developed into congregations, which still exists.

Most of the congregations in towns and mining areas were handed over to the DRCM (Cape), which was in charge of mission work in Zimbabwe by the DRC Orange Free State, who were doing mission work in Zambia. The following congregations were handed over to DRCM in 1954:

- i. Enkledorn (now Chivhu) in Mashonaland East province
- ii. Gwelo (now Gweru) in Midlands's province.
- iii. Shabani (now Zvishavane) in Midlands's province
- iv. Wankie (now Hwange) in Matebeleland North province
- v. Gatooma (now Kadoma) in Mashonaland Central
- vi. Umtali (now Mutare) in Manicaland province
- vii. Salisbury (now Harare) in Harare Metropolitan province.

It is noted that on 9 July 1954, congregations in all towns and cities in Zimbabwe previously care for by the DRC in the Orange Free State were handed over to the Shona Reformed

Church. Because of this, the membership was composed of Zambians, Malawians and Zimbabweans, which led to the changing of the name from the Shona Reformed Church to the African Reformed Church.⁸

This was supported by Cronje (1984:121), who stated that today the RCZ, born out of mission work amongst the Shona-speaking people, have congregations in all provinces, towns, cities and rural areas. But in 1984 he conveyed that the RCZ had only 40 congregations spread across ten cities and rural areas. The moderator of the RCZ in his report of the 29th General Synod Conference noted that the RCZ has only 85 congregations, of which 83 are in Zimbabwe, the other two are outside the country (*Synod Minutes* 2014:16). The two congregations which are outside the country are Reformed Church International in the United Kingdom, referred to as UK Congregation and Reformed Church International in South Africa, hereafter referred as SA Congregation. UK congregation has two ministers of Word and Sacrament, namely Rev. Godwin Mutukwa and Rev. Philip Mahere and SA Congregation is under the leadership of Rev. Doctor Christopher Munikwa.

Other new centers were opened in Dete, Hurungwe in 1995 and in Binga amongst the Tonga-speaking people in 1996 (Paas 2006:222). As an autonomous Church, the RCZ must continue with the missional mandate of spreading the Gospel to all corners of the world. However, this can only be accomplished if the resources are available. This is the duty of the deacons to make sure that all the financial obligations are readily available for the RCZ to fulfil the Great Commission.

In all these 83 congregations as reported in the RCZ Synod report of 2014, each congregation is under the leadership of the Church Council, which is made up of a Minister/Ministers, elders and deacons.

This shows that the office of a deacon is in the same position as the offices of ministers and elders. No office is bigger than the other; in other words, these three offices in the system of the RCZ complement each other.

⁸ The information was extracted from the pamphlet compiled by Rev. A.R. Mutumburanzou, Rev. D.P. Mandebvu and Rev. E.C. Esterhuysen (a missionary). They were lecturers at Murray Theological College at Morgenster Mission in Masvingo province, Zimbabwe. The pamphlet that they compiled is entitled *Ten years of development in the Reformed Church in Zimbabwe*. Their pamphlet was published at Morgenster Printing Press in 1982. Rev. D.P. Mandebvu served as the Moderator from 1963 to 1968 and Rev. A.R. Mutumburanzou was elected to the Moderator's post in 1981 to 1988.

2.4 Formation of the Church Council, Presbytery and Synod of the RCZ

2.4.1. Church Council

Van der Merwe (1981:79) states that since 1891 to 1917, the RCZ was operating under the guidance of the mission council. At the meeting of the mission council in 1917, the missionaries at their annual meeting laid down the rules and regulations of the Church Council, known as *Rangano Doko* in Shona, were laid down. Van der Merwe (1981:79) explains:

“The duties of the church council were to oversee the day to day running of the congregations. This led to the establishment of the office of the elders and deacons in the DRCM. The elders and deacons by that time were supposed to be comprised of married men only (Van der Merwe 1981:79).

Van der Merwe (1981:79) further states that the following regulations were laid down for the local Church Council:

- i. It should consist of the local missionary and one or more elders according to the need of the congregation;
- ii. The elders should be elected by the male members of the congregation;
- iii. The tasks of the Church Council should be similar to those of a Church Council in the mother Church, but adapted to local conditions; and
- iv. The Church Council should meet quarterly or as often as necessary.

During the formation of the Church council in the RCZ, only two offices were mentioned; the office of the local missionary or minister, who was in charge of a mission station of the congregation and elders, who were elected from the male church members of the congregation (Mutumburanzou 1999:51). Van der Merwe (1981:80) argued that it was a biblical, as well as an anthropological point of view; it was wise to start with the election of elders only. Another point of interest was that only male members in the congregation were allowed to participate in the election of elders whilst other members such as women and

youth were not even consulted, that is they were only observers of all the proceedings, says Van der Merwe (1981:80).

On this note, it shows that there was an oversight because the missionaries neglected the office of deacon as something that was not of great importance in the growth of the RCZ. On the other hand, it was probably the missionaries who were getting support and stipends from their own countries. They were the managers of their own resources.

The formation of the Church Council also led to the establishment of the Presbytery as it is stated by Pauw (1980:29) in his book *Mission and Church in Malawi*. The qualifications of elders and deacons were similar in these two churches even though they are in two different countries.

2.4.2. Presbytery

Presbytery is also known as the council of congregations or *Rangano Huru* in Shona, which was formed in 1918 and was constituted as a coordinating body of jurisdiction over all congregations (Cronje 1984:130). This was also supported by Van der Merwe (1981:122) that the Presbytery was formed in 1918 with the purpose of deliberating issues from their respective congregation, but the final say on every matter was the responsibility of the Mission Council. Van der Merwe (1981:80) further asserts that the resolutions made at Presbytery council meetings were to be submitted to the Mission Council and Mission Board for approval. However, it was a step forward on the road to building a young autonomous church.

This was a step forward to the building of a young autonomous church. As at present, the RCZ has 17 presbyteries all over the country, with two other congregations in the United Kingdom and South Africa (*Synod Minutes* 2014:16).

The following regulations were laid down for the Presbytery, which was referred to as a Council of Congregations, or *Rangano Huru* in Shona:

- i. It should consist of the missionary in charge of every station and the minister of the local congregation, as well as an elder of each congregation;
- ii. It should meet two days before the meeting of the Mission Council and at the same venue;
- iii. It should consider church visitation, reports on the state of religious life, applications of church discipline and other matters referred to it by local Church Councils; and

- iv. It should annually elect its own Chairman and Secretary (Van der Merwe 1981:80).

2.4.2.1 Formation of the Presbyteries in the RCZ

Each congregation was to be represented by a minister or ministers and one elder, all of them had voting powers, states Van der Merwe (1981:122). The Church Council of the congregations of the Shona Reformed Church in Zimbabwe started with only two offices that were the office of the minister and that of the elder (Van der Merwe 1981:122). He (Van der Merwe 1981:80) also states that it was called a Council of Congregations (*Gemeente raad* or *Rangano Huru* in Shona).

The research is of the opinion that this is why the office of the deacon has been marginalized in some cases, although it has recently been accorded full status like any other office in the church, as stated in the Rules and Regulations of the RCZ, hereafter referred to as *RCZ Bhuku yoMurairo* Article 16 (*RCZ Bhuku yoMurairo*⁹ 2010:38).

Presbyteries are constituted by:

- i. All serving ordained ministers who belong to the congregations of the respective presbyteries of the RCZ;
- ii. One delegated elder or deacon or former elder or deacon from each of the congregations belonging to the respective presbyteries;
- iii. All ministers serving in the church departments and such ministers have no voting rights, but can be voted for. This was deliberated at the Synod of 1990 and it was resolved that only ministers in congregations are allowed to vote as a way of balancing the votes between ministers and elders. Unlike in the previous Synod, where all serving ministers in congregations and departments were allowed to vote, and this created discontentment on the elders' part because they were outnumbered by ministers (Mutumburanzou 1999:206);
- iv. Evangelists, lay preachers and youth counsellors are also members of the Presbytery, but have no voting rights;
- v. Presbyteries are delimited by the Synod or Synodical committee at its session; and
- vi. Presbyteries assemble annually at a place determined by them.

⁹ *RCZ Bhuku yoMurairo* is the RCZ's book of rules and regulations used as the Constitution of the Church. It is the Church Order book. This Church Order book is normal revised after every five years. *RCZ Bhuku yoMurairo* in this document will be referring to the book of Rules and Regulations of the RCZ.

2.4.2.2 Presbytery Executive

Chairperson (Ordained Minister)

Vice Chairperson (Ordained Minister)

Secretary (Elder/Deacon)

Vice Secretary (Elder/Deacon)

Treasurer (Elder/Deacon)

Actuary (Ordained Minister)

Youth Co-coordinator (Ordained Minister).

The signatories to the Presbytery accounts are the Chairperson, Secretary and treasurer. The executive shall be elected after every two years (*RCZ Bhuku yoMurairo* 2010:6-7).

2.4.3 Synod of the RCZ

The 9th of September 1952 saw the birth of the Synod of the Shona Reformed Church, which was made up of all congregations in the country (Mutumburanzou 1999:52). This was an autonomous governing body that was now operating under its own regulations rather than to report to the Mission Council as was the case with the Church Council and the Presbyteries.

Rev. E. Ngara¹⁰ was the first indigenous minister to be elected as the moderator of the RCZ Synod in 1961. He spoke on behalf of the Shona Reformed Church as follows: “We desire inner growth. We want a spiritual church which has the Spirit of Christ. Only such a church can be holy, and will be received by the Bridegroom, Jesus. Go and tell the mother church that we thank her because she brought the Gospel with so much love. Some of your children you sent here, have died here, but that did not stop you from sending more, and so we see many of them are present here today”.

¹⁰ Rev. E.N. Ngara was the first Shona minister to be elected as the Moderator of the Shona Reformed Church in 1961. This is an extract from the pamphlet, *Ten years of development in the Reformed Church in Zimbabwe*. Ngara said these words when he was accepting the post of the Moderator, as well as giving a vote of thanks to the missionaries of the DRC from Cape Synod for spreading the Gospel South of the Limpopo, which is now known as Zimbabwe.

2.4.3.1 Formation of the RCZ Synod

At a Presbytery meeting of 1950, one of the elders, as C.A. Napata, who was a delegate of Morgenster congregation, tabled a motion that the formation of the Synod be considered, says Van der Merwe (1981:123). As a result of this, the Synod of the then Dutch Reformed Mission was formed in September 1952 as already explained in the preceding paragraph. Van der Merwe (1981:123) states that after the formation of the Synod there was a dialogue to try to reach an agreement between the newly proposed Synod of all mission congregations, which were founded by the Dutch Reformed mission from the Cape Synod with those congregations in urban centers, which were founded by the Dutch Reformed mission of the Orange Free State Synod. The latter did not agree with the proposal.

This was because the Synod of the RCZ at its formation was constituted of only two Presbyteries, namely Morgenster and Gutu (Van der Merwe 1981:123). The congregations comprised by these two presbyteries were the ones which constituted the synod of the Shona Reformed Church. Only congregations from Morgenster and Gutu presbytery were members of the newly formed Synod. This governing body, the Synod, was autonomous and its decisions and regulations were no longer subject to the approval of the Mission Council or the Mission Board, argued Van der Merwe (1981:124). This was not the case with the presbyteries because they were under the supervision of the Mission Council. After the formation of the Shona Reformed Church synod, it was declared that the DRC in South Africa was responsible for the salaries of all European ministers who were serving in the Shona Reformed Church, whilst the Shona Reformed Church was responsible for all local ministers, evangelists and lay preachers, who were in the service of the church, purports Van der Merwe (1981:124).

At present, the RCZ (*Synod Minutes* 2014:16) as a synod has 17 presbyteries, of which 16 presbyteries are in Zimbabwe and one is outside the country. In the Synod report, which was presented by the Moderator of the RCZ in August 2014 at Zimuto mission, the presbyteries were listed as follows:

Table of Presbyteries as at August 2014

No.	Name of Presbytery	Province/Country
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1.	Morgenster	Masvingo
2.	Gutu	Masvingo
3.	Pamushana	Masvingo
4.	Chibi	Masvingo
5.	Jichidza	Masvingo
6.	Masvingo	Masvingo
7.	Alheit	Masvingo
8.	Makumbe	Manicaland
9.	Harare	Harare
10.	Highfield	Harare
11.	Kuwadzana	Harare
12.	Hatcliffe	Harare
13.	Bulawayo	Bulawayo
14.	Gweru	Midlands
15.	Kwekwe	Midlands
16.	Kadoma	Mashonaland West
17	Moderature ¹¹	United Kingdom and South Africa

The church, which started with only two presbyteries, has now grown to 17 presbyteries, which show that the church is growing. However, there is need for the RCZ to embark in evangelism so that the presbyteries will be found in all ten provinces of the country.

¹¹ Moderature is the Synodical Committee Executive, which is composed of eight members. The duty of the Moderature is to implement the decisions of the Synodical Committee. All congregations that are outside of the country (Zimbabwe) are supervised by the Moderature on behalf of the Synodical Committee, whereas all congregations within Zimbabwe are supervised by their respective presbyteries.

Mutumburanzou (1999:53) states that this was a breakthrough in the history of the RCZ because it indicated that the time was ripe for the church to be administered by indigenous leadership.

However, after this occasion, it was not until 4 May 1977 that the entire organization of the DRCM were officially handed over to the African Reformed Church by the DRC Cape Synod (Cronje 1981:191). The African Reformed Church was later renamed the RCZ after the country attained her independence on 18 April 1980.

The Synod of the RCZ is the Supreme body of the RCZ, which is constituted by:

1. All the serving ordained ministers of congregations who belong to the RCZ.
2. One delegated elder or deacon/deaconess from every established congregation.
3. Ordained ministers engaged in other official church posts shall have no right to vote, but can be voted for.
4. It assembles after every two years.
5. When the Synod is not in session its business will be conducted by the Synodical Committee;
- 6.1. Moderature (Synodical Executive Committee);
- 6.2. Each Presbytery represented by one elder/deacon and one minister or their alternates.
7. At the Synod meeting, the Synodical Committee Executive which is called the Moderature shall be elected which will consist of:
 - 7.1. Moderator (Minister)
 - 7.2. Vice Moderator (Minister)
 - 7.3. Scriber (Elder/Deacon/ness)
 - 7.4. Vice Scriber (Elder/Deacon/ness)
 - 7.5. Actuary (Minister)
 - 7.6. General Secretary (Ex officio) Minister
 - 7.7. Vice General Secretary (Ex-officio) Minister
 - 7.8. Treasurer (Ex-officio) or Assistant Treasurer.

(RCZ Bhuku yoMurairo 2010:1-2)

Those elected to the Moderature should have served the Church for more than two years and have attended more than one Synod meeting. These people are eligible for re-election as long as they are serving well (*RCZ Bhuku yoMurairo 2010:7-8*).

2.5 Training of Spiritual Workers

Because the number of church members and catechumens was constantly increasing and the evangelistic program was expanding, there was an urgent need for more Shona evangelists and ministers, says Van der Merwe (1981:112).

2.5.1 Training of Evangelists

The program of training of evangelists commenced at Morgenster mission on 22 June 1925. The first lecturer was A.A. Louw Jnr (Van der Merwe 1981:112). He also notes that the first people to be enrolled as evangelists were Jeremia Matanga from Gutu, Ezra Shumba¹² from Chibi, Shadreck Shumba from Chipinge, and Josia Chipadza from Makumbe in Buhera, notes Van der Merwe (1981:112).

The training of evangelists continued until 1935 and through these years 21 evangelists were trained, two of them were blind. These evangelists rendered valuable service to the church because they were doing evangelism, pastoral care and teaching of catechism classes as well, Van der Merwe (1981:112) acknowledges.

2.5.2 Training of Indigenous Ministers

In 1936, H.W. Murray was appointed as lecturer to train indigenous ministers at Morgenster mission and he was assisted for a short time by A.A. Louw Snr, says Van der Merwe (1981:114). He points out that the first two candidates to be enrolled to train as ministers were selected by the *Rangano Huru* from the first group of evangelists who had completed their training in 1927. Those enrolled were Ezra Shumba and Shadreck Shumba. After the completion of their studies, Ezra Shumba was ordained as a minister of Morgenster congregation on 27 August 1938. Shadreck was licensed at Morgenster congregation, however, he was never called or appointed to a congregation; therefore, he was never ordained and he later on settled on his farm (Van der Merwe 1981:114).

¹² Ezra Shumba is the first indigenous minister to be ordained as a Minister of Word and Sacraments in the RCZ. He was ordained in 1938. The late Rev. Ezra Shumba's name and ministry will be remembered by many people who enter the hall in the head office of the RCZ in Masvingo province.

Van der Merwe (1981:114) notes that the number of indigenous ministers who were trained at Morgenster rose from two to sixteen in the year 1936 to 1956; these ministers were laboring in both rural and urban congregations.

2.5.3 Training of Lay Preachers

Because of the growth of the church, the ministers were not capable of pastoring the number of people who were accepting Christ as their personal Savior. This led to the establishment of a six month course in Bible Studies in 1939, contends Van der Merwe (1981:115). The idea of this was to equip believers for effective Christian witness. Those who were trained in this course included three blind candidates, who were amongst the 29 who attended this course. This was a way of equipping a great number of church members for the priesthood of all believers. Those who did this Bible course were employed by the church to serve in rural areas, farms, mines and towns and received remuneration, says Van der Merwe (1981:115).

In the beginning, only missionaries were responsible for the training of ministers, evangelists and lay preachers. It took about 37 years for the missionaries to recruit indigenous lecturers to train fellow workers. Since 1962¹³ indigenous lecturers were recruited, starting with Rev. D.P. Mandebvu, who retired in 1983.

With this historical background of the RCZ, the research will now focus on the office of the deacon in the history of the Church and as it is in the Church Rules and Regulations (*RCZ Bhuku yoMurairo*) of the RCZ.

2.6. The Office of the Deacon in the RCZ

The RCZ 2010 *Rules and Regulations (RCZ Bhuku Yomurairo)*, clearly states that anyone who aspires to be a deacon has to be a RCZ church member. The RCZ deacons have voting rights in the Church Council and can also be elected as delegates to represent the congregation as delegates at the Presbytery and Synod. The *RCZ Bhuku Yomurairo* demands that members who will be elected to the office of deacon in the RCZ must meet the following qualifications:

¹³ Rev. D.P. Mandebvu was the first indigenous lecturer at Murray Theological College of the RCZ.

- i. Must have attained the age of twenty five, regardless of being a youth member who is not married (*RCZ Bhuku Yomurairo* 2010:20).
- ii. Must have stayed in the Congregation for at least one year or more as a full member (*RCZ Bhuku Yomurairo* 2010:20).
- iii. If possible, those who have never been to this post shall be given first preference (*RCZ Bhuku Yomurairo* 2010:20).
- iv. A deacon must serve in this office for two years and if re-elected, must serve for another two years. He/she is not permitted to serve in this office for more than four years without a rest. After four years, one can be elected back to the office of deacon after a rest of at least one year (*RCZ Bhuku Yomurairo* 2010:20).

Similarly, Hanko (1962) mentions in Article 22 of his book, *Notes on Church Polity*, that members of the congregation are given an opportunity to direct attention or recommend suitable candidates from each section. The Consistory or the Church Council will vote, using secret ballots, for one to take the office of a deacon in that section or preaching centre. This criterion is the same as that being used in the RCZ when electing members to the office of deacon. Strictly speaking, the examination of those elected in both the office of the elders and deacons in RCZ is missing.

Installation of the deacons will only take place after the names of those to be installed have been announced on three successive Sundays during the worship service and they will be installed during the worship service. Most of these installations are usually done during Holy Communion services and the end of the year. In the *RCZ Bhuku yoMurairo* (2010:23) it is stated that the purpose of announcing the names before the installation to the office are twofold:

1. To make sure that all members in the congregation are well informed of the nominations.
2. To give an opportunity to those who want to bring objections against the nomination or against the election as a whole (*RCZ Bhuku yoMurairo* 2010:23).

2.6.1. Women as Deacons in the RCZ

As has been noted earlier, when the RCZ attained her autonomy in 1952, the elders and deacons of the Church were supposed to be married men only. Women and youth were not allowed to take leadership posts in the Church Council, Presbytery and at Synod level. This can be supported with the minutes of the Synod that was held at Morgenster Mission in 1981, where the Women's Guild, hereafter referred to as the Women's Fellowship, requested to be included in the decision-making boards such as the Church Council, Presbytery and the Synod. Their request was unanimous rejected (*Synod Minutes* 1981:432).

In August 1984 at Zimuto Mission, the Synod accepted that women can be elected as deacons and elders in the Church. At the same General Synod, it was also agreed that women are allowed to read the liturgy when leading worship services (*Synod Minutes* 1984: 631/21).

Mutumburanzou (1999:20) notes that the struggle of women in the church in both the Synods of 1978 and of 1981 was passed positively at the Synod of 1984. From this Synod, women were allowed to take responsibility for the leadership of the church and could be elected as elders and deacons of the Church.

It took eight years for the congregations to recommend women as delegates to represent Church Councils in the highest decision-making boards of the Church. Zunga Congregation, Chivi Presbytery in Chivi district in Masvingo province was the first congregation to send a female delegate to represent their congregation at Synod level in 1992 (*Synod Minutes* 1992:66/3). Women were despised as people who cannot hold leadership positions in the RCZ. The first woman to be sent as a delegate at the Synod in 1992 was Mrs Majange.

Thank God, by the time this research was done, women are being elected as elders, deacons and some have been ordained as ministers of the Word and Sacraments.

2.6.2. Duties of deacons in the RCZ

It is stated in the *RCZ Bhuku yoMurairo* (2010:23) that the duties of deacons are as follows:

- i. To collect tithes, membership, and Sunday collections, hereafter referred to as Church offerings and thanksgivings with the help of the elders. This is also stated in the Constitution of the Reformed Church in Zambia (2013:70), which states that the duty of deacons is to encourage Christians to give their tithes and offerings required to extend the works of the Church in accordance with the Scriptures.

- ii. To care for the poor, although this must be done in consultation with the Church Council. In the Reformed Church in Zambia it is stated that the deacons must identify the poor and the needy that should be ministered to with regard to their spiritual and physical needs (The Constitution of the Reformed Church in Zambia 2013:70).
- iii. They must strategize ways and means of raising money for the whole congregation. Mutumburanzou (1995:19) notes that the issue of stewardship became the bone of contention in the RCZ because they were relying on donors who had withdrawn their support after independence because the indigenous Christians were not taught how to give and the necessity of tithing and giving church offerings. As a result of this, church members in some of the congregations were and are still unable to raise enough funds to support their own projects and to support their ministers.
- iv. Deacons are the ones responsible for receipting and banking all congregational funds as soon as possible because congregational funds must be kept in the bank.

Vorster (1999:45) explains that the main duty of deacons in the church, as it is stated in the Church Order, is to attend to the material and spiritual matters. This is the same as in the RCZ; deacons have the duty of collecting and receiving all resources for the congregation. Of course, in the *RCZ Bhuku yoMurairo* (2010:51) it is stated in Article 139 that members must be taught what is in the Word of God concerning the giving of tithes, building funds, Sunday collections, thanksgiving and other means of raising funds which the Church Council may see fit for the congregation.

Similarly, this is also explained by Zeze (2012:113) who stated in his dissertation that the task of the deacons is to look after the church and the needy.

The duties of the office of the deacon shall be the upliftment, comfort and support of those in need, collection and distribution of resources necessary for the diaconal work of the Church. They shall attend Congregational Council meetings, do house visitation and undertake works of charity, says Zeze (2013:24).

The administration of the funds in a congregation is the duty of the Finance Committee, where all deacons are members of this committee. They are the people responsible for the formulating the budget of the Congregation (*RCZ Bhuku yoMurairo* 2010:103).

The congregational budget must include monies for the central box, which is administered by the national Church treasurer; some of the money is allocated for the administration on the congregation and the Presbytery (*RCZ Bhuku yoMurairo* 2010:97). It is the duty of the deacons to see to it that funds are made available for the administration of the Church on a daily basis. Therefore, deacons in the RCZ are stewards of God's resources. Good stewardship of Church's resources is the vehicle for the development of the RCZ.

2.6.2.1. Stewardship in the RCZ

When the missionaries came to Zimbabwe from 1891 to 1952, all the Church work took place under the Mission Council, which was fully supported financially by the Mission Board in South Africa (Mutumburanzou 1999:67). From the beginning of mission work in Zimbabwe, indigenous Christians were not taught the importance of giving tithes or free will offering (Sunday collections). At the Synod of 1975, it was resolved that all money raised by congregations and other church departments should be channeled to the Central Box/Central Fund, which was established at the same Conference. Those who were to benefit from this fund were ministers, evangelists and all workers of the Church who work in various departments (*Synod Minutes* 1975:112/138).

However, this did not improve the way of giving in the RCZ until the church started to hold refresher courses on the importance on giving, starting with ministers and then members of the Church. This resulted in a marked improvement in giving by many Christians (Mutumburanzou 1999:179). The ministers, elders and deacons were challenged to lead by example, even in giving.

It is the duty of the office of deacons to teach member of the RCZ to understand what stewardship is, namely that is they have to carry the responsibility of being self-reliant instead of depending on partners from outside Zimbabwe. This was also highlighted by Mutumburanzou (1999:303) in his doctoral dissertation, when he said:

“Regarding the issue of stewardship in the RCZ, there has been a general lack of education among the Christians, especially during the missionary era. This was not caused because the people were poor or were unwilling to give to the Lord, but just because many had not learnt fully the meaning of giving, and even the need to give” (Mutumburanzou 1999:303).

If the office of deacons is fully utilized in the RCZ, the Church can be self-supporting and all her departments because good stewardship is the backbone of the development of the Church. This will help the Congregation Treasurer and the Finance Committee to fully implement all cost centers of the Congregation without any limitations as the resources will be readily available all the time, asserts Mutumburanzou (1999:303).

2.6.2.2. Central Deacon¹⁴/Congregation Treasurer

One deacon should be chosen and he/she must be in position to prepare the income and expenditure of the money in the congregation Article 23:3 (*RCZ Bhuku yoMurairo* 2010:42). Financial reports must be given to the congregation each year and at every Church Council meeting. He/she is called the central deacon or congregation treasurer.

Central deacons in the congregations are chief advisors of financial issues in their congregations (*Central Deacons Minutes* 2011:05/4).

The Central Deacon must ensure that all the monies received are paid into the congregation's bank account. All monies must be banked first before being used, so it is the duty of the central deacon to see that all collections for the month must be banked on the last working day of that month, regardless of the amount collected.

At one of the central deacons' meeting held at the RCZ headquarters, the Church treasurer emphasized that central deacons should take a leading role in giving and teaching about tithing in their congregations (*Central Deacons Minutes* 2005:01/3).

2.6.2.3. Roles of Central Deacons

The Finance Committee Chairperson, who addressed the central deacons at their meeting on 14 May 2011, highlighted the following as the Key Result Areas (KRA) of central deacons:

- i. Safe keeping of the church wealth
- ii. Gather church wealth

¹⁴ In the RCZ the treasurer of the congregation is referred to as the central deacon. All section deacons are to bank all their collections to the central deacon for mastering and are the one to represent the congregation in all matters that involves finances. His/her duties is to receive all collections of the congregation from the section deacon and to prepare income and expenditure statements for the congregation.

- iii. Manage use of money (expenditure)
- iv. Records keeping and update the congregation (financial report).
- v. Assess or review performance
- vi. Take responsibility for the results whether good or bad (*Central Deacons Minutes* 2011:05/4).

2.6.3 Responsibilities of the Finance Committee

The Finance Committee, which is an arm of the office of deacons in the congregation, is there to oversee the overall management of the financial and other resources of the congregation in accordance with the RCZ finance policy procedures.

The Constitution, by-laws and Procedures of the Reformed Church in Zambia (2013:132) states the same things as the RCZ, where it says that the committee must conduct various capacity building programmes for all deacons within the congregation. It is stated that they must carry out internal audits of church finances in the congregation.

The Finance Committee was constituted by the Synod with the purpose of advising the Moderation, which is the Synodical Committee Executive on the Church's financial issues; Church budgetary controls and assist in the Church's national fundraising activities for its strategic projects (*Synod Minutes* 2014:112).

2.6.3.1 Duties of the Finance Committee

1. To ensure that proper books of accounts are kept at the congregation.
2. To ensure that the congregation has an updated master asset register and inventory record.
3. To ensure that payments are made as and when they fall due and to keep proper record of any outstanding amounts in appropriate books.
4. To prepare and control annual congregation budgets.
5. To prepare monthly expenditure, income projections and analysis financial reports from the Central Deacon.
6. To propose various methods of raising enough resources needed in the congregation.

7. The minister, being the Chairperson of the congregation, shall ensure that proper financial management is implemented in accordance with the RCZ financial policy procedures (2013:132).

8. At Synod level the Finance Committee is mandated by the Church to visit all congregations that are not performing well in terms of their budget as a way of encouraging them and to conduct workshops with presbyteries, Church Councils and deacons. This was resolved at the RCZ Synod in 1996 at Morgenster Mission (*Synod minutes* 1996: 1081/68). This is also supported by what was reported at the Synod in August 2014 at Zimuto Mission, the Finance Committee noted that before they embark on an outreach programme, an average contribution to the central box was 47%, but after a national outreach the average contributions rise up to 60%. All the Presbyteries were visited during this outreach programme (*Synod Minutes* 2014:115).

This is also supported by what is stated in the RCZ Rules and Regulations Article 150:5 (*RCZ Bhuku yoMurairo* 2010:103) that the Minister in charge of the congregation has the statement of the congregation. However, the minister must be relieved or exempted from handling congregation funds.

According to the *Bhuku yoMurairo* of the RCZ (2010:102 Article 150:2-3) it is the duty of the Finance Committee to safe guard all congregational funds. The committee must give a financial report at every Church Council meeting. The Church magazine, *Munyai WaShe* (Messenger of God), of March (2010:11) noted that it is the duty of the Finance Committee to prepare the congregation's budget and to present it for approval by the Church Council.

2.7. Church Treasurer

As noted earlier in 7.8, the Executive of the Synodical Committee has the posts of the treasurer and the assistant; their duties are to safeguard the funds of the whole Church and to prepare the budget for the Church. The treasurer is there to safeguard that the Congregations meet their monthly contribution to the Central box. The treasurer and his/her assistant are members of the RCZ Finance Committee. He/She is responsible for planning the salaries of all Church workers, including ministers. He/She also gives financial reports to the Synodical Committee and also to the Synod. The treasurer is further the signatories of all Church

accounts and have to make sure that all Church accounts are audited annually by the internal and external auditors, as is recommended by the Church (*RCZ Bhuku yoMurairo* 2010:100).

The Church treasurer periodically holds meetings with the central deacons as a way of notifying their performance on a quarterly basis. He/She is the one who present budget proposals to the central deacons at the beginning of each year (*Central Deacons Minutes* 2011:05/5). This is also supported by what the Finance chairperson reported during the 2014 Synod, namely that most congregations continued to struggle with their Central box budgets. This, however, was attributed to the economic climate of the country because it has affected everyone, including our congregants (*Synod Minutes* 2014:112).

If the treasurer is out or on leave, the assistant treasurer will perform the duties of the latter. The treasurer must be in a position to prepare the income and expenditure. The Church treasurer has the duty to revise the budget upwards or downwards with the blessing of the Finance Committee when it receives the approval from the Synodical Committee (*Central Deacons Minutes* 2010:11/3).

The Church treasurer is also a member of the Board of Trustees together with the Moderator, Scribe, General Secretary and Actuary. The Board of Trustees shall have the power to buy, sell, let or hire property, and exchange, transfer, or receive funds by way of donations or otherwise (*RCZ Bhuku yoMurairo* 2010:99).

The treasurer is the head of the Finance division in the Church. The treasurer reports to the Finance Board, which is appointed at the Synod every two years. The Finance Committee consists of highly qualified and successful people in the area of finances (*Munyai WaShe* 2010:01/19). The Church, through its Synodical Committee, is the responsible authority and oversees the financial administration of all departments.

2.8. Conclusion

The historical background of Zimbabwe as a country has shown that even though it is landlocked, on the other hand it has a vast amount of resources to export and earn foreign currency. This historical background is very important for the understanding the history and the growth of the RCZ, which was founded by the DRC missionaries from South Africa.

During their missionary work in Zimbabwe the missionaries did not only concentrate on the preaching of the Word. They founded churches and established Church offices, one of which

is the office of deacon. Deacons in the RCZ are members of the Church Council with the specific task of collecting of money and taking care of the resources of the Church. They are also responsible for raising and distributing those resources.

As has been highlighted in this chapter, the deacons, through the Finance Committee, are the stewards of God's resources in the RCZ. In the next chapter, the research will attempt to refer to the biblical evidence of the office of the deacon. The RCZ will need to analyze what the Bible says about the office of deacon. If it is biblical, where does the RCZ fall short?

CHAPTER THREE

The Scriptural Basis for the Office of the Deacon

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will attend to the Scriptural foundation for the office of the deacon. Amongst others, attention is given in this chapter to the historical roots of the diaconate; the meaning of the word ‘deacon’; the distinction of the offices of deacon and elder; the office of the deacon in the New Testament; the duties of the deacon; stewardship; the qualifications for the office; and lastly, the deaconess in the New Testament.

3.2 Historical Roots of the Diaconate

Both De Jong (1952:27) and McKee (1989:66) note that the biblical basis for the origin of the diaconate is recorded in Luke’s writings in Acts 6:1-6. De Jong¹⁵ (1952:30) highlights that the roots of the diaconal office can be found in the history of the Jewish people. There is no mention of deacons under the Old Testament dispensation. The contributions of offerings were under the care of the Levites and Priests (Exodus 38:21; Numbers 1:50, 53; Ezra 8:24-30, 33) (Douglas & Bruce 1962:959). Special provisions were made under the law for the relief of the poor (Exodus 23:11; Leviticus 19:9, 10; 25:25-55) (Marshall and Packer 1996:959). Deuteronomy 15:11 states the following: “The poor will never cease out of the land”. The Israelites were mandated to see to it that no one was left destitute. The Old Testament is replete with references to the poor and their relief (De Jong 1952:31).

God is the protector of Israel. God warned his people to give special consideration to the widows and the fatherless: “If thou afflict them at all, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry; and my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword; and your wives shall be widows and your children fatherless” (Exodus 22:23-24). According to De Jong (1952:34), all offices in the church find their roots in Jesus Christ, who was clothed with three offices, namely priest, king, and prophet. The offices in the New Testament are visible representations of Christ’s triple offices, which were the ministries of teaching, rule, and

¹⁵ De Jong is a pastor of the First Christian Reformed Church of Hamilton in Ontario, Canada. He holds a Ph.D. degree from Hartford Theological Seminary and is the author of *The Covenant Idea in New Theology, Taking Heed to the Flock, The Christian Reformed Church, The Christian Life, Our Great Commission, and the Church’s Witness to the World*.

mercy. The origin of the diaconate derives from the power that Christ received from the Father to perform His ministry on earth. At the time of His departure, he conferred the same task to the apostles. De Jong notes that the apostles were to do this through the ministry of teaching, church government and through the ministry of mercy (1952:36).

3.3. The meaning of the word deacon

The Greek word for deacon is διάκονος, *diakonos* (a waiter, servant; anyone who performs any service, an administrator).¹⁶ The deacon in the Bible is regarded as one who does what promotes the welfare and prosperity of the church.

According to Cowen, the word ‘deacon’ (*diakonos*) has three different meanings:

1. The word ‘deacon’ refers to one who executes the command of another, such as a master. A deacon is also referred to as a servant.
2. In the church, it refers to one who cares for the poor and has charge of and distributes the money allotted for them.
3. It can refer to a waiter, one who serves food and drink (Cowen 2003:10).

In the original language, the word ‘deacon’ could mean a servant. The title itself is as descriptive as any job description could be. Colin Brown (1975:544, 546) describes how the word has been defined in its various forms:

1. *Diakoneo* and its derivatives etymology suggests personal help to others.
2. *Diakonia* means service at the table, as in Luke 10:40; Acts 6:1.
3. *Diakonos*’ primary meaning is one who serves at tables.¹⁷

For Cowen (2003.103), the word ‘deacon’ refers to an office of the church. The office of deacon was instituted to lead the ministry of charity in the New Testament. A deacon by advantage of the office assigned by the church cares for the poor and has charge of and distributes the money collected for their use. According to Williams (1972:119), a deacon is a church officer who has been given the task of the practical administration in material matters to those people in need, regardless of whether they are members of the church. The deacon’s

¹⁶ Strong's Concordance. Thayers Greek Lexicon, Electronic Database. 2011 by BibleSoft, Inc.

¹⁷ The Greek words defining the word ‘deacon’ was accessed from the Strong’s Concordance, which translates Greek words into English.

task was mainly the administration of the charitable funds of the Church to the sick and those in need (Goodykoontz 1963:40). Likewise, Meeter (1993:71) points out that the Dort Church Order assumes that the role of the deacons is that of performing ecclesiastical charity because the foundation of this office has its roots in Acts 6. This was also supported by Fitzmyer (1998:344) and Peterson (2009:230) when they indicated that the origin of the office the deacon is found in Acts (Acts 6:1-7).

De Jong notes that the word 'deacon' is derived from the Greek word *diakonos* (1952:40). According to *Strong's Greek Concordance* (2011)¹⁸, there are 29 occurrences of the Greek word διάκονος (*diakonos*) in the New Testament. For example, in Matthew 20:16, ἔσται ὑμῶν διάκονος means 'let him be your servant'. In Matthew 22:13, εἶπεν τοῖς διακόνοις Δῆσαντες αὐτοῦ refers to a servant who is bound to him'. Matthew 23:11, ἔσται ὑμῶν διάκονος indicates 'will be your servant'. In Mark 9:35, καὶ πάντων διάκονος means 'of all servants'. Mark 10:43, ἔσται ὑμῶν διάκονος refers to 'will be your servant'. In the book of John 2:5, αὐτοῦ τοῖς διακόνοις ὃ ἄν means 'to the servants', whilst John 2:9 οἱ δὲ διάκονοι ἤδεισαν οἱ and John 12:26 καὶ ὁ διάκονος ὁ ἐμὸς means 'the servant of me (my servant)'.¹⁹

In the Pauline epistles the following usage of *diakonos* occurs: Romans 13:4 θεοῦ γὰρ διάκονός ἐστιν σοὶ 'of god indeed a servant he is to you'; Romans 13:4 θεοῦ γὰρ διάκονός ἐστιν ἔκδικος 'of god indeed a servant he is an avenger'; Romans 15:8 γὰρ Χριστὸν διάκονον γεγενῆσθαι περιτομῆς 'indeed Christ a servant has become of [the] circumcision'; Romans 16:1 οὗσαν καὶ διάκονον τῆς ἐκκλησίας 'being also servant of the church'; 1 Corinthians 3:5 ἐστιν Παῦλος διάκονοι δι' ὧν 'is Paul servants through whom'; 2 Corinthians 3:6 ἰκάνωσεν ἡμᾶς διακόνοους καινῆς διαθήκης 'made competent us [as] servants of a new covenant'; 2 Corinthians 6:4 ὡς θεοῦ διάκονοι ἐν ὑπομονῇ 'as God's servants in endurance'; 2 Corinthians 11:15 καὶ οἱ διάκονοι αὐτοῦ μετασχηματίζονται 'also the servants of him masquerade'; 2 Corinthians 11:15 μετασχηματίζονται ὡς διάκονοι δικαιοσύνης ὧν 'masquerade as servants

¹⁸ Strong's Concordance. Thayer's Greek Lexicon, Electronic Database. Copyright © 2002, 2003, 2006, 2011 by Bible soft, Inc. Accessed 04/08/2015.

¹⁹ Barnes, Albert. *Barnes' Notes on the Whole Bible*. Calvin, John. *Calvin's Commentaries on the Bible*. Clarke, Adam. *Clarke's Commentary*. Coffman, Burton. *Coffman Commentaries on the Bible*. Jamieson, Fausset & Brown. 1878. *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible, Unabridged*. Guzik, David. *Guzik's Commentaries on the Bible*. Henry, Matthew. *Henry's Complete Commentary on the Bible*. Barclay, William. *Barclay's Daily Study Bible. Cambridge Greek Testament for School and Colleges*. Robertson, Nicoll William. *The Expositor's Greek Testament. Greek Testament Critical Exegetical Commentary 1863-1878*. Meyer, August Wilhelm. 1832. *Meyer's Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*. Robertson, A.T. *Robertson's Word Pictures in the New Testament*. <http://www.studydrive.org/commentaries/cal/>. Accessed 04/08/2015

of righteousness of whom'; 2 Corinthians 11:23 διάκονοι Χριστοῦ εἰσὶν 'servants of Christ are they'; Galatians 2:17 Χριστὸς ἁμαρτίας διάκονος μὴ γένοιτο 'Christ of sin minister never may it be'; Ephesians 3:7 οὗ ἐγενήθην διάκονος κατὰ τὴν 'of which I became servant according to the'; Ephesians 6:21 καὶ πιστὸς διάκονος ἐν κυρίῳ 'and faithful servant in [the] Lord'; Philippians 1:1 ἐπισκόποις καὶ διακόνους '[the] overseers and deacons'; Colossians 1:7 ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν διάκονος τοῦ χριστοῦ 'for you a servant of Christ'; Colossians 1:23 ἐγὼ Παῦλος διάκονος 'I, Paul minister'; Colossians 1:25 ἐγενόμην ἐγὼ διάκονος κατὰ τὴν 'became I minister according to the'; Colossians 4:7 καὶ πιστὸς διάκονος καὶ σύνδουλος 'and faithful servant and fellow bondman'; 1 Timothy 3:8 Διακόνους ὡσαύτως σεμνοὺς 'deacons in like manner dignified'; 1 Timothy 3:12 διάκονοι ἔστωσαν μιᾶς 'those who serve let be of one'; 1 Timothy 4:6 καλὸς ἔση διάκονος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ 'good you will be a servant of Christ Jesus'.²⁰

The word *diakonos* (servant) and its variations appears, as shown above, 29 times in Scripture with the connotation of service on each occurrence.²¹ De Jong (1952:40) acknowledges that the word 'servant' was especially used in the New Testament to designate those who waited on tables. He concedes that the word 'servant' was used to refer to anyone who serves or works for another; secondly, it refers to a religious or ethical relationship by which something or someone is benefitted by another (e.g. the servant of sin, the servant of the law, the servant of circumcision) and lastly, it indicates an ecclesiastical office that existed next to that of the eldership (De Jong 1952:40).

Burtchaell (1992:318) is convinced that deacons are servants given authority for the service of the welfare of others not themselves. Even the story of Luke (Acts 6; 8:4-8) specifies that the task of deacons was to offer service whilst the Twelve were to preach and pray. This is also supported by Berghoef and De Korster (1980:65). The duty of the deacons was to wait

²⁰ Barnes, Albert. *Barnes' Notes on the Whole Bible*; Calvin, John. *Calvin's Commentaries on the Bible*; Clarke, Adam. *Clarke's Commentary*; Coffman, Burton. *Coffman Commentaries on the Bible*; Jamieson, Fausset & Brown. 1878. *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible, Unabridged*; Guzik, David. *Guzik's Commentaries on the Bible*; Henry, Matthew. *Henry's Complete Commentary on the Bible*; Barclay, William. *Barclay's Daily Study Bible*; *Cambridge Greek Testament for School and Colleges*; Robertson, Nicoll William. *The Expositor's Greek Testament*; *Greek Testament Critical Exegetical Commentary 1863-1878*; Meyer, August Wilhelm. 1832 *Meyer's Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*; Robertson, A.T. *Robertson's Word Pictures in the New Testament*. <http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/cal/>. Accessed 04/08/2015

²¹ Albert Barnes' *Notes on the Whole Bible*, Matthew Henry's *Complete Commentary on the Bible* 1706 <http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/bnb>. Accessed 04/08/2015.

on the tables whilst the apostles devote themselves to prayer and to the ministry of the Word. The term *diakonos* can therefore also be translated as ‘the ministry of service’.

3.4. The distinction of the office of Deacon and Elder

The office of deacons and elders in the New Testament are mentioned together, as in Philippians 1:1 and in 1 Timothy 3:1-13. The qualifications are similar, but not identical. For example, the bishop is required to be ‘able to teach’, whereas the deacon does not have that expectation. The differences in title and qualifications mean that the offices are distinct (Grissom 1991:42).²² According to Grissom (1991:42), the term ‘bishop’ is translated as ‘overseer’ in some translations. It is the word from which we get our word ‘episcopal’, which means, ‘to look upon, inspect, oversee, look after, care for’ and refers to ‘the care of the church which rested upon the elders’. The term is used interchangeably with ‘elder’ and ‘shepherd’ (i.e. pastor) in Acts 20 and 1 Peter 5. There is no question on the authority of the office: “Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine” (see 1 Timothy 5:17). Grissom (1991:45) further points out the three facts that stand out in this verse:

- i. Deacons and elders are the offices in the church. These offices are distinct; elders are not deacons, deacons are not elders.
- ii. The terms, elder, pastor (shepherd), and overseer (bishop) are used synonymously in the New Testament.
- iii. In the New Testament, elders had the role of the general oversight of the church.

In Philippians 1:1 and in numerous references in early Christian literature outside of the New Testament, bishops and/or elders and deacons are mentioned together, with deacons mentioned last. Because of this order, and because of the natural connotations of the word *diakonos*, most interpreters believe that from the beginning, deacons served as assistants of church leaders (Grissom 1991:45).

²² Fred A. Grissom 1991. *The Holman Bible Dictionary*. [Online]. Available: http://www.baptiststart.com/print/role_of_deacons.html. Accessed 05/08/2015.

3.5 The Office of the Deacon in New Testament

McKee's²³ (1989:63) basic argument in her book *Diakonia in the classical Reformed tradition and today* is that the office of the deacon was instituted to attend to the care of the poor and to minister to them in a holistic way. The origin of the office the deacons are described by Luke in Acts 6:1-6 as follows:

When the number of the disciples was greatly increasing, complaint was made by the Hellenists (the Greek-speaking Jews) against the [native] Hebrews because their widows were being overlooked and neglected in the daily ministration (distribution of relief). So the Twelve [apostles] convened the multitude of the disciples and said, It is not seemly or desirable or right that we should have to give up or neglect [preaching] the Word of God in order to attend to serving at tables and superintending the distribution of food. Therefore select out from amongst yourselves, brethren, and seven men of good and attested character in addition repute, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may assign to look after this business and duty.

When a murmuring arose amongst the Greeks, because in the administration of the poor their widows were neglected, the apostles excused themselves, saying that they were unable to discharge both offices, to preach the word and serve tables. They therefore requested the multitude to elect seven men of good reports to whom the office might be committed (*Calvin Institutes Book IV Chapter 3*). McKee (1989:63) concludes that the office of the deacon is an independent office because nowhere in Scripture it is referred to as an office of assistant of elders.

The office of deacon was established in order to enable the apostles to function effective in their preaching and teaching ministry. Grissom (1991:45) notes that some scholars have understood this passage to mean that it is the role of deacons to oversee the business of the church. Firstly, the text says, “this business,” not “the business” and the business being referred to is the business of benevolence. The original seven deacons were people who were able to serve the Lord in ways which were more spiritual in nature than merely delivering food. When the apostles laid out the plan for the creation of this office, “The saying pleased the whole multitude” (Acts 6:5). The complaints about the benevolence ministry stopped.

²³ She is associate professor in Church History at Andover Newton Theological School, Newton Centre, and Massachusetts. Her previous books include *John Calvin on the Diaconate* and *Liturgical Almsgiving*.

These complaints were by the Greek speaking Jews. According to Grissom²⁴, it seems that the Hebrew-speaking Jews bent over backwards to preserve the church's unity, for all the men selected had Greek names; Stephen, the man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, Philip; Prochorus; Nicanor; Timon; Parmenas and Nicolaus, a Gentile from Antioch who had been converted to Judaism earlier.

The immediate impact of the creation of the office of deacon was to eliminate the controversy in the church and to get the church back on course in fulfilling its mission: "Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:8). Two roles of the deacon can be discerned in the New Testament, namely the distribution of alms (service of mercy/charity) and the administration of charity.

3.6. Duties of the deacon

3.6.1. Service of Mercy

According to McKee (1989:154) and Gamble (1992:168), the office of the deacon was established as a ministry to offer service to the poor. This was contrary to what the Roman Catholics were doing because their teaching was that the deacons were to act as assistants to the priests (Gamble 1992:168). The 'serving tables' of Acts 6: 2 is a matter of caring for the poor, and not only of assisting in the celebration of the Mass, as in the Church of Rome. Gamble (1992:168) and McKee (1989:154) object to the idea that deacons were to be assistants of elders and priests. The duty of the deacons were rather to take care of the poor (Acts 6:1-6). Therefore, both Gamble and McKee agree on the Scriptural basis of the office of the deacon and conclude that the office of the deacon was a necessity and a permanent office in the early church (McKee 1984:158).

According to McKee (1989:169), in both Acts 6:1-6 and 1 Timothy 3:8-13) deacons are charged with the collection, administration of the church treasury, and the care for the poor.

²⁴ Fred A. Grissom 1991. *The Holman Bible Dictionary*. [Online]. Available: http://www.baptiststart.com/print/role_of_deacons.html. Accessed 05/08/2015.

The role of the deacon is the administration of charity and the distribution of alms; this also includes the seeking out of those in need (McKee 1989:183). McKee (1989:184) argues that the alms the deacons administer are a kind of sacrifice, for it is the New Testament re-interpretation of ceremonial offerings, which were required in the Old Testament worship.

Gamble (1992:168) in *Calvin's Ecclesiology: Sacraments and Deacons* agrees with McKee (1989:184) that the care for the poor was entrusted to the deacons in the early church. However, Gamble (1992:168) argues that there were two kinds of deacons as mentioned by Paul in his letter to 1 Timothy 5: 9-10: "A widow may not be put on the list of widows at all unless she is over sixty, has been faithful to her husband, and is well known for her good deeds, such as bringing up children, showing hospitality, washing the feet of the Lord's people, helping those in trouble and devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds". Gamble (1992:270) states that the argument on the conception of a double diaconate in the New Testament rests upon the reading of different texts, such as those in 1 Timothy 5:9-10 and Romans 12:8: "It is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, and do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully."

The duties of deacons in the New Testament was to collect donations and money for the poor and those in need and to distribute these materials to those in needy for at least on a twice weekly basis (Barclay 1956:98). This is supported by Peterson (2009:232), who says that deacons were appointed to serve the tables by doing the practical ministry of serving and comforting the widows, the needy and the sick in the church and those in the community. De Jong concluded that the deacon's duty is to gather and distribute the alms in the church (1952:42, c.f. Powers 1996:148). The office of the deacon was established to care for the poor and the sick. McKee argues that the major functions of the deacons are the collections and administration of finance to address the needs of the poor and the sick (McKee 1989:64). Gamble (1992:266-270) explains that the works of charity was directed to the Christian community by officers who were bearing the title of deacons basing his arguments on Acts 6:1-6 and 1 Timothy 3:8-13. Deacons were not expected to be people who are double tongued, not addicted to too much wine or greedy of gain; they must be serious and hold the mystery of faith (Gamble 1992:272). Hale (1996:72) argues that the term 'deacon' means 'one who serves' and were chosen to administer the worldly affairs of the church and to look after the poor and the sick (c.f. Hendricksen 1957:133). Cowen (2003:110) also emphasizes that the duties of the deacons are not systematically stated anywhere in the New Testament.

Based on 1 Timothy 3:10 their ministry was intended to serve by taking care of the physical needs of the church.

Similarly, in the Book of Acts, it is clearly stated that the deacons were to be in charge of the serving at the table (Acts 6). The responsibility of deacons, according to Grudem (1994:919), included the distribution of food to widows who were in need and to care for the poor. This view is also supported by Van Wyk (1997:95), who states that the expression ‘to wait on the tables’ from the context of the deacon’s work from the biblical perspective is the collection and control of gifts from the congregation for the poor and the distribution of these gifts.

Barclay (1953:97) notes that in 1 Corinthians 16:2 Paul advised the Church at Corinth that the offering must be kept in readiness by the time he came. In view of this, it is advisable that Church members should know when the deacon will visit or when the collection is to be taken up in the Church, says Peterson (2009:240). This is because the deacons are a special group of people chosen by the congregants to address the social needs of the people. Barclay (1953:51) says that in Acts 6:1-6 the office-bearers who were chosen were appointed to offer practical service as a way of putting Christianity into practical action. Collins (2002:78) refers to deacons in the New Testament as servers. Their duty is to collect offering goods for the poor and distribute these goods to those in need.

Olson (1989:72) argues that the office of the deacons the New Testament was instituted to oversee three functions, namely the receiving of gifts, disbursement of these gifts and visiting the poor. Thus, their daily activities were to work with the poor and widows who came to them or by visiting them in their homes. Grudem’s (1994:919) basic argument in his book *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* is that even though the office of the deacons is mentioned in 1 Timothy 3:8-13, their functions are not spelled out. However, the qualifications demanded for one to qualify for the office of deacon suggest some functions. A close look at 1 Timothy 3:8 suggests that they had some responsibility in caring for the finances of the church, given that they had to be people who were “not greed for gain”, says Grudem (1994:919).

In his concluding remarks, Grudem (1994:920) argued that:

“It is significant that nowhere in the New Testament do deacons have ruling authority over the church as the elders do, nor are deacons ever required to be able to teach scripture or sound doctrine”.

Deacons' sole responsibility from a biblical perspective is that of the collection and distribution of alms to the poor, sick, those in need, and the care of the financial affairs of the church whilst the apostles concentrate on prayer and the preaching of the Word.

According to McKee, the diaconate is the ministry of the Church established to care for the poor and the sick. As alluded to in Acts 6 when the seven were appointed, their duty was to see that the daily needs of the widows were catered for. Cowen (2003:111) states that the seven were appointed to serve the tables, which mean that they were distributing food to the poor and those in need. This was also supported by De Jong (1952:183), because he contends that the office of the deacon in Acts 6 was inaugurated for the relief of the widows in the early Church. The Church is the family of God and therefore she should take care of the poor within their communities, regardless of their Church affiliation, as was being done in the early Church. The office of the deacon was instituted to take care of the poor.

Berghoef and De Korster (1980:89) advocated that God's desire is to see the widow, the orphans, the poor and the afflicted being taken care of. Deacons are called upon to prevent poverty, as well as to minister to it. McKee (1989:64) purports that Calvin was of the opinion that the office of the deacon was established in the Church to take care for the poor. She continues to argue that, as it is described by Luke in Acts 6:3, the office of the deacon was established to attend to the care of the poor and minister to them.

The office of the deacon in the Bible was not instituted to only take care of the poor, but also to take care for the sick. This is supported by De Witt (1969:86), who highlighted in his book *Jus Divinum: The Westminster Assembly and the Divine Right of Church Government* that at one of their conferences, they spend more than three hours discussing whether or not to allow widows in the Church to be elected as deacons

McKee (1989:64) argues that widows who were appointed as deacons in Paul's letter to Timothy (1 Timothy 5:9-10) were there to offer personal care to sick in their homes and hospitals (McKee 1989:64). Cowen (2003:114) agrees with McKee because the former noted that deacons are there to minister to those in need, to the sick and the friendless.

De Jong's (1952:187) basic argument in his book *The ministry of mercy for today* is that in Matthew 25:35-43, the disciples are admonished to feed the hungry, visit prisoners and comfort the sick. So it is not optional for the deacons to visit and care for the sick, but it is the command from the Bible. Our example is our Lord Jesus Christ because during his earthly

ministry He did not only preach the Word, but He also fed those in need, comforted and healed the sick (De Jong 1952:187). Cowen (2003:114) also points out that deacons may also be referred to as the Church's ministers of mercy because they are there to show Christ's mercy to those who are sick.

3.6.2 The Deacon and House Visitation

The deacons must visit, help, and encourage where there is need, and urge church members to render assistance. Therefore, house visitation is a very important duty of the deacon because it will help them to assess the degree of assistance needed. However, Berghoef and De Korster (1980:94) argue that visitation in the office of deacons in the New Testament times, was the sole responsibility of the second group of deacons, widows, who were not allowed to hold public office in the church. Calvin, basing his arguments on 1 Timothy 5:9-10, noted that deaconesses served as nurses in hospitals, cared for the handicapped, and visited the sick in their homes (Berghoef & De Korster 1980:94).

McKee (1984:152) agrees with Berghoef and De Korster (1980:94) by acknowledging that the widows elected as deaconesses in Paul's letter to Timothy (1 Timothy 5:9-10) were tasked to take care of the domestic and private business of giving personal care to the sick and visiting the poor.

The research agrees with De Jong (1952:149) when he says that deacons must do house visitation with the Gospel of grace as it applies to the lives of God's people and brings peace, comfort, peace and security to them. Therefore, the sole purpose of their visit to the needy in their homes is to comfort them. Deacons must be people of God who are well versed in the Scriptures. This is supported by Cowen (2003:105), who notes that according to Acts 6, a deacon must be someone who is full of wisdom and full of the Holy Spirit.

Van Oene (1990:113) highlighted that when the deacons visit people to distribute Christ's gifts, they are to see to it that they also encourage and comfort those who receive the gifts of Christ's love with the Word of God. Berghoef and De Korster (1980:79) support this and noted that the deacon must not be someone who is greedy and double-tongued. Deacons of the New Testament Church were encouraged to speak truth in love whenever executing their duty. This shows that they were supposed to be honest people in whatever they were doing. Faithfulness was a prerequisite during the administration of gifts to the needy and during house visitation.

Deacons in the Book of Acts 6 (Acts 6:2) were supposed to be men of good repute. Berghoef and De Korster (1980:77) note that this was one of the qualifications for one to be appointed a deacon, because good repute and visitation work hand in hand. For one to be well received by the people whom he is visiting, someone must be a person of good character. The object of the appointment of the first seven deacons and their successors was that the apostles might be relieved from serving tables, and that the latter might give themselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the Word (Acts 6:2-4). The qualifications therefore required for deacons are not excellence to teach or preach, but are honest report, prudence, gravity, temperance, faith, consistency, being full of the Holy Ghost, and not greedy of lucre (Acts 6:3; 1 Tim. 3:8, 9,10).²⁵

3.6.3 Deacons as Administrators

The deacons must have something to give to the poor, widows, and the sick; therefore it means that they have the duty of gathering offerings for that purpose. McKee (1989:66) argues that deacons were designated with the distribution of the alms to the poor whilst the apostles concentrate on the preaching of the Word and prayers. She also contends that Scripture specifically designates deacons as those whom the Church appointed to distribute alms, take care of the poor and serve as stewards of the common chest of the poor (McKee 1989:65-66). McKee (1989:69) also highlights that those seven who were elected to wait on tables (Acts 6:3) were elected to care for the poor; that is, they were administrators of offerings. The care for the poor in New Testament was entrusted to the deacons, argues Gamble (1992:266), who goes on to elaborate that two kinds of deacons are mentioned in Romans 12:8. He explains that the first group was designated to distribute the alms to the poor, whereas the second group referred to those who were taking care for the poor and the sick. Collins (2002:78) supports Gamble and McKee and he also argues that the duty of the deacons in the New Testament were to collect offerings and to distribute these offerings to the need that is caring for the poor.

The Bible clearly states that people should give their offerings. De Jong (1952:136) also mentions that many Scriptures urge people to give without measure (Luke 6:38; 1 Corinthians 9:6) and there are some of the verses that encourage people to give; therefore it is the duty of the deacons to administer these offerings for the sake of God's kingdom. The

²⁵ Hodge, Aspin Wall. 1882. *What Is Presbyterian Law? As Defined by the Church Courts*, (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1882), pp. 63.

apostle Paul emphasized the importance of bringing gifts for the poor during his ministry. This was to come as an expression of corporate worship. In 1 Corinthians 16, Paul regulated the giving and receiving of relief offerings for the believers in Judea (De Jong 1952:132). This occupies the office deacons because they were there ones entrusted with the administration of these offerings.

Van Oene (1990:111) acknowledges that deacons need funds in order for them to be able to extend help to those who are in need. As noted in Acts 6, they were to wait on the tables, distributing the gifts to the widows; this means that the resources were readily available. It is the duty of the deacons to gather the offerings from the congregation to be distributed to those in need. McKee (1984:152) also points out that male deacons had the task and administration of the alms and the goods that were given to support the poor. McKee (1984:154) argues that Acts 6 shows that the care and administering of alms and supporting the poor and all kind of supervision were the responsibility of the deacons.

The deacons' task in the New Testament Church was the administration of the charitable funds of the church, as Goodykoontz (1963:40) argues. This was against the thinking of some scholars from the Roman Catholic tradition, who were of the opinion that the deacons were regarded as assistants to the priests and bishops of the early Church, says McKee (1984:151). Proper administration of gifts to the widows, sick and the poor was the order of the day during the early Church and this led the apostles to advocate for the Christians of that time to appoint seven men to wait on the tables whilst they (apostles) concentrate on the preaching of the Word.

Hale (1996:814) indicates that deacons are the second main group of officers in the church and their main responsibility is to help people who are in need and to take care of the property and financial affairs of the church. According to Hale, the deacons should be men of good character (see Acts 6:1-4) (1996:207).

Berghoef and De Korster's (1980:19) basic argument in their book, *The deacon's handbook: A manual of stewardship* is that the practice of stewardship is the supreme challenge of the Christian life because the Bible makes it (stewardship) the key to Christian behavior.

The word 'steward' is from a Greek word *oikonomos*, meaning one who oversees or manages household or civic affairs as defined by Renn (2005:931). The word 'steward' is found in the Gospel of Luke and Paul's letter to Romans (Luke 12:42; 16:1ff and Romans 16:23) and in

all these passages a steward is referred to as one who manages (Renn 2005:932). In his definition, McKim (1992:358) says that the biblical term 'steward' describes the office of one who is entrusted with the properties of another. This is the same as the deacons of the New Testament who were entrusted with the resources of the Church, representing God through the ministry of mercy here on earth. He also contends that stewardship is linked with watchfulness (Luke 12:42), which Jesus was looking for as a mark of true disciples of his time (McKim 1992:359).

The person who administers the household is called a steward or an overseer. Administration of duties or goods in one's care is referred to as stewardship, says Elwell (2001:1149). In the Old Testament (Genesis 24:1) we read of Eliezer who was made a steward over the entire household of Abraham, which means that he was in charge of all the wealth that Abraham had, Berghoef and De Korster (1980:19) note.

Here on earth we have been made the stewards of God's wealth; the Church officers such as elders, pastors, deacons and all Church members are the stewards of God's resources and these resources must be managed in a way that pleases God, who is the owner of everything. Taking the responsibilities outlined in the Bible concerning the office of the deacon into consideration, it shows that they can be referred to as the stewards of the Church.

3.7 Stewardship

Humanity was given dominion over all creation (Genesis 1:28). Therefore, the principle of stewardship is closely linked to the concept of grace. Ferguson and Wright (1988:661) pointed out that everything comes from God as a gift and we are to administer faithfully on his behalf.

The ordinary idea of stewardship is found in several passages in the New Testament (Luke 16:1-8; 12:42; Matthew 20:8; Romans 16:23 & Galatians 4:3), explains Elwell (2001:1149). Although it is not written anywhere in the Bible that deacons are referred to as stewards, the demands of their office is a true witness that they are acting as God's stewards because they are commanded to take care of God's resources and distribute them in a manner that pleases God, who is the owner of these resources.

This can be supported by what is written in the Gospel of Luke (Luke 19:17, 27). Berghoef and De Korster postulate that:

“As each has managed his stewardship, so will he be judged: ‘Well done, good servant,’ or, ‘But as far for those enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slay them before me’ (Luke 19:17, 27)”.

It is the responsibility of the deacons to take care of God’s resources and distribute them to those who are in need. Stewardship in the Bible is about taking care of everything such as the earth, Gospel, personal resources of time, money, resources of the Church and the society, including people, as is explained by Ferguson and Wright (1988:661). Elwell (2001:1150) also argues that stewardship is broadened to include all Christians and all gracious gifts of God as mentioned in 1 Peter 4:10. He purports that the requirement of stewards of God is faithfulness in the administration of their duties (Elwell 2001:1150).

Holman contends (2008:227) that the task of the steward should not be entrusted to just anyone but to someone who had been carefully tested to ensure that he would show no favoritism, partiality, possessiveness, contentiousness or pride. Similarly, Hale (2007:814) also points out that a deacon must be someone who is not blameless in whatever they are doing (1 Timothy 3:10). Therefore, this Scripture must be the foundation for deacons to perform their duty today as was done in the New Testament times. Hale (1996:814) is of the same opinion as Holman (2008:227) because he argues that the Church or the congregation must not think that a deacon’s work is not important and that anyone can therefore be a deacon. This is not true at all because deacons must be tested and examined before being appointed for this noble office of service. Deacons by virtue of their calling in the New Testament show that they were called to act as God’s stewards of God’s resources through the ministry of mercy.

A close reading of this passage shows that it is rich with the principle of Christian stewardship. Martin (1964:77) argues that the Churches of Galatia were urged to be concerned with those who are in distress and that the Corinthian Church’s contribution was the relief of the poor in Jerusalem (Romans 15:26). Hale (1996:590) argues that people in Jerusalem were very poor because they had fallen under the control of the Roman Empire; hence, help was needed. Most of them were Jewish, but later they became the followers of Christ so they were persecuted for that to the extent of losing their properties; that is why Paul was urging the Church to support them. Hale (1996) also points out that Paul was

collecting finances through the help of the Macedonian and Achaean Churches, which were Gentile churches but were collecting offerings to help other churches who were poor (2 Corinthians 8:1-4; 9:1-2).

The New Testament Church shows that she was not only centered on preaching the Word and prayers, but she was also concerned with the poor and the distressed. One of the duties of the deacons was the collection of gifts for the poor and the management and administration of the relief.

Secondly, it is indicated that giving was to be systematic and regular because 1 Corinthians 16:2 directs the Church that every Sunday each member has to put aside a sum of money proportional to his gains, explains Martin (1964:78). It is not mentioned that who were assigned with the responsibility of collecting the funds and administer these resources, but one can argue that this was not Paul's duty. Therefore, an assumption can be made that there were deacons who are referred to in verse 3 as messengers whose task was to collect and bring the money in the temple for the support of those in need.

Hale (1996:656) agrees with Martin (1964:78) that giving regularly to meet the needs of the poor is the duty of every Christian. Although it is not written that the deacons were the one responsible for spearheading the collection of these offerings, one can theorize that there were deacons who were in charge of collecting these offerings. Christians must not give because of the law, but must give because of love and from the heart (Hale 1996:656), (1 Corinthians 16:2; 2 Corinthians 8:12).

Fallon (19980:68) is of the opinion that Paul's wanted people to know that the last day has arrived in Christ and the unity of the church is symbolized by showing equal status amongst the Jews and the Gentiles. Christian stewardship is for every believer that is why the Church of Macedonia volunteered to help the Jerusalem Church, even though they were facing some challenges. The Macedonian Church showed that they were generous even in the midst of tribulations, says Fallon (1980:69).

Paul is urging Christians to give because Christians are prompted by divine grace; that is, why he emphasized the issue of voluntary, eager and cheerful as it written (2 Corinthians 9:6, 11) that the Macedonian Christians, under a lot of hardships, tried their best and did it willingly, purports Martin (1964:85). Christian stewardship is for every Christian as a way of

expressing that we are only keepers of God's resources; we must give to him through the office of deacons like the Macedonian Christians did.

The research agrees with Hale (1996:656), who says that Paul was not trying to raise money for himself (2 Corinthians 8:19-21); thus, he instructed the Church at Corinth to choose men amongst themselves to take the money to Jerusalem. This was the argument of the apostles in Acts 6:1-6 when they instructed the Christians to choose men amongst themselves to wait on the tables whilst the apostles concentrate on the preaching of the Word. This was the same scenario with Paul, who wanted to concentrate on the preaching the Word whilst others were responsible for the welfare of those in financial need (Hale 1996:656-657).

A question can be asked concerning 1 Corinthians 16:3-4: Who were these men to be chosen to take the money to Jerusalem if they were not deacons from the Church of Macedonia? Again, it is not written that these men were deacons, but as already indicated in Paul's letter to Timothy (1 Timothy 3:8-13), deacons must be men who are not greedy of money and accordingly, one can assume that Paul was also referring to deacons when he told the Corinthians to choose men amongst themselves. These men were to come back with a report of how they administered the money amongst the Jerusalem Church. Therefore, stewardship in the New Testament was of great importance, argues Martin (1964:84). The research has pointed out that the deacons in the New Testament were responsible for collecting, administration and distribution of these offerings and this can be regarded as stewardship because they were taking care of God's resources.

As was explained by McMichael (1993:183) in *Creation and Liturgy*, a steward is one who stands in for or serves on behalf of the interests of another. Deacons in the New Testament were not appointed to serve their own interests but they were appointed to serve the interests of the Church by caring for those who are in need and by collecting and administration of the offerings. The office of the deacon during the New Testament Church portrayed an important service, which must be emulated by the Churches of this present age.

Fallon (1980:81) argues that the collection that was done by the church at Macedonia when they were in trial was an act of generosity and an act of love, which showed that in the body of Christ one part provides for the needs of another. The deacons of the New Testament were appointed to show an act of love through caring for the poor as a way of showing that they have been reconciled with Christ through the truth of the Gospel, asserts Fallon (1980:81). It was the responsibility of the deacons in the New Testament Church to help those who were in

need such as the poor, widows, orphans and the sick. They were not supposed to show favoritism but they were to fulfill their ministry for the sake of the Gospel.

The purpose of the Church is to reach out with the Gospel and this can provide a way for the Church to care for others. In his book, *Stepping stones of the steward*, Vallet (1989:107) argues that: “As a Christian steward, you are called to use and risk resources in order to reach out to others. Others includes both those people with whom you can easily identify especially those who are different even those you may not like, who do not like you, or about whom you have fear. The reaching out is to be based on actual need, not on what you feel or think that the other person may or may not deserve. Nor is the reaching out in care to be limited to human beings only. You are called to care for all dimensions of planet Earth, and space beyond”.

The parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) is a good example of Christian stewardship in the New Testament Vallet (1989:111) mentions, where caring through the giving of time and money as a way of showing love, regardless of the fact that he was a Samaritan. This was the model of what the office of the deacon should look like. Hale (1996:306) contends that what was done by the Samaritan shows that any person is one’s neighbour and therefore he/she needs to be taken care of if there is need. This was the same thing expected of the deacons of the New Testament; that is why they were expected to be men full of wisdom and full of the Holy Spirit.

The lesson which can be learnt from this passage is the issue of helping others. Deacons must be people who are willing to offer services to others. The difference here is that the Samaritan was using his personal resources to help the person who was not related to him at all. This was not the case with the deacons in the New Testament for their duty was to take care of and administer the offerings that were collected from the church.

Vallet (1989:112) explains that the Samaritan took a risk for the sake of another person’s life. This also applies to the deacons in the New Testament, who were also taking risks by way of helping people who were despised by other tribes like what prompted the choosing of the seven men in Acts 6:1-6. Hale (1996:450) argues that in Acts 6 there were complaints from the Greek-speaking Jewish believers that the Grecian Jews and Aramaic-speaking group were not given equal food when distributing food to the needy. This was a risk to those appointed to wait on the tables.

Deacons in the New Testament were servants to minister to those in need on behalf of the Church, the same as the steward who is one who is taking care of another person's property. With this in mind, one can come to a conclusion that these words can be used interchangeably, even though the word 'stewardship' can refer to the taking care of all God's creation. On the other hand, the word 'deacon' is just a branch of stewardship. The act of the Samaritan can also be linked to one of the duties of deacons because the parable touched the issue of caring and the use of money.

When giving is talked about in the Church, the deacon's office is the one which is responsible of what is to take place, even though the whole congregation will participate. This was not the case with the Apostle Paul, because he was the one who was moving from one church to another. Carter (1998:64) argues that Paul was urging the Church at Corinth to make an offering for the people who were distressed in Jerusalem. He argued Paul was talking about stewardship; that is why he was appealing to the church at Corinth, purports Carter (1998:66).

The research agrees with Carter (1998:66) that what Paul was advocating from this church was to offer service to the need. This service can be referred as "*diakonia*" meaning 'service' or 'ministry', which is the root of our word 'deacon', explains Carter (1998). Paul set the service to the poor within the context of service to God. When people are giving to the Church, it means that they will be offering service to God. Martin (1964:85) acknowledges that God is no person's debtor; if we do our part it is in the confidence that God's providence will supply our needs (2 Corinthians 9:8).

Martin (1964:86) continues and argues that Paul wanted the Corinthian Church to see the collection of offerings as an integral part of corporate worship and anchor it firmly in the total response we make to the Good News. Like all true worship, the offering is sacramental, asserts Martin (1964:86). The argument here is that all Christians must know that corporate worship must be accompanied by offering of gifts as a way of giving thanks to the Lord.

Hale (1996:683) states that giving money and possessions for the Lord's work is like sowing seeds in the ground. If we give generously, God will give to us generously in return. Proverbs 22:9; 11:24-25 says: "*One man gives freely, yet gains even more; yet another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty. A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes other will himself refreshed*", says Hale (1996:683). Paul's teaching to the Corinthians was that their giving must be from their hearts and by the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Christian stewardship according to Paul was to be part of worship for every believer so that their giving was to be done generously and cheerfully. People must not think that when we give to God we must suffer loss because God is able to make us rich. Paul was confident in the strength that God could give to the Corinthians, argues Carter (1998:67).

In all these teachings about stewardship by Paul, the deacons are unheard of, not because they were not in the Church, but because they were not part of the teaching ministry, as was explained earlier on in this chapter when the difference between deacons and elders was highlighted in 1 Timothy 3:2. On the other hand, Paul was teaching about giving but it does not mean that he was also the person who was responsible for collecting offerings; that is why Titus and a brother who was not mentioned by name volunteered to return to Corinth to help make the final arrangements for completing the arrangements ((2 Corinthians 8:16-19), argues Hale (1996:681).

Christian stewardship played a very important part in the New Testament and the focal point of it was offering service to those who were in need. The researcher assumes that there was a synthesis between the apostles as teachers/preachers of the Word and deacons as administrators of the offerings to those who were in distress and in need.

3.8 Qualifications for the Office

The biblical qualifications of the office of the deacon are found in Acts 6:1-7 and 1 Timothy 3:8-12. The qualifications for the office as deacon is portrayed as honesty, good report, being filled with the Holy Ghost and wisdom, being the husband of one wife, ruling his children and own house well (Acts 6:3; 1 Timothy 3:12). Stephen “did great wonders and miracles amongst the people,” and he did speak with wisdom and spirit, both in his daily intercourse with men and in his defense when accused of blasphemy before the Sanhedrim (Acts 7). Being concerned with pecuniary trusts, it was necessary they should be men of reputation for honesty; having the difficult and delicate task of distribution; the church funds amongst the needy; various and somewhat jealous claimants, they must be men of wisdom and having a laborious and self-sacrificing work to perform, they must be men of whose zeal and devotion would sustain them and “*full of the Holy Ghost*” (Hopkins 1878:57). These qualifications must fit the deacons for being *diakonoi*, i.e. those who serve. Thus, the task of deacons, although related to the material and physical needs of the people of God, is essentially a

spiritual task requiring men with spiritual qualifications. Based on the biblical point of view, one can argue that the qualifications of deacons may not be exactly the same as those mentioned in Acts 6:1-6. For instance, it is mentioned in the Book of Acts that the deacons were supposed to be people of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and full of wisdom. In his book, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Peterson (2009:233), shows that the requirements concerning the office of the deacon need people who can properly manage the ministry of practical care in the life of the Church. Therefore, outstanding candidates were required for this work. The qualifications for the office of the deacon were spelt out clearly by De Yong (1952:92) when he said:

“In Acts 6, the congregation is urged to, ‘Look ye out therefore, brethren, from amongst you seven men of good report, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom you may appoint over this business. A longer list of qualification is afforded by Paul ... Deacons in like manner must be grave, not double tongued, not given to much wine, let deacons be husbands of one wife, ruling their children well and their own houses well’.

Deacons should be people who live according to the Word of God in order for them to do their duties in a way that pleases God, who elected them to this office. Deacons must be under the control of the Holy Spirit in their daily lives; that is, they must be born again Christians who represent God’s ministry of mercy here on earth without favor and discrimination.

Hendrickson (1957:132) argues that deacons must be persons able to sustain the test of having the eyes of the whole Church and the outsiders focused on them. Cowen (2003:105) correctly states that the letter of Paul to Timothy offers a more comprehensive list of qualifications of deacons in the New Testament (1 Timothy 3:8-12). He argues that the deacon must be a person who is over and above in three areas of life; that is, personal character, spiritual life and Christian experience. On the other hand, in the Church today members are no longer looking for these characteristics when choosing people to the office of deacons. This is supported by Hendricksen, who says that people must not be elected to this office because they criticize those in leadership (1957:37). Van Wyk (1997:95) argues that the congregation must look out for able men and appoint them to this office, as it is written in the Books of Acts 6, and 1 Timothy 3. Furthermore, Van Wyk (1997:95) states that the Bible

strictly warns that people with loose characters must not be elected to serve as deacons in the Church. Similarly, Holmberg (1978:102) points to the fact that deacons must be people who devote themselves to serve the Church.

In reference to Cowen, Burtchaell (1992:320) maintains that all the qualities required for one to assume the office of a deacon are the ones found in 1 Timothy 3:8-13. They are the people who must set an example in whatever they are doing. In the same way, Williams (1972:120) is convinced that deacons as stated in the Bible had to meet certain basic requirements before they could be accepted. Williams also mentions that they were supposed to be Church members of good reputation and people of good standing, full of the Holy Spirit (Williams 1972:120).

A close reading of 1 Timothy 3; 2, 11-13 clearly shows that the deacons are to bring spiritual comfort to the people they minister to. Therefore, whether male or female, a deacon should be an officer of good morality. Fiore's (1991:82) basic argument about the qualities or qualifications of deacons mentioned in 1 Timothy 3:8-13 are similar to those of elders/overseers, except for the teaching ability mentioned in Timothy 3:2. Deacons in the New Testament were supposed to be people who can work with the public because there are issues of people who are of good standing and the privileges of confident speech, purports Van Klinken (1989:57). Fiore (1991:82) opines with other authors that deacons must be men of one wife, not given to excessive wine, no love of money, managing his household well, a man of highest principle and not indulging in double talk.

According to De Jong (1952:92), this office demands people who enjoy the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in their lives as was mentioned by Peter in Acts 6, they should be full of the gift of wisdom. The gift of wisdom is far more than intellectual understandings, but it is God-given knowledge. On the same issue, Cowen (2003:106) indicates that the deacon must be people who have the strong grip on the mystery of the faith, meaning that they must be rooted in the Word of God in executing his duties all the time. The job of the deacon is to bring spiritual comfort and ministry to others (Cowen 2003:107).

Powers (1996:152-153) was of the same sentiments that for one to qualify as a deacon, one must be a person of sound knowledge of the faith, as it is written in (1 Timothy 3:9; 13) that "they must keep hold of the deep truth of the faith with a clear conscience". The issue of personal faith was also emphasized regarding the election of Stephen as a deacon in Acts 6:5. The congregation was instructed to elect men who were "full of the Spirit and wisdom". This

is an indication that in order to become a deacon in the early Church, one was supposed to be in good relationship with Christ.

As written in 1 Timothy 3:8ff: “Deacons likewise, are to be men of worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine and not pursuing dishonest gain ... the husband of one wife”, says Powers (1996:153). A deacon in the Bible shows that he was supposed to be a man who was able to manage his family well for him to be able to manage the Church of Christ. This was supported by De Jong (1953:95), who mentions that the deacon shall be the husband of one wife and must also be able to manage and rule his own house and children well. Hale (1996:814) is of the opinion that before choosing one to the office of the deacon, it is necessary to look at his family and if he cannot control his family and exercise authority properly in his family, he will do the same in the Church of Christ.

De Jong (1953:98) notes that the wives of the deacons are there to render assistance to their husbands, especially when it comes to issues that deal with the widows and women who were ill. Here, the services to the women were performed by the wives of deacons under the supervision of their husbands.

Cowen (2003:108) asserts that the way the deacon handles his family matters must be the measuring rod to see if he qualifies to lead God’s Church and to take care of the resources of the Church. Deacons must have the respect of their family and have the ability to manage the affairs of the household well, says Cowen (2003:108). Therefore, the family life of the deacon’s family in the New Testament was supposed to set an example and be edification in the sight of the whole community of believers and non-believers. A family does not live in isolation therefore other families are needed to form a society or village. The family life of the deacon’s family must be testimony to other families. In his explanation about the relationship of the deacon to other people, in his first letter to Timothy Paul’s notes that they must be full of respect and honor from members of the congregation and the community, says De Jong (1953:99).

Furthermore, De Jong (1953:99) contends it is required that the deacon shall be “not a double tongued” person. The congregation and the community must feel that the deacons are dependable; they must fulfill the promises they make.

According to Powers (1996:155), deacons must prove themselves to the congregation as it written in 1 Timothy 3:10; their way of life qualifies them to this office. In other words, they

are tested and accepted to this office by the congregation, which means that their relationship with other people, meaning the members of the congregation and the community, must be their testimony for eligibility to the office. Cowen (2003:106) mentions that they should “not be greedy for money”, because they handle a lot of money and gifts to be distributed to those in need. If they are greedy they can convert those gifts to their personal use instead of giving them to the rightful recipients. Deacons must be honest people.

Freedom of expression towards others is one of the good consequences of this good standing amongst the congregation, says Fiore (1991:82). The deacon must gain an excellent standing in the eyes of humanity, which is the community and the congregation and they will have a great assurance in their faith as they bear witness to Christ (Hale 1996:815).

Deacons do not elect or appoint themselves into office but they are elected into office by members of the congregation. According to De Jong (1953:100), they should first of all be proved and then serve as deacons if they are blameless as written in Paul’s letter to Timothy (1 Timothy 3:10).

Powers (1996:155) mentions the issue of being tested first and if found to be blameless they can be appointed as deacon. His assertion was also based on 1 Timothy 3:10 and Acts 6:6. Therefore, the appointment of a deacon was subject to examination from the congregation for acceptance and endorsement or ordination. More so, according to Powers (1996:156), the Bible is silent as to whether the position was concerning a full time or a part time ministry. He argues that the Bible is not saying anything about ceasing the office of the deacon or upgrading the deacon to become an elder.

The responsibility of electing deacons rested in the congregation through the Church Council, which makes the final nomination, as is written in 1 Timothy 3, says De Jong (1953:101). This is supported by Hale (1996:75), who mentions that the deacons mentioned in Acts 6:1-6 were chosen by the people, meaning that all Christians who were present on that day participated in the appointment of the seven men to wait on the tables. He also argues that deacons were to go under an examination, which was to be carried out by the congregation (see Acts 6:1-3) (Hale 1996:814). Van der Borght (2007:74) asserts that Calvin exhorts that those to be elected to the office of deacons must be people of sound doctrine and irreproachable conduct. Therefore, deacons were supposed to be Christians of good faith.

According to Van der Borght (2007:74), deacons were called to office through elections by presbyters after prayer and fasting.

3.9 The Role of the Deaconess in the New Testament

As already noted in Gamble's (1992:267) interpretation of Paul's letter to the Romans and 1 Timothy (Romans 12:5-8 & 1 Timothy 5:9-10), deaconesses were not allowed to hold public offices in the Church but were allowed to work with the sick, poor, less privileged in their homes and hospitals (Gamble 1992:267). Also, not all women were allowed to become deacons, but only those grown up widows were assigned to the office of deaconess. Berghoef and De Korster (1980:94) argue that Paul did not want to take young mothers out of their families to serve as deaconesses, neglecting their families to serve the Church of God (1980:94).

The deaconesses during Paul's ministry, according to Berghoef and De Korster (1980:94) were the ears and eyes of the Church in discerning the plight of the people in their homes, society and hospital. Furthermore, they were not operating independently because they were reporting to their male counterpart deacons and the latter were under the administration of the Church Council (Berghoef & De Korster 1980:94).

McKee (1989:74) also points out that she understood Phoebe and the widows as the female deacons of the New Testament, who were charged with personal care of the sick and the poor in their homes. Because of this separation of duties with male deacons, one will wonder how these women were related to the deacons mentioned in Acts 6 and 1 Timothy 3.

In Paul's first letter to Timothy (1 Timothy 3:11) there is a specific reference to the wives of deacons or women deacons. This is supported by Ward Powers²⁶ (1996:159), who argues that women were urged to be serious, not slander, but rather be temperate and faithful in all things.

Gamble (1992:266) argues that during the ministry of Paul and the New Testament, women were not allowed to hold public offices; widows were assigned to take care for the poor and the sick in their homes whilst the men were the ones to serve the Church in administering the affairs of the poor (Gamble 1992:266). Berghoef and De Korster (1980:94) also argued through their layman's interpretation of scriptures that during the Church of the New Testament, deaconesses served as nurses in the hospital and also cared for the handicapped in

²⁶ Rev Dr. Ward Powers had a B.A. degree in Greek at Sydney University, M.A. in Linguistic Science at the University of Reading and Ph.D. in New Testament from London University. He taught for twelve years in the Faculty of the Missionary and Bible College.

their homes. Only widows were allowed to enter into this office. Gamble's argument was based on Paul's letter to Timothy (1 Timothy 5:9-10). The deaconesses were to execute their duties in their homes and their work was supervised by male deacons (Gamble 1992:266; Berghoef & De Korster 1980:94). However, Berghoef and De Korster (1980:94) argued that when Paul mentioned women being elected as deaconesses, he was referring to widows who were to minister to women and those who were sick. They argued that deaconesses were considered as auxiliaries for men so their ministry was limited to women only. Their work was to be supervised by the male deacons.

3.9.1 Phoebe at Cenchreae

Phoebe is called "a servant of the church" (Romans 16:1 οὔσαν καὶ **διάκονον** τῆς ἐκκλησίας). Paul was commending Phoebe, a servant at the Church of Cenchreae. Phoebe has been a great help to many people, including Paul himself (Powers 1996:161).

According to Powers (1996:161), Phoebe was the deaconess in the congregation of Cenchreae because Paul used the word 'servant' as an alternate for the word 'deaconess'. There is however no evidence that the deaconesses, or those women who had care of the poor in the apostolic Church, were formally elected or ordained as officers in the church.²⁷

McKee (1989:73) notes that it was a form of service to the Church at Cenchreae, even though it was interpreted as hospitality that resembles those duties which were carried out by widows as discussed in 1 Timothy 5:3, 5, 9-10. Hale (1996:78) points out that in his letter to the Romans, Paul praised a woman named Phoebe and called her a servant, which can also be translated to mean or designate a deaconess. Although it is not certain that Paul meant that Phoebe was a deacon, by virtue of referring to her as a servant meant that this woman had offered some kind of service to the Church of Cenchreae; that is why Paul was commending her.

3.9.2 The Ministry of Priscilla and Aquila

Even though Priscilla was not referred to as a servant, which was the case with Phoebe, her being mentioned by Paul in the Bible must not be ignored. Powers (1996:162) argued that in

²⁷ Excerpted from *What Is Presbyterian Law? As Defined by the Church Courts?*, by the Rev. J. Aspin Wall Hodge (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1882), pp. 63

Acts 18:26, Priscilla is mentioned as the one who was exercising the teaching ministry with her husband Aquila. The mention of Priscilla indicates her active participation in the business of the Church of that time, together with her husband.

Furthermore, when Paul was sending greetings to churches and families, he usually refers to the household of Stephanas (1 Corinthians 1:16; 16:15) and does not mention the name of the wife or wives, but when he was sending his greetings in 1 Timothy 4:19, he sent his greetings to Priscilla and Aquila.

Powers (1996:163) highlighted that the mention of Priscilla in relation to Paul's ministry cannot be overlooked, but one can conclude that she actively shared the ministry of the Church with her husband. It is highly likely that Aquila was an elder, and even more likely that Priscilla was a deacon, says Powers (1996:163). Paul did not mention whether Priscilla was a deaconess, but on the other hand, he greeted Priscilla and Aquila as fellow workers. Hale²⁸ (1996:78) assumes that Paul shared a teaching ministry with Priscilla and Aquila and therefore concluded that by addressing her first before her husband, he shows that Priscilla made some contribution in and during the ministry of the Apostle Paul in the New Testament Church.

In the New Testament there is no distinction between men and women elected as deacons because there is no text in Scripture that forbid that. Powers (1996:168) acknowledges that women and men elected as deacons must perform their duties without limitations and discrimination. This is supported by what is written in Galatians 3:28, that there is no Jew or Greek, male or female, but we are all one and equal in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Gamble (1992:266) explains that Paul in his letter to Timothy (1 Timothy 5:9-10) argued that women were to fill no other public office that to care for the poor. To him this was an assumption because he stated that if people accept his interpretation of this passage, there will be two kinds of deacons; one to serve the church in the administering of the affairs of the poor and the second group caring for the poor. In the early Church there were deaconesses who had charge of the poor and sick of their own sex, but the office was abolished in the Latin Church in the eleventh century and in the Greek Church in the twelfth century.

²⁸ Dr Thomas Hale is a retired medical missionary who served in Nepal, and his book is essentially a missionary's commentary. Although he has done his biblical homework and he thinks theologically, he does not write from an ivory tower of academia. His concern is rather for the grass roots of newly planted churches.

3.10 Conclusion

The office of the deacon as it is being portrayed in this study, particularly from a biblical perspective, displays that deacons play an important role in the life of the congregants; deacons bring spiritual comfort to those in need and are also involved in providing social welfare and hospitality to the destitute in the Church. Given that this service is based on Scripture, the research opines that the office of the deacon in the RCZ should be encouraged, and re-enforced to increase their effort on compassion and service of mercy in the congregation. It is hoped that this will decrease the level of poverty and suffering of the congregants.

In biblical terms, the office of the deacon was established to offer service to the Church, representing Christ through the ministry of mercy and compassion, as a ministry of and by the Church to the needy in its own midst (Acts 6) and as a ministry to all in need (Luke 10; Matthew 25). Of importance is that, despite differences between churches, the Bible puts it clearly that the deacons in the New Testament were the stewards of God's resources, meaning that their duty was to take care of these resources and to administer them in a way which pleases Christ, who is the Head of the Church and they are to be accountable to the Church and to Christ as the owner of the Church. This is supported by what Paul said in his letter to Timothy (1 Timothy 3:11) where it says deacons must be men of "*temperate and trust worthy in everything*".

This too requires that the deacons allow themselves to be people "full of faith and full of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 6:3, 5). This conclusion will come to its fullness in the next chapter when the office of deacon in a church judicial analysis is discussed.

CHAPTER FOUR

A Church Judicial Analysis of the Office of the Deacon

4.1 Introduction

In chapter 3, the Scriptural basis for the office of the deacon was discussed. In this chapter, the qualifications of the deacon will be indicated, as well as the two tasks of the office, namely service of mercy/charity and the administration of charity. In this chapter attention will be given to the church judicial analysis of the office. Therefore, this chapter will attend to the historical development of the office in the Reformed/Presbyterian Churches who had their foundations in the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances for the Church in Geneve in 1541* of John Calvin, and the *Church Order of the Synod of Dort 1618-1619*. Attention will be given to a wide array of Church polity experts.

According to Hanko (1962:56), deacons must collect the alms and other contributions of charity. There is no difference between the two words ‘alms’ and ‘charity’. Alms refer to the gifts of mercy. The word comes from the Greek ἐλεημοσύνη (*eleémosuné*): mercy, pity, spec. alms. Contributions of charity mean assistance in addition to the usual funds collected at the worship service. These include gifts of food, clothing, real estate, legacies, etc. (Hanko 1962:56).

Following these guidelines from Scripture, Hanko (1962) concludes that:

The office peculiar to the deacons is diligently to collect alms and other contributions of charity, and after mutual counsel, faithful and diligently to distribute the same to the poor as their needs may require it, to visit and comfort the distressed and to exercise care that the alms are not misused, of which they shall render account in the consistory, and also (if anyone desires to be present) to the congregation, at such time as the Consistory may see it (Article 25).

The office of the deacon was seen with different conceptions in the 16th century (McKee 1989:62-63). In the Roman Catholic Church, deacons were auxiliary liturgical ministers, third from the rank of those ordained to holy orders. McKee (1989:63) notes that Zwingli, a German-speaking Reformed theologian referred to the office of the deacons as an assistant

pastor who was assigned to the care of needy. Sometimes, the name deacon was used to refer to the civil administrators.

The Church polity of Calvin had its background in the Swiss Reformation, which originated from Switzerland under Zwingli. This was prompted by the decaying of the essence of Christianity under the Roman Catholic Church (Schaff 1893:10).²⁹

The Church in Switzerland was very corrupt and needed Reformation, as was taking place in Germany. Zwingli reacted against this immorality that was taking place in Switzerland (Schaff 1893:11). Protestantism provides a larger scope to individual and national freedom and variety of development than Roman Catholicism, which demands uniformity in doctrine, discipline, and worship; this was the cry of Zwingli. It has no visible centre or headship, and consists of a number of separate and independent organizations under the invisible headship of Christ. It is one flock, but has many folds. Variety in unity and unity in variety are the law of God in nature and history. Protestantism so far has fully developed variety, but not yet realized unity, argues Schaff (1893:12).

Schaff (1893:12) says that this is why the Reformation of the 16th century is the mother or grandmother of at least half a dozen families of evangelical denominations, not counting the sub-divisions. Lutheranism has its strength in Germany and Scandinavia; the Reformed Church in Great Britain and North America. The Reformed Confession has developed in different types. Travelling westward with the course of Christianity and civilization, it became more powerful in Holland, England, and Scotland than in Switzerland, but the chief characteristics that distinguish it from the Lutheran Confession were already developed by Zwingli and Calvin. With this brief history of the Swiss Reformation, reformation started a long time before Calvin. Zwingli labored for twelve years, fighting for Reformation from 1519 to 1531, and emphasized the Word of God as it is contained in the Bible, especially the New Testament, as the only rule of Christian faith and practice. This is the objective principle of Protestantism that controls the whole of theology (Schaff 1893:67, 69).

²⁹ Phillip Schaff authored the book *The History of the Christian Church* and described the Swiss Reformation and the Reformation of John Calvin in detail.

4.2. The Church Order of John Calvin

John Calvin (10 July 1509 - 27 May 1564) was the founder of a new system of Church polity and discipline. He was an influential French theologian and pastor during the Protestant Reformation. Calvin was a principal figure in the development of the system of Christian theology later called Calvinism. Originally trained as a humanist lawyer, he broke from the Roman Catholic Church around 1530. After religious tensions provoked a violent uprising against Protestants in France, Calvin fled to Basel, Switzerland, where in 1536 he published the first edition of his seminal work *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. He drafted a Church order for the Reformed Church at Geneva, which still influences reformed and Presbyterian Church orders across the globe today. Calvin argued in the draft of *Ecclesiastical Ordinance for the Church of Geneva*³⁰ in 1541 that there are four orders of offices instituted by the Lord Jesus Christ for the government of His Church. The offices mentioned by Calvin in his draft are as follows: pastors, doctors, elders and deacons. He noted that the fourth office was that of deacons and the office was responsible for the receiving, distributing and guarding the goods of the poor; their possessions, income and pensions, as well as the quarterly offerings. They were also there to take heed of and care for the sick and administer the pittance for the poor. This custom is being preserved by Reformed and Presbyterian Churches across the globe. The influence of Calvin's *Ecclesiastical Ordinance for the Church of Geneva* on Church orders of Reformed/Presbyterian churches can easily be detected. In his *Ecclesiastical Ordinance for the Church of Geneva*, Calvin indicates that there should be two groups of deacons.³¹

According to Calvin, the first group of deacons was regarded as stewards and the second group was managers. The election procedure of the deacons in Calvin's *Ecclesiastical Ordinance for the Church of Geneva* was similar to that of the elders. In Calvin's *Institutes* he states that there were two orders of deacons in the ancient Church; the one concerned with receiving, distributing and guarding the goods of the poor, their possessions, income and pensions, as well as the quarterly offerings; the other, to take heed of and care for the sick and

³⁰ John Calvin, *Ecclesiastical Ordinances*, 1533, *Calvin: Theological Treatises*, edited by J. K. S. Reid, Library of Christian Classics, Ichthus edition, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1954), pp. 58-72, 77-82, 333-343. *Draft Ecclesiastical Ordinances September & October 1541 Submitted by John Calvin and others for the City of Geneva*.

³¹ John Calvin, *Ecclesiastical Ordinances*, 1533, *Calvin: Theological Treatises*, edited by J. K. S. Reid, Library of Christian Classics, Ichthus edition, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1954), pp. 58-72, 77-82, 333-343. *Draft Ecclesiastical Ordinances September & October 1541 Submitted by John Calvin and others for the City of Geneva*.

administer the pittance for the poor (*Institutes Book IV, Chapter 3*).³² According to Calvin, one of the four stewards of the hospital is to act as receiver of all its goods and receive adequate remuneration in order that he may better exercise his office. The number of four stewards shall remain as it is, of which number one shall be charged with the common funds, as directed, not only that there may be greater efficiency, but also that those who wish to make special gifts may be better assured that these will be distributed as they desire. With regard to the office and authority of stewards, Calvin confirms that in urgent matters, especially when the issue is no great matter and the expenditure involved is small, they are not required to assemble for every action taken, but that one or two of them may be permitted to act in the absence of the others in a reasonable way.

According to Calvin, the care of the poor was committed to deacons, of whom two classes are mentioned by Paul in the Epistle to the Romans: “He that giveth, let him do it with simplicity” and “he that showed mercy, with cheerfulness” (Rom 12:8).³³ He discerns two distinct classes of deacons, namely those who administered alms and those who had devoted themselves to the care of the poor and the sick. Paul also mentioned the role of the widows in the Epistle to Timothy (1 Timothy 5:10) as deaconesses. As Calvin rightly said: “For there was no public office which women could discharge save that of devoting themselves to the service of the poor” (*Institutes Book IV Chapter 3: 513*). Calvin noted that there is two classes of deacons; one serving the Church by administering the affairs of the poor; the other, by taking care of the poor themselves.

Scripture specially gives the name of deacons whom the Church appointed to dispense alms, and take care of the poor; constituting them as it were as stewards of the public treasury of the poor. The origin, institution, and office are described by Luke (Acts 6:3 c.f. *Institutes Book IV Chapter 3 pages 503-515*).³⁴ The Calvinistic system of Church polity is based upon the following principles, which have exerted great influence in the development of Protestantism:

- i. The autonomy of the Church, or its right of self-government under the sole headship of Christ;

³² *Institutes Book IV Chapter 3. Of the Teachers and Ministers of the Church. Their Election and Office. Pages 508-515.*

³³ *Institutes Book IV Chapter 3. p. 513.*

³⁴ *Institutes Book IV Chapter 3. p. 513.*

- ii. The parity of the clergy as distinct from a *jure divino* hierarchy, whether papal or practical;
- iii. The participation of the Christian laity in Church government and discipline;
- iv. Strict discipline to be exercised jointly by ministers and lay-elders, with the consent of the whole congregation; and
- v. Union of Church and State on a theocratic basis, if possible, or separation, if necessary to secure the purity and self-government of the Church (Schaff 1893:333-336).³⁵

Calvin in his *Ecclesiastical Ordinance* clearly pointed out that there are two types of offices, extraordinary officers and ordinary officers. In his *Institutes* he distinguishes the three extraordinary officers of the Church, which are apostles, prophets, and evangelists, and the four ordinary officers, pastors (bishops), teachers, elders, and deacons (Schaff 1893:33).

In the Reformed tradition, the pastors, or ministers of the Gospel, as Calvin likes to call them, have the duty, “to preach the Word of God, to instruct, to admonish, to exhort and reprove in public and private, to administer the sacraments, and, jointly with the elders, to exercise discipline as way of maintaining the purity of the church against contamination”. Moreover, no one can be a pastor who is not called, examined, ordained, or installed. In the examination, the candidate must prove their calling by giving satisfactory evidence of their knowledge of the Scriptures, soundness in the doctrine of the Bible, purity of motives, and integrity of character. If they prove worthy of the office, they receive a testimony to that effect from the Council that they will be presented to the congregation (Schaff 1893:341). If they fail in the examination, they must wait for another call and be prepared to submit themselves for another examination.

The best mode of installation is by prayer and the laying on of hands, according to the practice of the apostles and the early Church; but it should be done without superstition. All the ministers are to hold weekly conferences for mutual instruction, edification, correction, and encouragement in their official duties. No one should absent themselves without a good excuse. This duty is also devolved to the pastors of the country districts. If doctrinal controversies arise, the ministers settle them by discussion; and if they cannot agree, the

³⁵ Schaff, Philip. 1893. *History of the Christian Church, Volume VIII: Modern Christianity. The Swiss Reformation*. Second edition. Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library.

matter is referred to the Presbytery or the Synod for further deliberations, argues Schaff (1893:342).

Discipline is to be strictly exercised over the ministers, and a number of sins and vices are specified that cannot be tolerated amongst them, such as heresy, schism, rebellion against ecclesiastical order, blasphemy, impurity, falsehood, perjury, usury, avarice, dancing, and negligence in the study of the Scriptures; this will attract discipline like any other member of the Church (Schaff 1893:342).

In the *Institutes*³⁶, Calvin described the office of pastors to be the same as that of the apostles; they only vary in the extent of their field and authority. They are all ambassadors of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God (1 Corinthians 4:1). What Paul says of himself applies to them all: “Woe is to me, if I preach not the Gospel” (1 Corinthians 9:16). The office of the teachers in the Church is to instruct the believers in sound doctrine in order that the purity of the Gospel is not corrupted by ignorance or false teachings. Calvin derived the distinction between teachers and pastors from Ephesians 4:11 and states the difference to consist in this; “that teachers have no official concern with discipline, nor the administration of the sacraments, nor admonitions and exhortations, but only with the interpretation of the Scripture; whereas the pastoral office includes all these duties”. He also noted that the teachers sustain the same resemblance to the ancient prophets as the pastors to the apostles. He himself had the prophetic gift of luminous and convincing teaching in a rare degree. Theological professors occupy the highest rank amongst teachers (Schaff 1893:342).

The elders’ responsibility is to watch over the good conduct of the people. They must be God-fearing and wise believers, without and above suspicion. This is a very important office in the Presbyterian Churches. This office of government is necessary in every age. He makes a distinction between two classes of elders, namely the ruling elders and the teaching elders, on the basis of 1 Timothy 5:17: “*Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and in teaching*”. The exegetical foundation for such a distinction is weak, but the ruling lay-eldership has proved a very useful institution and great help to the teaching ministry, argues Schaff (1893:343).

³⁶ *Institutes* of Calvin on the offices in the Church as they are explained by Philip Schaff in his book, *The History of the Christian Church* (1893:340-342).

Schaff (1893:342) states that from Calvin, no one was to be admitted to the Church before having been instructed in the catechism and made a profession of his faith. The remainder of the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances*, which contain regulations about marriage, burial, the visitation of the sick and prisons are not for discussion in this research, but are fully explained in the history of the Christian Church. The ministers and the elders were to meet once a week on Thursday, to discuss together the state of the Church and to exercise discipline. The object of discipline is to bring the sinner back to the Lord. The *Ecclesiastical Ordinances of 1541* were revised and enlarged by Calvin, and adopted by the small and Large Councils of 13 November 1561. This revised edition of the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* also contains the oaths of allegiance of the ministers, pastors, doctors, elders, deacons, and the members of the Consistory, and regulations and procedures concerning the administration of the sacraments, marriage, the visitation of the sick and prisoners, the election of members of the Consistory, and excommunication. Another revision of the *Ecclesiastical Ordinance* was made and adopted by the General Council on 3 June 1576.

On his explanation of these offices, Schaff (1893:342) states that the responsibilities deacons are to have included the care of the poor, the sick, and those in hospitals. They must prevent mendicancy, which is contrary to good order. Two classes of deacons are distinguished; those who administer alms, and those who devote themselves to the poor and sick. Calvin's position on the offices clearly portrays the two functions of collection and administration of the alms.

Furthermore, Calvin did not only make reforms of the offices only in his Church government, but he also included the issue of discipline to both the laity and the clergy. Discipline was to be exercised in three forms. He distinguished between the discipline of the people and the discipline of the clergy. Schaff (1893:346) also points out that the discipline of members has three degrees or three states, depending on the gravity of the sin committed, as follows: (1) private admonition; (2) a second admonition in the presence of witnesses or before the Church; and, (3) in the case of persistent disobedience, exclusion from the Lord's Table. This is in accordance with the rule of Christ (Matthew 18:15–17). The object of discipline is threefold: to protect the body of the Church against contamination and profanation; to guard the individual members against the corrupting influences of constant association and fellowship with the wicked; and to bring the offender to repentance that he/she may be saved and restored to the fellowship of the faithful according to will of Christ, who is the Head of the Church (Schaff 1893:346).

In exercising discipline, excommunication was permitted in the *Institutes* of Calvin in certain cases, such as unwarranted crimes that disgrace the Christian profession; these are adultery, fornication, theft, robbery, sedition, perjury, contempt of God and His authority. Disciplining or excommunicating should not be exercised by the bishop or pastor alone, but by the body of elders, and it has to be publicized in the whole congregation (Schaff 1893:346).

In his writings, Calvin did not spare the clergy as was the case in the Roman Catholic tradition; Schaff (1893:347) argues that regarding the discipline of the clergy, Calvin objects to the exemption of ministers from civil jurisdiction, and wants them to be subject to the same discipline as laymen. They are guiltier than lay people because they ought to set a good example to the laity or members of the church. However, Calvin disputed the Roman Catholic practice of denying the clergy to marry because it is acting against the Word of God. In Hebrews 13:4 it is written: “*Marriage is to be honoured by all, and husbands and wives must be faithful to each other. God will judge those who are immoral and those who commit adultery*”. He was refuting what the Roman Catholic priests were doing, because they were engaging in sexual immorality of hiring concubines³⁷.

4.3. The Office of the Deacon in the Presbyterian/Reformed Church Government

In this section, attention will be given to Reformed/Presbyterian Church Orders in order to discern the duties bestowed on deacons on the respective denominations starting with the Church Polity in the Netherlands. Attention will also be given to the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, Reformed Church in America, The Christian Reformed Church in America, the Canadian Reformed Churches, the Protestant Church in the Netherlands and the Dutch Reformed in South Africa. A judicial analysis of Church Orders of all the mentioned denominations is to be consulted because they have originated from the Church Order of the Synod of Dort, 1618-1619.

³⁷ In the Roman Catholic Church, priests were and are still not allowed to marry but were privately engaged in sexual immorality with concubines, which mean that they were not able to live according to what they have declared to abide with on their ordination. Calvin argued that this was against the Word of God because God encourages people to marry because adultery and fornication is contrary to the Word of God.

4.3.1 Church Polity in the Netherlands

4.3.1.1 Background History

In Wezel, Germany, the *Ecclesiastical Ordinance* of Calvin had been used as a blueprint for the development of the Church Order of Wesel, which had been approved at the Convent of Wezel, 1568. Afterwards, at The Synod of Emden in 1571, amendments of the Church Order had been approved. At the Synod of Dort, the *Church Order of Dort*³⁸ was approved, which became the basis for Reformed/Presbyterian Church Orders around the world until the present. Article 24 of Dort clearly shows the influence of Calvin: “The same procedure which applies to the elders shall be maintained in the election, approbation and ordination of deacons. Article 25 of the Church Order of Dort stated that the office of the deacons is diligently to gather the alms and other goods for the poor and to distribute the same faithfully and diligently according to the requirements of the needy, both residents and strangers, by common consent, to visit and comfort the distressed, and to see to it that the alms are not misused, of which they shall give an account in the consistory and also (if anyone wants to be present) in a congregational meeting, at such a time as the consistory shall see fit. The Church Order also makes provision that in places where there are charity workers or the distributors of alms the deacons shall seek to keep in close correspondence with them to the end that the alms may better be distributed amongst those who have the greatest need” (*Church Order of Dort* Article 26).

4.3.1.2. The Convent of Wezel, 1568

It was during the midst of persecution when the group of Reformed believers from the Netherlands met together in Wezel, Germany. Bouwman (2000:33) states that this particular meeting was called “The Convent of Wezel”.³⁹ The meeting was a private meeting to set out some principles as to how a federation of churches ought to function. Those who attended the Convent were refugees from the Netherlands who had found shelter in the cities of Wezel and Emden in Germany and London (Bouwman 2000:33). Even though these people were foreigners in the Netherlands, they were motivated by the love for God and his Church to lay the ground work for Scriptural-based Church government in the Netherlands, explains Bouwman (2000:33).

³⁸ Accepted at the Synod of Dort in 1619.

³⁹ The word ‘convent’ means to convene or to meet. This meeting was not a class or a synod because it was not made up of delegates from churches.

The brothers in Wezel did not use new ideas to formulate the Church government, but used the used the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances*⁴⁰ of Calvin as a blueprint for their work. They developed Calvin's work further and made some improvements on what was formulated by Calvin in his *Ecclesiastical Ordinances*. On 3 November 1568 under the presidency of Petrus Athens, the forty preachers and elders at the Convent in Wesel drew up a tentative Church Order.

Other issues discussed during the Covent of Wezel were that of equality amongst office bearers that no one should domineer upon the expense of others and also the need of ecclesiastical assemblies. The Covent of Wezel emphasized that in the Church of Jesus Christ there should no room for domineering; a minister is not to lord it over another minister, nor a minister over a consistory, nor a consistory over another consistory, nor an elder over another elder, etc. Rather, all office-bearers have a place directly under Christ, and so the one office-bearer needs to respect the other. The Convent of Wezel penned down the Scriptural principle basic of no lordship as Article One of their Church Order: "*No church shall in any way lord it over other churches, no office-bearer over other office-bearers.*" (Bouwman 2000:34). It serves to protect congregations and consistories from domineering individuals. The emphasis was that the churches need to meet regularly (Bouwman 2000:34). This led to the formation of classis, which was to meet at least once in three months.

4.3.1.3. From Wezel to Emden

This was initiated by Marnix of St Augustine, who labored to free the Netherlands from the Spaniards, for he was reformed in his thinking (Bouwman 2000:35). He longed for the Netherlands by the grace of God to be free of the Spanish oppression. Bouwman (2000:35) states that Marnix was convinced that there was need for the establishment of a Synod because there is only one Lord and was convinced that the elder-centered Church government was a good line of thinking for the churches to take. He encouraged the convening of a Synod in Emden.

4.3.1.4. The Synod of Emden 1571

The first General Synod of all Reformed Churches in the Netherlands was held in the German town of Emden in 1571 (Bouwman 2000:35). The synod was held outside Holland because

⁴⁰ Calvin had already established Reformed Church government in Geneva and wrote a Church Order entitled *Ecclesiastical Ordinances*.

persecution was still taking its toll, but people managed to send delegates to represent their churches in Emden to defend themselves against the false teachings that were the order of the day (Bouwman 2000:35). At this synod, the delegates endorsed the Belgic Confession as the creed of the Church. The Church was bound together with the faith that God has worked in the hearts of His people, faith in one Gospel of salvation through the one Savior Jesus Christ (Bouwman 2000:36). The Synod at Emden developed a model of Church life based on what was started at the Convent of Wezel. An Article about not lording it over others received pride of place in Emden's Order: "No church shall have dominion over another Church, no minister of the Word, or elder or deacon shall exercise dominion over another. Rather shall they be vigilant lest they should give cause to be suspected of desiring dominion" (Acts of the Synod of the Netherlands Churches both under the Cross and Scattered through Germany and East Friesland, held at Emden, 4 October 1571: Article 1). The Churches at this Synod promised to accept decisions of Synod because the churches themselves were participants of that Synod and made the decision together (Bouwman 2000:36). This synod of Emden laid the foundations of the Dutch Reformed Church.

4.3.1.5. The Synod of Dort, 1618-1619

The Church Order adopted at Emden was revised at the Synods of Dordrecht (1574 and 1578), Middelburg (1581), and The Hague (1586), before being adopted by the Synod of Dordrecht (1618-1619). After the Synod of Emden persecution in the Netherlands started to go down, many synods were being held in the Netherlands without any disturbances. Many of these synods contributed much to the development of Reformed Church government (Bouwman 2000:36). Bouwman (2000:36) states that the most important synods, which led to the development of the Netherlands Church Order, were the provincial Synod of Dort 1574, the national Synod of Dort in 1578, the Synod of Middelburg in 1581 and the Synod of The Hague of 1586. These Synods build on the work that was done during the Wezel and Emden meetings.

The churches met again in 1618 in the city of Dort to address the heresies in Amsterdam and a number of sessions were spent trying to polish the Church Order and the churches adopted it in this synod. It is known as the Church Order of the Dort. The basis of Reformed Church Orders worldwide is formulated around the Church Order of Dort (Bouwman 2000:36).

4.3.2. Church Order

The Church Order of the Netherlands is divided into four sections, namely,

1. Offices and supervision of doctrine;
2. Assemblies;
3. Worship, Sacraments and Ceremonies; and
4. Discipline.

4.3.2.1. Offices

The churches have agreed that there should be three offices in the Church of Jesus Christ and these are the minister of the Word, the elders and the deacons (Bouwman 2000:39). The minister, elders and deacons together form the Council of the Church and they are to be chosen to their offices by the lawful election of the Church.

4.3.2.2. Office of deacon

The roots of the office of the deacon in the Church Order of the Netherlands is in the Bible in the New Testament, where the word 'deacon' is mentioned in these verses, namely Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:8-13 and Acts 6:2-7 (Bouwman 2000:40).

4.3.2.3. Task of Deacons

The deacons shall perform the ministry of mercy. They shall acquaint themselves with difficulties; visit, help and encourage where there is need; and urge church members to render assistance where necessary. They shall collect and manage the gifts of the congregation, and after mutual consultation, distribute them where there is need. The deacons shall give account of their policies and management to the consistory (Bouwman 2000:65). The deacon's ministry of mercy is there to let people taste the love of God regardless of their situations. Deacons need to visit people in their homes to find more information concerning the people to whom the gifts are distributed. However, Bouwman (2000:65) concludes that the heart of the deacons' tasks is the collection and distribution of the gifts. The main task of the deacons is to serve; they should serve both the members in the church and those in the society.

4.4. Presbyterian Church in the USA⁴¹

4.4.1. Introduction

The 6th edition of the Church Order (1982:9-80) of the Presbyterian Church in America clearly states that Jesus Christ is the King and the Head of the Church. Christ contains in Himself all the offices in His Church and the names of these offices are found in the Scriptures. The Presbyterian Church in America's form of Church government was and is still founded upon the Word of God.

4.4.2. Book Order of the PCUSA

In the Book of Order of the PCUSA (G-2.0201), the office of the deacon is being defined as the ministry of compassion and service. They share in the redeeming love of Jesus Christ for the poor, the hungry, the sick, the lost, the friendless, the oppressed, those burdened by unjust policies or structures, or anyone in distress. Deacons may also be given special assignments in the congregation such as assisting with the Lord's Supper, caring for members in need, handling educational tasks, cultivating liberality in giving, collecting and disbursing monies to specific persons or causes, or overseeing the buildings and property of the congregation.

The PCUSA emphasizes in their Church Order that persons of spiritual character, honest repute, exemplary lives, brotherly and sisterly love, sincere compassion and sound judgment should be chosen for this ministry. In the *Book of Order of the PCUSA (G-2.0202)* provision is being made for the ministry of the deacons to fall under the supervision and authority of the session (Church Council). Even if they are organized as a Board of Deacons, their ministry falls under the Church Council. Gray and Tucker (1986:52-53) note the following duties of the deacons: To minister to those who are in need, the sick, the friendless and to anyone who may be in distress; to devise effective methods of raising many resources to be used in their ministry; to carry out their duty under the supervision of the session. Deacons are helpers to the pastors and elders of a congregation in the work of the Lord as visitors to the sick, ministers to the poor, counsellors to those in trial and messengers of the Gospel in the homes of the people (Gray & Tucker 1986:55).

⁴¹ The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA), Part 11, Book of Order 2013-2015. This Book of Order is revised every two years. The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), as defined in F-3.04, consists of the *Book of Confessions* (Part I) and the *Book of Order* (Part II). The *Book of Confessions* contains the Nicene Creed, the Apostles' Creed, the Scots Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Second Helvetic Confession, the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Shorter Catechism, the Larger Catechism, the Theological Declaration of Barmen, the Confession of 1967, and a Brief Statement of Faith Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

Gray and Tucker also note that the form of service to be administered by deacons will differ according to place and situation (Gray & Tucker 1986:57). The office of the deacons was undermined in most of the Reformed traditions so it expired through great transformation to be suitable to the demands of the office, which are suitable from country to country. Gray and Tucker (1986:59) conclude that by electing and ordaining persons to the office of deacon, the church is seeking to assure that there is order in its cooperate life and that the ministry of compassion in the church is never overlooked. It is the duty of the deacons to make sure that their mandate is fulfilled. Then, with this background, attention is now given to different Reformed scholars who wrote about the office of the deacon in the Reformed perspective. According to Henry Roberts, the first premise of the *Book of Order of the PCUSA* is that Scripture clearly point to deacons as distinct officers in the church, whose business it is to take care of the poor, and to distribute amongst them the collections that may be raised for their use. The deacons may also be properly committed to the management of the temporal affairs of the Church according to the *Book of Order of the PCUSA* (Roberts 1918:360). In the PCUSA the deacon is one of the perpetual officers of the Church. The meaning of the word ‘perpetual’ is that the office cannot be laid aside at pleasure. According to Roberts, no person can be divested [of it], but by deposition (1918:360).

Hall and Hall (1994:224) note that one had to rest for a minimum of three years before seeking re-election. This was a way of promoting democracy whilst on the other hand preventing few members to dominate in the leadership of the Church. Similarly, Gray and Tucker (1986:55) mention that deacons should be persons of such liberty of spirit in honoring the Lord with their substance that they may be leaders of the people in the right use of the talents that was placed in their hands. They were to be people who were in a position to collect and distribute offerings for the charity under the guidance and instruction of the Session.

4.4.2.1. The Doctrine of Church Government

The PCUSA’s form of church government in the *Book of Order PCUSA* 1982 was divided into five parts, namely:

1. The Church
2. Its members
3. Its Officers
4. Its Courts

5. Its Orders

The officers of the Church who administers all the powers to govern the Church according to Scriptures are the teaching elders, the ruling elders and deacons (*Book of Order PCUSA* (1982:9-80). Under the section that deals with the officers of the church, only one office, the office of the deacon, is analyzed. However, the latest edition of the Book Order of the PCUSA now has four parts, unlike the five parts which were found in the Book Order of 1982.

The four parts of the *Book of Order 2013-2015* are as follows:

1. The Foundations of Presbyterian Polity
- 2 Form of Government
3. Directory for Worship
- 4 Rules of Discipline (Book of Order 2013-2015:4)

4.4.2.2. Office of the Deacon

The office of the deacon is founded in the Scriptures and it is the office of sympathy and service, for it expresses the communion of believers, especially in their assisting of one another in time of need (Book Order of the Church 1982:9-1). Their duty (deacons) is to minister to those who are in need, the sick and those who are distressed. Deacons discharge their duties under the supervision and the authority of the session. The deacons of a particular congregation shall be organized as a board that must keep records of their proceedings; they are to submit the minutes of the proceedings to the session regularly or upon request by the session (*Book of Order PCUSA* 1982:9-4).

Gray and Tucker (1986:46) agree with what is enshrined in the Book Order of the PCUSA and remark that the duty of deacons is to minister to those who are need, to the sick, to the friendless and to any who may be in distress both within and beyond the community of faith. Their primary duty is that of ministering to persons in need and in distress they argued that this is the core business of deacons.

The office of deacons is referred to as the ministry of compassion and service by sharing in the redeeming love of Jesus Christ for the poor, the hungry, the sick, the lost, the friendless, the oppressed, those burdened by unjust policies or structures, or anyone in distressful. Persons of spiritual character, honest repute, exemplary lives, brotherly and sisterly love,

sincere compassion, and sound judgment should be chosen for this ministry (Book Order of the Church G-2.0201).

Deacons as an independent board may be individually commissioned or organized as a board of deacons. In either case, their ministry is under the supervision and authority of the session; therefore, they should submit their reports to the session on a regular basis. Deacons may also be given special assignments in the congregation such as caring for members in need, handling educational tasks, cultivating liberality in giving, collecting and disbursing monies to specific persons or causes, or overseeing the buildings and property of the congregation. Deacons shall assume other duties that may be delegated to them by the session, including assisting with the Lord's Supper.

A congregation by a majority vote may choose not to utilize the ordered ministry of deacons. If the congregation has neither a board of deacons nor individually commissioned deacons, the function of this ordered ministry shall be the responsibility of the ruling elders and the session (*Book of Order PCUSA 2013/2015- G-2.02–G-2.04*). This can apply when there are few members in the Church to take this responsibility.

4.4.3. Reformed Church in America

4.4.3.1 Introduction

The *Book of the Church Order of the RCA* (1983:7) clearly states that the purpose of the Reformed Church in America, together with all other churches of Jesus Christ, is to minister to the total life of people by the teaching, preaching and live according to the Word of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The Bible as the infallible Word of God is the only rule of faith and practice in the Reformed Church in America. The doctrinal standards are the Belgic Confession of Faith, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of the Synod of Dort (1983:7).

The Reformed Church in America is organized and governed according to the Presbyterian/Reformed type of government where there is equality of office bearers. The Church Order of the Reformed Church in America has its source in the Reformed Church of the Netherlands (1983:9).

4.4.3.2. Government

Article 1 of the *Book of Church Order of the RCA* (1983:14) explains that the consistory is the governing body of a local Church, and the members of the consistory are the minister(s) of that local Church, the elders and the deacons who are currently serving in office. The minister and the elders constitute the Board of Elders with specified responsibilities and powers, the deacons constitute the Board of Deacons with specified duties and authority (1983:14). The consistory combines the ministerial powers of the offices of the minister of the Word, elder, and deacon in providing services, supervision and exercise of discipline within members of the local Church.

Jansen (2006:175) concurs with the *Book of Church Order of the RCA* that the offices of minister, elders and deacon and a congregation are joined together to form the Church.

4.4.3.3. Office of the deacon

The deacons are members of the local Church who have been included into that office by ordination in accordance with the Word of God and the Order established by the Reformed Church (*Book of Church Order of the RCA* 1983:15). The tasks of the deacons are to receive the contributions of the congregation and to distribute them under the guidance and direction of the consistory. They give attention to the needs of the congregation by taking care of the ministry of mercy of the Church. Jansen (2006:208) points out that deacons must be present and visible at the collection of the Church's offering and this collection should be directed to those who are in need. They represent the local Church in showing the love of Christ to the whole world without favor. The office of the deacon centers on help or mercy and righteousness; therefore, this office represents Christ in a holistic way because their service addresses the whole being of a person, both physical and spiritual needs (Jansen 2006:204).

Deacons, as written in the *Book of Church Order of the RCA* (1983:15), must take charge of all alms contributed for the benefit of the poor and distribute with discretion. The Board of Deacons is responsible for visiting and comforting the sick, distressed and those in material need. Deacons represent God here on earth by doing the diaconal work of showing justice and mercy to all people as demanded by the Lord Jesus Christ (Jansen 2006:205). The duty of deacons in their work is to reflect that God want the disadvantaged people in the society to continue with life like all other people. Deacons can perform other duties that they may be assigned by the consistory from time to time.

In the Reformed Church in America, the deacons are made up of Church members who are active in services of the congregation and the number is determined by the needs of the congregation. Those elected to the office of deacons shall be people called by God for the ministry of mercy, service and outreach; they are called the Board of Deacons. In the Reformed Church in America, the duties of deacons is to serve those who are in distress and need, they are to minister to the sick, the poor, the hurt and helpless. Deacons must represent the Church by showing concern to the social and spiritual life of people in times of need. It is also highlighted that the focus of the deacons in doing their service ministry must be directed to the Church and the world at large.

In the Reformed Church in America, deacons as a board on their own must keep their minutes of how they are carrying their ministry Furthermore, it is noted that they shall give reports to the consistory about the collection of offerings and how and where they have distributed the contributions of the congregation. The *Book of Church Order of the RCA* clearly states that the deacons are entrusted to care for the contributions of the congregation and to distribute these benevolence to those who are needy, sick and in distress, whether they are members of the congregation or not. Jansen (2006:208) states that the office of the deacon exists in the congregation with its face turned toward the world, whilst on the other hand; it is eschatologically located in the Kingdom of God. Jansen (2006:209) concludes by saying “the congregation through the office of the deacon is directed to the needs of the world and participates, through the offering, in doing God’s work of mercy and justice”.

4.4.3.4. Election and Term of office

The elders and deacon shall be elected from members of the congregation who are full communicants and who have at least attained the age of twenty-one years. After election, notices shall be made for two consecutive Sundays at a place of worship (*Book of Church Order of the RCA* 1983:17-18). The deacons, as well as elders in the Reformed Church in America, shall be elected for a term not to exceed five years. On the other hand, election of office bearers shall be conducted every year in order to avoid an entire change of all deacons and elders at one time. The congregation, which is the representative of God, is the one which is mandated to choose the office bearers of the church (Jansen 2006:176). It is God who calls and elects leaders of the Church. Furthermore, the congregation did not only participate in the

election, but also prayed on behalf of the office bearers so that they may function well in the world⁴² during their term of office.

4.4.4. Book of Order of Christian Reformed Church in North America

In the book, *The Church Order Commentary* in Article 27 it is indicated that elders and deacons shall serve in office for two or more years according to the local regulations (Monsma & Van Dellen 1954:123). This shows that elders and deacons in Presbyterian Church government are elected to office for life; they have to retire as a way of giving others chance to lead the church as stated in the last commentary on the Church Order of the CRCNA. Zondervan Publishing House published the final edition of Idzerd Van Dellen and Martin Monsma's *Revised Church Order Commentary* in 1967. William Brink and Richard De Ridder's *Manual of Christian Reformed Church Government* in 1979, 1980, and 1987; Richard De Ridder and Leonard Hofman's in 1994; David Engelhard and Leonard Hofman's in 2001; and Peter Borgdorff in 2008. According to Hanko (1962:38), the Book of Order of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, Article 25, says:

“The office peculiar to the deacons is diligently to collect alms, and other contributions of charity, and, after mutual counsel, faithfully and diligently to distribute the same to the poor as their needs may require it; to visit and comfort the distressed and to exercise care that the alms are not misused; of which they shall render an account in consistory, and also (if anyone desires to be present) to the congregation, at such a time as the consistory may see fit”.

Hanko indicates that deacons must be people who are faithful in the performance of their work as deacons and are to do their work wholeheartedly. Deacons must collect the alms and other contributions to charity. The gifts of charity include gifts such as food stuff, clothes, or real estate, says Hanko (1962:41). This is supported by Borgdorff (2008:114) in the revised edition of the *Manual of Christian Reformed Church Government*, Article 25.6, where he acknowledges that the primary aim of the office of deacons is collecting and distributing money or gifts for the need.

⁴² Jansen (2006:177) explains that deacons are located in the Kingdom and not the Church; therefore, the offices extend beyond the congregation, and the congregation supports God's work in the world as God's kingdom. By doing so the deacon will be witnessing God's unconditional love to the world, regardless of one's work.

Borgdorff (2008:62) asserts with Hanko that the basic calling to the office of deacons is to be like Christ in reaching those who are distressed and to faithfully and diligently supply them with their needs. Hence, the poor must not suffer because the deacons must constantly look for those who need assistance in the church and the surrounding communities (Hanko 1962:41).

Deacons must also visit and comfort those who are distressed so they must not only concentrate on the relief of those who are in need and sick in terms of material things, but they must represent Christ the High Priest by bringing sympathy and comfort by sharing the Word of God. Their duty as deacons must be guided by the Word of God, opines Hanko (1962:42). Borgdorff (2008:115) is of the same opinion with his predecessor Hanko, because he highlights that deacons should serve the disadvantaged people and led them to see the grace of Jesus Christ so that they can recognize the Lord, from whom all blessing are flowing.

Hanko (1962:42) mentions that deacons must exercise care against misuse of the alms because they are not being distributed for wasting and to make beneficiaries live a luxurious life. He argues that deacons are there to investigate the financial circumstances of the poor. Deacons have the responsibility of teaching people the principles of Christian stewardship (Hanko 1962:42).

It is the duty of the deacons to give reports of how they are carrying out the activities to the consistory and to the congregation. Hanko (1962:42) states that deacons are not independent because they are under the supervision of the elders as it are stated in the Articles (cf. Article 23). Deacons must report to the congregation because the work of mercy is the work of the whole congregation; therefore, the latter must know if the work is carried out in a way that pleases Christ, who is the Head of the Church, contends Hanko (1962:42).

Article 26 in Hanko's Book, *Notes on the Church Order* (1962:42-43) explains that:

“In places where others are devoting themselves to the care of the poor, the deacons shall seek a mutual understanding with them, to the end that the alms may the entire better be distributed amongst those who have the greatest need. Moreover, they shall make it possible for the poor to make use of institutions of mercy, and to that end they shall request the board of directors of such institutions to keep in close touch with

them. It is also desirable that the diaconates assist and consult one another, especially in caring for the poor in such institutions”.

His argument in this Article is based in the history of the Reformation and has its origin in the light of the Church that existed in the Netherlands. This was also highlighted by Borgdorff (2008:11), who says that the Church offices in the Christian Reformed Church in North America have its origin in the Calvinist Reformation in the Netherlands. According to Hanko (1962:43), this Article explains of the diaconal cooperation. Deacons of this era were supposed to network or have partnership with other organizations that were devoting themselves to the care of the poor and to make it possible for the poor to use these institutions. Meeter (1993:71) was of the same opinion that deacons shall serve for two years and after that, they shall seek re-election for another two years. In the Church Order and its supplement of the Christian Reformed Church in North America (2012:45) it was stated that elders and deacons shall serve for a limited time as designed by the Council. As a rule, a specified number of deacons shall retire from the office. The retiring office-bearers shall be succeeded by others

4.4.4.1. Offices of the Church

The Church Order⁴³ of the Christian Reformed Church in North America notes that the Church recognizes the offices of the minister of the Word, elders, deacons, and evangelists. Although these offices differ from each other, they complement each other. Brink (1987:7) in the edition of the same Church Order indicates the same thing as those noted in the 1978 edition concerning the offices of the Church. Borgdorff (2008:113) purports the same argument concerning the office of the Church but replaces the word 'evangelist' with 'mission associate'.

4.4.4.2. Office of the deacon

Hanko (1962:40), Brink (1987:13), Meeter (1993:70), Borgdorff (2008:113) and the Church Order and its supplements of the Reformed Church in North America (2012:45) all agree that the office of deacon was established to diligently collect the alms and contributions of charity and, after mutual counsel, faithfully and diligently distribute the same to the poor as their

⁴³ The Church Order of the Christian Reformed Church in North America 1978, revised edition explains the offices of the Church in Article 2 of that Constitution.

needs may require it. The deacons should also visit, comfort the distressed and exercise care that alms should not be misused.

The core business of the deacons is the ministry of mercy, which is administering the mercy of Christ to all people (Borgdorff 2008:115). The Church Order of the Christian Reformed Church in North America⁴⁴ according to Hanko (1962:41) to the Church Order and its Supplements (2012:45) revolves on the five tasks of the deacons, that is: (1) they must collect the alms and other contributions of charity; (2) they must be faithful and diligent in their distribution; (3) there is emphasis in visiting and comforting those in distress; (4) deacons must exercise care against the misuse of alms; and (5) the deacons must be held accountable because they must render account of their activities to the consistory.

4.4.5. Church Order of the Canadian Reformed Churches

4.4.5.1. Introduction

In his book *With common consent: A practical guide to the use of the church order of the Canadian Reformed Churches*, Van Oene (1990:1) states that the Bible teaches that Jesus Christ is the only King of the Church and its only Bishop as is confessed in Article 31 of the Belgic Confession. No other church has authority over another church. All authority in the Canadian Reformed Churches belongs to the King of the Church who is the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (Van Oene 1990:3). It is argued in this book that the Church Order of the Canadian Reformed Churches is in line with the thinking of Calvin from Geneva, France and the Netherlands and traces its roots from the Church Order of the Dordrecht since 1619 (Van Oene 1990:6).

4.4.5.2. Purpose and Division

Article 1 mentions the purpose and division made in the Church for the maintenance of good order in the Church of Christ. It is necessary that there be offices and supervision of doctrines, assemblies; worship, sacraments, and ceremonies; and discipline (Van Oene 1990:7).

⁴⁴ This refers to Church Orders of the Christian Reformed Church in North America editions of 1962, 1979, 1987, 1993, 2008, and 2012. Although the Church Order is continuously revised, it shows that the content of the tasks of the deacon remain the same.

4.4.5.3. Offices

Three offices are mentioned in the Church Order of the Reformed Church in Canada, namely the offices of the minister of the Word, elder and the deacon (Van Oene 1990:10). In the Canadian Reformed Churches⁴⁵ no females are allowed to be called as ministers of the Word. The office of the elder is explained in detail in Article 22, which mentions that the elder, together with the minister of the Word, have to supervise the Christian Church. Elders are chosen to their offices through the election of the Church (Van Oene 1990:103).

4.4.5.4. The Office of Deacon

Van Oene (1990:109) in Article 23 states that:

“The specific duties of deacon are to see to the good progress of the service of charity in the congregation; to acquaint themselves with existing needs and difficulties and exhort the members of Christ’s body to show mercy; and further, to gather and manage the offerings and distribute them in Christ’s Name according to the need. They shall encourage and comfort with the Word of God those who receive the gifts in Christ’s love, and promote with word and deed the unity and fellowship in the Holy Spirit which the congregation enjoys at the table of the Lord”.

4.4.5.4.1 Mercy

Van Oene (1990:109) indicates the deacon’s work is referred to as the ministry of mercy. The Lord Jesus Christ did not want to see beggars, but wants the Church to feed those who are in need through the office of deacon. Deacons are there to see that the sick, lonely and poor are taken care of.

4.4.5.4.2. Leadership

The deacon, according to the Church Order of the Reformed Church in Canada, should exercise leadership by exhorting members of the Christ’s body to show mercy. They act as a channel of hope from the congregation to those in need (Van Oene 1990:110).

4.4.5.4.3. Offerings

The duty of deacons is to collect offerings from the congregation and also to keep the congregation updated and informed about the needs of the congregation. It is also advisable

⁴⁵ Only males are eligible to be called as ministers of the Word and Sacrament; the author argues that their Scriptural basis is found in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1.

for deacons to give monthly reports of what has transpired, because this will help members of the congregation to be well informed (Van Oene 1990:111). The deacons are to help those in need by giving them money, food or clothes, depending on their assessment.

4.4.5.4.4. According to Need

Deacons' task is also to determine how much and in what manner financial support should be given to each person according their needs (Van Oene 1990:112). Assessing the needs of the person or family to be helped before distributing Christ's gifts help deacons to know the needs of the person they are helping.

4.4.5.4.5. Cooperation

Deacons are to visit those in need as way of acquainting themselves with the existing challenges of the people whom they are serving. Van Oene (1990:113) argues that when deacons distribute Christ's gifts they must see to it that they also encourage and comfort them with the Word of God to show them Christ's love.

4.4.5.4.6. Term of Office

Van Oene noted that in most churches, four years is the maximum term of an office bearer (elders and deacons) (1990:115). Furthermore, equality has to be maintained between elders and deacons; therefore they should respect the duties of their offices.

4.5. Church Order of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands

4.5.1. Introduction

Article 2⁴⁶ of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands is the continuation of the Netherlands Reformed Church, the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Netherlands. The Protestant Church in the Netherlands consists of all the congregations, namely the Protestant congregations, the Netherlands Reformed congregations, the Reformed congregations and the Evangelical Lutheran congregations.

⁴⁶ The Church Order of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands was revised in 1984 and they used the Reformed in the Netherlands Church to formulate their Church Order.

4.5.2 The Offices and the Ecclesial Assemblies

It is the duty of the office bearers to make the congregation focus on issues of salvation and to keep it to its call in the world; that is why the public office of Word and Sacrament was given on the part of Christ. With a view to this ministry, the Church distinguishes the offices of minister, elder, deacon, as well as other ministries in Church and congregation. However, these offices cannot function properly without the support of the others.

The office-bearers⁴⁷ are jointly responsible for building up the life of the congregation in the world by providing for the ministry of Word and sacraments, missionary, diaconal and pastoral work, spiritual education, supervision, stewardship over financial affairs and other work serving to build up the life of the congregation.

In the Protestant Church of the Netherlands, ministers as servants of the Word are especially called to the administration of Word and sacraments, the proclamation of the Word in the world, pastoral care and supervision and instruction and lay training. The same calling also applies to elders because they are specifically called to care for the congregation as a community, bear co-responsibility for the administration of Word and sacraments, provide pastoral care and supervision and train the congregation to fulfil its pastoral and missionary vocation⁴⁸. The office of the deacons is designated for the purpose of the administration of financial affairs and they are also called to minister at the Table of the Lord and to collect and distribute the gifts of charity, which is the ministry of compassion and justice in the congregation and the world. Deacons in the Protestant Church the Netherlands have the duty of training members of the congregation to fulfil the diaconal vocation. It is also the responsibility of deacons to manage the administration of diaconal financial affairs.

Their call to office (minister, elders and deacons) takes place on the part of Christ, locally by the congregation, and otherwise by the Church through the authorized assemblies.

An office in the Church can only be held by those who have been called thereto. According to the Order of the Church⁴⁹, they must be members who have made profession of faith and have been confirmed in office with supplication for the presence of the Spirit. Confirmation

⁴⁷ The word “office bearers” in the Protestant Church of the Netherlands refers to the ministers of the Word, the elders and the deacons.

⁴⁸ Article V of the Church Order of the Protestant Church of the Netherlands defines the duties of ministers, elders and deacons.

⁴⁹ Article V of the Protestant Church Order.

in office takes place in the midst of the congregation, using a form from the Church's book of worship.

The other ministries consist of administrations and functions to be indicated as such in the order of the Church, which is carried out in collaboration with the office-bearers in order to fulfil the vocation of Church and congregation.

4.5.3. Equality of Office-bearers

The Church Order of the Protestant Church of the Netherlands underscores the issue of equality amongst office bearers, so that one office shall not lord it over another⁵⁰, one office-bearer over another, or one congregation over another, but so that all things shall be aimed at obedience to Christ the Head of the Church. The leadership in the Church is entrusted to ecclesial assemblies. These assemblies are for the local congregations, which are governed by the Church Councils, whilst the congregations' administration belongs to a classis or classical assembly. The Evangelical Lutheran congregations coming together form what is known as the Evangelical Lutheran synod for all congregations together and hence, for the entire Church the General Synod.

The Church Council is formed by ministers, elders and deacons serving in the congregation. The classical assembly is formed by the delegated office-bearers of the Church Councils of the congregations belonging to the classis. The composition of the Evangelical Lutheran synod takes place according to rules separately laid down for that purpose. The general synod is formed by the office-bearers delegated by the classical assemblies and the delegates of the Evangelical Lutheran synod⁵¹.

The Church Council directs the life and work of the congregation. The classical assembly directs the life and work of the classis and in doing so, expresses the responsibility of the congregations for each other and for the entire Church, as well as the responsibility of the Church for the congregations. The Evangelical Lutheran synod directs the life and work of the Evangelical Lutheran congregations and takes care of preserving the Lutheran tradition and making it serve the entire Church. The general synod directs the life and work of the Church as a whole.

⁵⁰ Article VI in the Church Order articulates the issue of the priesthood of believers that there is equality amongst office bearers and even amongst the members of the congregation.

⁵¹ Article VI of the Church Order of the Protestant Church of the Netherlands.

The Church Council shall not take decisions in affairs which are of essential importance for the life of the congregation without consulting the members of the congregation on these affairs. However, this does not mean that the Church Council will seize its final responsibility; the Church Council can share its care for building up the life of the congregation with working groups to be instituted by the council. For work that is to be carried out jointly by the congregations, the classical assemblies will work together in general classical assemblies according to rules laid down by ordinance. A general classical assembly is formed by members of the classical assemblies working together in it.

In order to fulfil the vocation of the Church and the congregations, the classical assemblies will be assisted by auxiliary bodies. An auxiliary body⁵² is instituted by an ecclesial assembly and is charged, under the responsibility of that assembly, with the task assigned to this body in its field of work. An ecclesial assembly can designate a number of its members who together form a broad moderamen⁵³ to which the assembly can delegate the exercise of certain powers, according to rules laid down by ordinance.

For carrying out work that is of general importance to a classis, to the Evangelical Lutheran congregations together or to the Church as a whole, the ecclesial assemblies concerned can call ministers in the general service of the Church or appoint functionaries who are attached to the classis, the Evangelical Lutheran congregations or to the Church as a whole respectively. The major assemblies will deal only with those matters, which, according to the order of the Church, belong to the work of the major assemblies, or with those which cannot be concluded in the minor assemblies⁵⁴.

4.6. The Dutch Reformed Church Order

The Church Polity of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa was influenced by Calvin's *Ordinance Ecclesiasticus*, which was accepted as a Church Order in Geneve in 1541 (Vorster 1999:3-4). Vorster explains that in writings these documents Calvin was trying to

⁵² Auxiliary body refers to functional committees which report to the Church Council. Whatever this body will do, they will do it under the supervision of the Church Council.

⁵³ The word "moderamen" refers to an Executive Committee of the Church Council, classis, Synod and the General Synod.

⁵⁴ Article VI of the Church Order of the Protestant Church of the Netherlands.

apply the New Testament teachings about the Church as a way of organizing and arranging worship and ministry⁵⁵.

The concept of the Church Order in the Dutch Reformed Church is stated clearly in Article 1, where it says: “To maintain good order in the Church of Christ, it is necessary that there should be offices; assemblies; supervision over discipline, sacraments and ceremonies; and church discipline” (Vorster 1999:14). He argues that the offices⁵⁶ in the Church made of ministers, elders and deacons form the Council of the Church to administer the preaching of the Word, to maintain sound doctrine and to care for the poor and the distressed.

The Dutch Reformed Church Order states clearly that Christ is the one who calls people to various ministries in the Church (Vorster 1999:17). Therefore, professors of theology, ministers of the Word and sacraments, elders and deacons are called to office by Christ, who is the Head and the Ruler of the Church using members of the congregation. In Article 22 and 24, Vorster (1999:41) says:

“Elders are elected by the congregation under the guidance of the church council according to the customary local procedures or as determined by the church council. Each church council may offer church members the opportunity to direct the attention to able persons before the election. The church council, with the deacons, may present the required number of elders to the church members for approbation, present them as a list of names from which the congregation may elect the required number. After their names had been announced on several occasions and no legal objection was lodged, the elected brothers are ordained according to the form prescribed for this purpose (Article 22). The procedure applying to elders must also be observed in election, approval and ordination of deacons” (Article 24).

⁵⁵ By doing this, Calvin has influenced the development of the Reformed Church Polity in different countries such as France, Netherlands, Switzerland, Hungary, the USA, Canada and later also in South Africa. Calvin’s ideas also influenced ecclesiastical resolutions about the Church Order by the early Reformed synods such as Wesel (1568); Emden (1571); Dordrecht (1574); Dordrecht (1578); Middleburg (1581); Den Haag (1586); and also Dordrecht (1618-1619). The Church Order of the Dutch Reformed Church is the brainchild of all these synods. The churches of the Reformation through the influence of Calvin intended to develop a model of the Church where worship and ministry can be conducted in a biblical fashion. The focus in this regard is on the reign of Christ and his rule of the Church by the way of the Word and of the Spirit. This can be found in the Church Order of the Reformed Churches of South Africa (GKSA).

⁵⁶ Vorster says offices are organs used by Christ to build up a congregation. During his ministry, Christ used the disciples in the ministry (Matthew 28:19). During the Reformation up to the present time, Christ is using offices to build His Church.

The Dutch Reformed Church Order shows that Christ leads His Church by means of using elders and deacons and shows his love through the work of deacons. The same as the case in the ministers of the Word where Christ Himself as the Head of the Church calls and equips people for this noble cause (Vorster 1999:41). All communicants have the right to vote and those voted to the office of deacons must be able to lead by example⁵⁷; that is why the congregation should be actively involved in the nomination and approval. With this brief background of the Dutch Reformed Church Order development from the Reformation time, attention will be given to the office of deacon as a judicial analysis.

In Article 25 of his book, Vorster (1999:45) mentions that:

“The essence of the office of deacon is conscientiously to collect the money goods given to the poor as gifts of love and to distribute these gifts diligently, after joint deliberation, according to the needs of both the needy and other church members. It is also their duty to visit and comfort those in need and to ensure that the gifts are not wrongly applied. The deacons must report to the church council about their activities and, if so desired, to the congregation as well when the church council considers it appropriate”.

Vorster (1999:45) argues that the work of deacons was clearly defined in the early church of the New Testament. As described in Acts 6, the office of deacons was established for the purpose of offering service to the need and the sick. According to Vorster (1999:46), the Dutch Reformed Church Order emphasizes the following duties of the deacons in material and spiritual matters:

- i. The collections of contributions for the poor;
- ii. The distribution of these contributions;
- iii. To act communal to prevent injustices and disorderliness;
- iv. To do house visitation with the sole purpose of comforting those in need with the Word of God and to inspire Christians to take care of the needy;
- v. To report to the Church Council and, if necessary, to the congregation about their work; and
- vi. To not only work in the congregation, but for all those in needy (Gal 6:10).

⁵⁷ This is the requirement from the Bible as mentioned in Paul’s letter to Timothy (1 Timothy 3:1-13). In this passage of Scripture, biblical qualities of elders and deacons are explained clearly.

The office of the deacon is there to promote Christian love and caring for the people in and outside the Church and their tasks are not only limited to material matters, but also include spiritual matters, argues Vorster (1999:45). In order for one to perform well in the office of the deacon, wisdom and the guidance of the Holy Spirit is a prerequisite for deacons to lead by example. This is so because those who work with money need to be accountable to their distribution of Church funds.

The calling of the Church through the office deacons as believers in the world is to organize themselves as an institution to devote themselves to the caring for the poor (Vorster 1999:46). The Church is called to remain faithful and active to her task of doing the diaconal work of Christ to the poor.

4.7 Term of Office in the Reformed tradition

Various Church Orders of the Reformed/Presbyterian Churches are not silent about the term of office of the deacons in their denominations. Office-bearers have limited tenure, so elders and deacons serve *terms*, not *forever* as is done in some of the Presbyterian Churches⁵⁸. Hanko (1962:43) explains that elders and deacons shall serve for two or more years according to the constitution of their Church, but a certain proportionate number shall retire each year. Those retiring shall be succeeded by others, unless there is any reason that can benefit the church those in office are to be re-elected in.

The reason the office of elders and deacons are not a permanent office was maintained even by John Calvin, because he was afraid of hierarchy, which was the order of the day in the Roman Catholic Church. The Bible is silent about the term of the office of elders and deacons (Hanko 1962:44). The Article speaks of a limited tenure, and the minimum term in many of the Reformed Churches is to be two years. Retirement from office is not universal but depends on the local congregation, thus some say one year, others two. In the Netherlands long terms are common, sometimes extending to five or six years (Hanko 1962:44). The basic

⁵⁸ The Church Order and its Supplements of the Christian Reformed Church in North America (2010:10) state that some of the Presbyterian Churches do not retire the elders and the deacons, which is not the case with the Reformed Churches.

arguments of Hanko are supported by Meeter (1993:71), who alludes that elders and deacons shall serve for two years, and the half shall be changed annually, and others are appointed in their place, unless the situation or advantage of some particular should otherwise require them to continue. The only difference between Hanko and Meeter is that Hanko uses the word 'succeeds' whilst Meeter uses the word 'appoint', however, the difference is the same.

Vorster (1999:47) states that deacons in the Dutch Reformed Church (SA) retire from office after serving for at least two years or more. The number of those to retire should be determined by the Church Council. The same proportionate number of officer bearers must retire every year. The purpose of retiring office bearers is a way of preventing hierarchy and this will promote a growth in ideas and leadership development; if office bearers do not retire and serve for a long period, this usually brings stagnation and domination of the Church by having few experienced office bearer at the expense of others. Periodical retirement help others to be elected so that they can exhibit their gifts.

Article 25 in the Church Order and its Supplements (2010:46) put it straight that the office-bearers of the Christian Reformed Church in North America (elders and deacons) shall serve for a limited time as designated by the council. As a rule, a specified number of them shall retire from office each year. The retiring office-bearers shall be succeeded by others unless the circumstances and the profit of the church make for immediate eligibility for re-election advisable and can be done with the consensus of the Church Council. Elders and deacons who are thus re-elected shall be reinstalled.

The underlining factor in the Reformed Churches worldwide is that the office of deacons is not a permanent office. Those elected in such office shall serve for a certain period and they retire as determined by the local church's constitution. The reason for doing this was and is to maintain equality amongst members of the Church, which is the priesthood of all believers. Permanence in the offices can cause others to dominate amongst others.

4.8. Conclusion

This judicial analysis of the office of the deacon shows that the draft *Ecclesiastical Ordinance of September and October 1541* that was submitted by John Calvin at the city of Geneva is the one which was used as the blueprint in formulating Church Orders of the Reformed/Presbyterian type of Church government. The Church as the body of Christ

through the offices is there to devote herself in the spreading of the word of God, supervision of doctrine, sacraments and ceremonies, and Christian discipline.

Hanko (1962:9) in his book, *Notes on the Church Order* under Article 2, says: “The offices are of three kinds; of the minister of the Word, of the elders and of the deacons”. Christ as the Head of the Church exercises His authority in the Church through people who are office bearers. In this analysis, the research has discovered that the duties of deacons are clearly explained:

- i. They must collect the offering and other contributions of charity;
- ii. Deacons must faithfully and diligently distribute the offerings to those who are in need;
- iii. Deacons must visit and comfort those in distress;
- iv. They must exercise care against misuse of the gifts; and
- v. Deacons are required to give account of their activities to the consistory, Church Council, assembly, or court.

This can only be achieved if the deacons are faithful in the collection of offerings and distribute them to those who are in need without fear or favor. It is clear that the office of the deacon in the Reformed tradition plays an important role in the collection and administration of finances in the Church.

Deacons are ordained in the office and they shall serve for a limited time and they shall be succeeded by others. Election is done every year and those re-elected must be re-installed. A specified number of office-bearer must retired every year, but this does not rule out the re-election of those who once served as elders and deacons. The judicial analysis of the office of deacons in this chapter provided a model of framework to be emulated by the RCZ through the office of deacons in order for her not to deviate from the Biblical and historical Reformed Church polity understanding of the office of the deacons.

CHAPTER FIVE

Towards a Scriptural and Reformed Church Polity understanding of the office of the deacon

5.1 Introduction

The central focus of this study is to explore the ecclesiastical office of deacons in the RCZ and in order to meet this purpose, relevant literatures were reviewed with a special focus on:

- i. The influence and the impact of the office of the deacon in the RCZ.
- ii. The biblical description of the office of deacons.
- iii. The Church understanding of the concept office of the deacon in Church polity.
- iv. The Scriptural and Reformed Church polity understanding of the office of deacons.

Two major duties of the deacon have been distinguished in the former chapters, namely the caring for the poor (distribution and comforting) and collection of alms. In this chapter, attention will be given to the following question: *In what ways does the RCZ diverge from or keep to the Scriptural and Reformed church polity understanding of the office of deacons?* According to the Christian Reformed Church in North America, the office of the deacon revolves around the following five tasks: (1) they must collect the alms and other contributions of charity; (2) they must be faithful and diligent in their distribution; (3) there is emphasis on visiting and comforting those in distress; (4) deacons must exercise care against the misuse of alms; and (5) the deacons must be held accountable because they must render account of their activities to the consistory (*Church Order Christioan Reformed Church*).

Calvin noted that the office of the deacon was responsible with the receiving, distributing and guarding the goods of the poor; their possessions, income and pensions, as well as the quarterly offerings (see chapter 4.). They were also there to take heed of and care for the sick and administer the pittance for the poor. This notion of Calvin is also being attended to in Article 25 of the *Church Order of Dort* and in numerous Reformed Church orders across the globe. The office of the deacons in the RCZ is responsible for the receiving of the offerings but they are not taking care of the sick and the administration of the pittance to the poor. By neglecting this task, it shows that the RCZ is not adhering to the notion of Calvin and Article 25 of the *Church Order of Dort*:

“The office peculiar to the Deacons is diligently to collect alms and other contributions of charity, and after mutual counsel, to distribute the same faithfully and diligently to the poor, both to residents and to strangers, as their needs may require it; to visit and comfort those in distress, and to exercise care that the alms are not misused; of which they shall render an account in Consistory, and also (if anyone desires to be present) to the Congregation, at such a time as the Consistory may see fit” (Article 25 *Church Order of Dort*).

According to Calvin, the first group of deacons was regarded as stewards and the second group was managers. In Calvin’s *Institutes* he states that there were two orders of deacons in the ancient church; the one concerned with receiving, distributing and guarding the goods of the poor, their possessions, income and pensions, as well as the quarterly offerings; the other, to take heed to and care for the sick and administer the pittance for the poor (c.f. *Institutes* Book 4 Chapter 4).⁵⁹ Although it is written in the *Church Order of the RCZ* that the office of the deacon is responsible for taking care for the poor, this is no longer applicable because the RCZ is now obliged to contribute to projects of the RCZ, for example to the budget of the Reformed Church University (*Synod Minutes* 2014:125/6). This shows that fundraising for projects are overshadowing the primary task of deacons, namely taking care for the poor and the sick. The office of the deacon is now concentrating on the minor like the Reformed Church University. The Church should find other means of funding other projects so that deacons concentrate on doing the duties of justice and mercy all the time.

According to Bouwman, the deacons should give account of their policies and management to the Church Council (2000:65). It is highly commendable that the deacons in the RCZ are obliged to give monthly reports of the income and expenditures of the local congregations (*RCZ Central Deacons’ Minutes, p-5, May 2011*).

However, deacons need to visit people in their homes to find more information concerning the people whom the gifts are to be distributed to. The main task of the deacons is to serve. They should serve both the members in the church and those in the society. Deacons in the RCZ do not do house visitation, because in the RCZ Church Order this task belongs to the

⁵⁹ *Institutes* Book IV Chapter 3. Of the Teachers and Ministers of the Church. Their Election and Office. Page 508-515.

duties of the minister of the Word and the elders. It is however important that the deacons should visit people in their homes so that they can acquaint themselves with the needs of the people. The deacons should take care of God's resources and distribute them in a manner that pleases God, who is the owner of these resources. Stewardship in the Bible is about taking care of everything such as the earth, Gospel, personal resources of time, money, resources of the Church and the society. The deacons should show no favoritism, partiality, possessiveness, contentiousness or pride. Christian stewardship is for every Christian a way of expressing that they are only keepers of God's resources like Macedonian Christians. The RCZ has diverted from the stewardship in the Bible. Currently, the RCZ are more concerned with contributing to institutions of the RCZ than to diaconal projects.

It is important to note that elders and deacons should rest for a minimum of three years before seeking re-election (c.f. *Book of the Church Order RCA* 1983:17-18; Monsma & Van Dellen 1954:123). This is a way of preventing a few members to dominate the leadership of the Church. The RCZ attend to this Reformed principle of retiring and re-election.

In the PCUSA and the RCA an independent board may be individually commissioned or organized as a board of deacons. The deacons are assembled in the PCUSA and the RCA in a diaconal board in order to organize their work of mercy. The diaconal board meets regularly in order to plan its ministries, keep a record of its proceedings and elect its own diaconal board officers (moderator, secretary) (c.f. *PCUSA Church Order and RCA Church Order*). The deacons are under the supervision and authority of the Church Council and submit their reports to the Church Council on a regular basis. Deacons are also given special assignments in the congregation, such as caring for members in need, handling educational tasks, cultivating liberality in giving, collecting and disbursing monies to specific persons or causes, or overseeing the buildings and property of the congregation in the PCUSA (*Book of Order PCUSA* 2013/2015- G-2.02–G-2.04). Article 150 of the *RCZ Bhuku yoMurairo* states that all finance of the congregation are managed and audited by the Finance Committee.

The duty of deacons is not only to collect offerings from the congregation, but also to keep the congregation updated and informed about the needs of the congregation. The deacons should therefore give monthly reports of their activities, because this will help members of the congregation to be well informed (Van Oene 1990:111). The deacons in the RCZ should therefore report to the Church Council of their activities.

The deacons should help those in need. It is also the responsibility of deacons to manage the administration of diaconal financial affairs. In the RCZ, the deacons through the Finance Committee manage the administration of diaconal affairs of the local congregation, but they are not helping those in need with financial assistance, food and/or clothes. The deacons in the RCZ must take care of those in need within their congregations and in their societies as a way of representing Christ on earth.

Most Reformed Church orders from Emden, Dort, to the Church Order of the Protestant Church of the Netherlands, underscore the equality amongst office bearers, so that one office shall not lord it over another, one office-bearer over another, or one congregation over another, but so that all things shall be aimed at obedience to Christ the Head of the Church. The Protestant Church in the Netherlands regulates the equality amongst office-bearers in Article VI, as follows: “So that one office shall not lord it over another, one office-bearer over another, or one congregation over another, but so that all things shall be aimed at obedience to Christ the Head of the Church, the leadership in the church is entrusted to ecclesial assemblies.” This does not mean that authority can never be exercised by one over the other. The principle of equality also pertains amongst churches, elders, and deacons. Although it is not stated in the *RCZ Bhuku yoMurairo*, there is an assumption in most congregations that elders are more superior to the deacons. The RCZ therefore need to revisit her Church Order in order to spell out the equality amongst office bearers. The offices are there to complement each other.

According to Vorster (1999:46), the deacons should do house visitation with the sole purpose of comforting those in need with the Word of God and to inspire Christians to take care of the needy. The *RCZ Bhuku yoMurairo* does not mention house visitation as one of the duties of the deacons. Deacons should do house visitation with the sole purpose of comforting those in need (Vorster 1999:46). The RCZ should therefore amend the *RCZ Bhuku yoMurairo*, especially regarding the tasks of the deacons in order to include a clause about house visitation. The advantage of deacons in doing house visitation is that this will help them to have a full picture and understanding of the needs of the people who are being helped.

5.2 Qualifications of deacons

The office of the deacon is being marginalized in the RCZ. The RCZ *Bhuku yoMurairo* (*Church Order of the RCZ* 1967:3) clearly states that the deacons were supposed to be less than the number of elders. The same anomaly was repeated in the RCZ *Bhuku yoMurairo* (1970:41), which was revised in 1970. In most of the congregations, one deacon was assigned to work with two elders and this promoted the domineering of elders in the office of deacons. The deacons are usually outnumbered by elders when discussing issues about financial matters, which resulted in the divergence of the money to other projects, neglecting care for the poor. The RCZ *Bhuku yoMurairo* shows that no qualities were mentioned concerning those to be elected in the office of deacon.

There are two texts in the New Testament that address the qualifications for believers in the Church who serve as deacons (Acts 6:3, 1 Timothy 3:8-12). Amongst others, Acts states that deacons should be men/women who are full of faith, full of wisdom and full of the Holy Spirit (c.f. Acts 6:1-7). These characteristics are lacking even in the New Revised edition of RCZ *Bhuku yoMurairo* (2010:34).

It seems as if the RCZ presumption is that the deacons' responsibilities in the congregation were of less importance compared to that of the elders. In most of the congregations, one deacon was assigned to work with two elders and this promoted the ignorance of the Reformed Church principle regarding domineering of one office of the other. In most cases, the deacons are outnumbered by elders when discussing financial matters. This results in the divergence of the money to other projects, neglecting the care for the poor. A close analysis of the RCZ *Bhuku yoMurairo* from 1967 up to the present shows that no qualities were mentioned concerning those to be elected in the office of either elder or deacon (RCZ *Bhuku yoMurairo* (2010:34). Men who are full of faith, full of wisdom and full of the Holy Spirit can be elected as deacons (c.f. Acts 6:1-7). Women were excluded from being elected as deacons in Acts 6. Already in 1984 the RCZ already (*Synod Minutes* 1984:631/21 approved to open the office of the elder and the deacon, as well as the ordained position to women in 2002 (*Synod Minutes* 2002:102; Munikwa 2011:98).

In the RCZ the qualifications of deacons are laid down in Article 4 of the *RCZ Bhuku Yomurairo* (2010:34) as follows:

- i. Must have attained the age of twenty five years regardless of being a youth member who is not married
- ii. Must have stayed in the congregation for at least one year or more
- iii. If possible those who had never been to this post shall be given first preference.
- iv. A deacon or deaconess must serve in this office for two years and if re-elected must serve for another two years. He or she is not permitted to serve in this office for more than four years without a rest. After four years one can be elected back to the office of deacons after a rest of at least one year.

The premise of the researcher is that the office of deacons in the RCZ must be assigned to people who are full of faith and full of the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:1-6) and whose life is blameless, as it is written in Paul's letter to Timothy (1 Timothy 3:8-13). The biblical principle should be the baseline on who should be elected as deacons in the RCZ. The RCZ has to address this anomaly so that care for the poor and good administration of funds will be addressed if the deacons are operating in the jurisdiction of the Word of God. The office of deacon as set forth in Scripture is one of compassion, witness, and service after the example of Jesus Christ. The RCZ should therefore revisit the provisions made in *RCZ Bhuku yoMurairo* regarding the office of the deacons. The deacons are responsible for diaconal and pastoral work and stewardship over financial affairs of the church.

5.3 The Deacon and the Ministry of Mercy

At present, the office of the deacon in the RCZ is neglecting the ministry of mercy in favor of other Church projects. For example, the RCZ Synod of 2014 (*Synod Minutes* 2014:125/6), obliged the local congregation to contribute to the budget of the newly Reformed Church University of the RCZ on a monthly basis. This decision put the local congregation in a dire position. The deacons had to spend a lot of time securing funding in order to put the local congregation in the position to adhere to the decision of the General Synod. This is being done whilst the deacons is neglecting their primary task, namely attending to the ministry of mercy. In "*RCZ Bhuku Yomurairo*" (2010:42) Article 23, the duties of deacons are stipulated as follows:

- i. To collect tithes, membership fees, Sunday collections/offerings, and thanksgiving with the help of elders.
- ii. To care for the poor, after consultation of the church council.
- iii. They must strategise ways and means of raising money for the whole congregation
- iv. One deacon to be chosen and he or she must be in a position to prepare income and expenditure of the money in the congregation. Financial report must be given to the congregation after four months which is three times in a year. He or she is called the Central Deacon or Congregational Treasurer.

The biblical perspective of the office of deacons is that of taking practical care of the poor. According to Harvey (1982:80), the duty of the deacon is to take care of the poor by supplying them with their daily physical needs, as well as spiritual needs, although in most RCZ congregations they are no longer putting a budget allocation to cater for the poor and the needy. Article 23 (ii) “To care for the poor, after consultation of the church council.” is also mentioned in the ordination formula of the deacons (*RCZ Bhuku Yomurairo*” (2010:42). This duty of the deacons is grossly neglected by the RCZ.

By neglecting the ministry of mercy, the RCZ is becoming irrelevant to the communities they are serving. As indicated by Vorster (1999:46), deacons are entitled to promote Christian love and caring; this must be emulated by the deacons of the RCZ. Deacons in the RCZ should be sensitized about their duty to carry out the ministry of mercy. Caring for the poor is another way of evangelizing to those who are not Christians. The ministry of mercy goes hand in hand with house visitation and comforting those who are distressed.

5.4 The Deacon and house visitation

Deacons in the RCZ must be encouraged to do house visitation in order for them to acquaint themselves with the real needs of the people whom they need to assist. It seems these days house visitation in the RCZ is the duty of ministers of Word and Sacraments and elders only. *RCZ Bhuku yoMurairo* (1967:6) Article 22, *RCZ Bhuku yoMurairo* (1970:44) Article 22, and *RCZ Bhuku yoMurairo* (2010:42) Article 22 mention only that the minister of the Word and elders are compelled to do house visitations. In the preceding chapter, the research discovered that Hanko (1962:41, 42) and Vorster (1999:45) mention the importance of house visitation

being done by the deacons. The office of the deacon of the RCZ has deviated from the historical Reformed perspective of the office of the deacon because nowhere in their responsibilities is the issue of house visitation by the deacons mentioned.

The main purpose of deacons in doing house visitation is not only to give the needy their gifts, but also to comfort those who are distressed, as Monsma and Van Dellen (1954:117) mention. Deacons represent Christ in the dispensation of His mercy to those who are in need. This is supported by Vorster (1999:46), who says deacons must do house visitation for the sole purpose of comforting those in need with the Word of God and to inspire Christians to take care of the needy. Deacons must be people who are full of the Spirit, because their office requires people who can not only share their physical needs with those in needy and the distressed but also the spiritual needs, which can be found from the Word of God. By sharing the Word of God with the poor, the distressed will be help to trust in God, who is the Provider of all resources, both physically and spiritually.

Currently, deacons in the RCZ, instead of being the servants of Christ attending to the needy, rather use their time, energy and the resources of the local congregation to attend to the financial growth and in doing so neglect their primary task to serve in the Church of Christ who called them to the minister to the poor.

Therefore, it is of the utmost importance that the RCZ Church Order should be amended in order to make provision for house visitation done by the deacons. As Williams rightly says, deacons who know their calling and place in the church are the ones who take their time in doing house visitation as way of establishing contact with the people whom they are ministering to (Williams 1972:134). It is indeed like Monsma and Van Dellen argues, namely that the duty of the office of the deacons is to relieve those who are distressed with deeds of kindness and words of comforting from the Bible (154:117). People should not set the importance of financial growth against the needs of the poor.

5.5 The Deacon and Stewardship

The *RCZ Bhuku Yomurairo* (2010:23) Article 23 (iii) clearly states that deacons must think of other ways of raising funds besides relying on tithes and Sunday offerings/collections: “They must strategize ways and means of raising money for the whole congregation”. At present, about 75% of the RCZ congregations are operating in deficit.

The church has been called to serve, as we have already seen; that, it is the duty of the church to minister to the sick, the bereaved and those in need. The RCZ, through the office of the deacons, has an obligation to meet also like the church in the New Testament was doing (Gifford 1993:99). The RCZ is lacking being stewards of God's resources because most of the resources are now channeled to the budget of the Reformed University of Zimbabwe. In doing this, the deacons are ignoring the care of those who are in need. Deacons in the RCZ are concentrating too much on raising funds to contribute to church owned projects, *inter alia* hospitals, schools and farms. The RCZ should take cognizance of the notion of Gifford (1993:100), who acknowledges that followers of Jesus Christ are being called to live their lives in obedience to the commands of Christ. Christ has called the church to minister and witness in His name by feeding the hungry, providing something to drink to the thirsty, to practice hospitality, to clothe the naked, to tend the sick, to help those who are not free and to be a blessing to others (*RCZ Bhuku yoMurairo* 2010:42). The deacons are responsible for the distribution of charity to those who are in need in consultation with the Church Council. It is the duty of the deacons in the RCZ to see to it that those who are hungry, thirsty, sick and prisoners are attended to.

As argued by Gifford (1993:105), it is the duty of the church to feed those who are hungry, both physical and spiritual. The deacons in the RCZ must show their commitment to attending to the needs of the less privileged by giving them what they are lacking and comforting them with the word of God. Deacons in the RCZ must emulate what was argued by Gifford (1993:107), namely that Christian stewardship is that of being servants. This is supported by what Williams (1972:118) noted when explaining the meaning of the word "deacon". He noted that a deacon was a servant who waited at tables. The primary calling of deacons in the Church of Christ, which includes the RCZ, is that of being servants or ministers of mercy. The church has an obligation to care for the poor amongst its members and even others in the community which they live. This is the duty of the office of deacons, says Klinken (1989:56). For this reason, it means that it is the duty of the RCZ through the office of deacons to be servants or ministers of mercy as a way of fulfilling Christ's call to be His witnesses.

Deacons in the RCZ must not ignore Christian stewardship so that the Church will not deviate from the biblical and historical Reformed understanding of the office of the deacon. Stewardship, if practiced well in the RCZ, means that the deacons will be executing their duties according to the Bible. In this way, even those elected to this office will be in line with the qualifications as stipulated in Acts 6 and 1 Timothy 3. It is the duty of the office of deacons to teach the members of the RCZ to understand what stewardship is; that they have to carry the responsibility of being self-reliant, instead of depending on partners from outside Zimbabwe. This was also highlighted by Mutumburanzou (1999:303) in his doctoral dissertation, when he said: “Regarding the issue of stewardship in the RCZ, there has been a general lack of education amongst the Christians, especially during the missionary era. This was not caused because the people were poor or were unwilling to give to the Lord, but just because many had not learnt fully the meaning of giving, and even the need to give” (Mutumburanzou 1999:303).

5.6 Amendments to the Church Order

On the one hand, the RCZ diverges from the Scriptural and Reformed church polity understanding of the office of a deacon, but on the other side, the RCZ holds to it. In order to embrace both the Scriptural and Reformed church polity understanding of the office of a deacon, the RCZ should revisit their church order in order to make provision for the following tasks of the deacons:

- i. They must collect the offering and other contributions to charity;
- ii. Deacons must faithfully and diligently distribute the offerings to those who are in need;
- iii. Deacons must visit and comfort those in distress;
- iv. They must exercise care against misuse of the gifts; and
- v. Deacons are required to give account of their activities to the Church Council.

In this way, the deacons will take up their rightful place in the RCZ.

The researcher wants to propose the following amendments to the Church Order of the RCZ in order to attend to the Scriptural and Reformed church polity understanding of the office of a deacon.

5.6.1 Spiritual in nature of the office of the deacon

Proposal: The office of deacon, which is spiritual in nature, shall be chosen from women and men of spiritual character, honest repute, exemplary lives, brotherly and sisterly love, sincere compassion and sound judgment as explained in Paul's letter to Timothy (1 Tim 3:7-13).

Motivation: This will help the RCZ to emphasize the spiritual nature of the office of the deacon, rather than merely uphold qualifications like the candidate's membership (they must be people who have been in the congregation for than one year), or age (they should be above 25 years) to be eligible for election in the office as deacon. The Scriptures and the Reformed Church polity outlined the spiritual qualities of the office of the deacon, *inter alia* good standing and character. The *RCZ Bhuku yoMurairo* is lacking provision of the spiritual nature of the deacon (c.f. Chapter 2, 2.6 on the office of the deacon).

5.6.2 Task/duties of office of the deacon

Proposal:

- a. The deacons should serve those in distress.
- b. The deacons fulfil their diaconal vocation in the church and in the world by showing the ministry of compassion and justice.
- c. The deacons perform its pastoral task in pastoral care to members and others in need.
- d. The deacons shall minister to the sick, the poor, the hurt and the helpless, as to the fulfilment of its diaconal and pastoral vocation.
- e. The office the deacon seeks to cooperate with other local church communities through the Church Council.
- f. The needs of those outside of the congregation, especially of other believers, should also be considered.
- g. The deacons are especially called to the ministry at the Table of the Lord and to collect and distribute the gifts of charity, the ministry of compassion and justice in the congregation and the world, the training of the congregation to fulfil its diaconal vocation, and the administration of diaconal financial affairs.

- h. The deacons may, with much advantage, hold spiritual conferences for deacons from time to time for the discussion of the interests committed to them. Any actions taken by these conferences shall have only an advisory character.
- i. The Church Council shall ordinarily conduct an annual review of the service of the deacons.

Motivation: It is presumed that the task of deacons in the RCZ is only to collect Sunday collection and tithes, whilst their task must manifest the presence of Christ in the Church and in the world. Deacons are there to do house visitation, attending to the needs of the poor, the sick and the distressed. The *RCZ Bhuku yoMurairo* should include this clause in the tasks of the deacon. They should conduct Bible studies about giving a way of motivating the congregation to know that it is their responsibility to take care of those who are in need. More so, deacons in the RCZ must hold conferences where they will be taught many things concerning the importance of their office. At these conferences, they can make recommendations to the Church Council on how they can fulfil their tasks as it is stated in the Scriptures and the Reformed church polity.

5.6.3 Finance committee

Proposal:

- a. The committee of deacons, which handle and distribute the finances of the congregation, is called the finance committee, of which the Executive of the congregation, namely the pastor, church council secretary and vice church council secretary are ex-officio members.
- b. The deacons shall ordinarily meet monthly to transact the business pertaining to their office, and whenever requested by the Church Council.
- c. The finance committee shall elect a chairperson and a secretary from amongst its members.
- d. The finance committee shall keep a record of its proceedings and of all fundraising and tithes in their wards or sections and the distribution to the poor, and shall submit its minutes to the Church Council regularly, and at other times upon request of the Church Council.

- e. The finance committee shall render a monthly account of their work to the Church Council.
- f. The finance committee shall be under its supervision and authority of the Church Council.
- g. The Church Council may endorse, reject or amend any action of the finance committee.

Motivation: Although provision is being made for the finance committee in the *RCZ Bhuku yoMurairo*, there is a need to amend the *RCZ Bhuku yoMurairo*. Currently, any member of the congregation can be elected as a member of the finance committee, regardless of being a deacon. The presumption of the researcher is that this committee should only consist of deacons. This will help the deacons and the RCZ at large to meet her obligation of taking care of the needy and the sick.

5.6.4 Equality of respective duties

Proposal: In the local congregation, equality shall be maintained amongst the ministers, elders, and deacons regarding their respective duties, and in other matters, as much as possible.

Motivation: The *RCZ Bhuku yoMurairo* should be amended in order to make provision for this Reformed church polity principles of no lordship. At present there is a presumption in the RCZ that the elders are more powerful in decision-making than the deacons. The *RCZ Bhuku yoMurairo* should state equality amongst the offices.

5.7 Conclusion

Christ cares for and governs His church through the office-bearers, namely ministers, elders, and deacons (Acts 1:23-26; 6:2-3; 14:23; 1 Timothy 3:1, 8; 5:17).

This study indicates that the RCZ should think afresh about the effectiveness of the office of the deacons by taking both the Scriptural and the Reformed Church polity understanding of the office of the deacons into account. The office of deacon is local, both in authority and function. The Lord gave no permanent offices to His church by which the churches are to be

governed. Therefore, no office-bearer may lord it over another office-bearer (Acts 14:23; 16:4; 20:17, 28; Ephesians 4:11-16; Titus 1:5). The RCZ should embrace not lording it over others as a fundamental principle of Reformed church polity. The deacons should take up the responsibility to diligently collect the offerings and other contributions of charity and after the mutual counsel, faithfully and diligently distribute them to the poor, do house visitation and render appropriate reports of their activities to the church council. The RCZ should therefore attend diligently to the following five points in their church order regarding the office of the deacon:

- i. They must collect the offering and other contributions of charity;
- ii. Deacons must faithfully and diligently distribute the offerings to those who are in need;
- iii. Deacons must visit and comfort those in distress;
- iv. They must exercise care against misuse of the gifts; and
- v. Deacons are required to give account of their activities to the church council.

In this way, the research presumes that the deacons of the RCZ will take up her rightful place in the Reformed Church in Zimbabwe.

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